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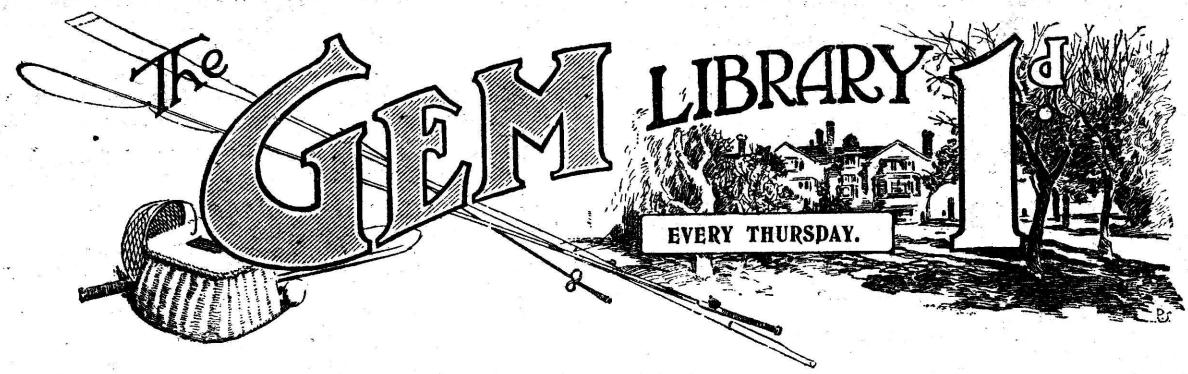
TOM MERRY & CO.'S WEEK-END.

Grand Long Complete Tale by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

WALLY'S DIPLOMACY!

"Yes, sir," shouted Wally. "It's a beautiful evening, sir, and I could go out to cricket practice, sir; but I'd rather try to be of service to you, sir. If I find the key of your door, would you be kind enough to grant me a little favour, sir?"



Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END!

A Splendid, Extra Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
The Week-Enders.

"WEALLY, it's too bad!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation in a tone of great annoyance, as he laid the letter he had been reading down upon the table in Study No. 6, in the School House.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were packing bags in the study, and they seemed too busy to hear D'Arcy's remark.

At all events, they did not look up, and Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and looked from one to another, with an expression of rising indignation.

"I say, it is weally too bad!"

"Yes," murmured Jack Blake; "a couple of pairs of socks will be enough, as I can borrow Gussy's if I run short."

"Weally, Blake——"

"What about dog-biscuits?" asked Herries, looking up from his bag. "I can't very well pack in dog-biscuits. I suppose the grub will be all right for Towser at your place, Gussy."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"You see, Towser won't eat anything. He's a particular dog. If you've got the right kind of dog-biscuits at Eastwood House, why——"

"Did you speak, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I did speak! I wemarked that it was weally too bad!"

"About those dog-biscuits——"

"Pway wing off for a moment, Hewwies. I have just weceived a lettah fwom my governah."

D'Arcy's three chums were all attention at once. As a matter of fact, they were just packing to spend a brief holiday with Arthur Augustus at his father's house, and from D'Arcy's expression it seemed that something had gone wrong with the invitation.

"Nothing happened to the noble earl?" asked Blake. "You don't mean to say that he's had an accident or anything just now?"

"Certainly not. He has w'itten me a lettah——"

"Well, that has happened before, and you've survived," said Digby. "It's no good being unreasonable. A chap's father will write to him sometimes. It's one of the things you have to expect."

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

"Pway allow me to finish, Dig. As you know, deah boys, my wespected pawents are now absent from home, and I thought it would be an excellent opportunity for me to give a little house-party at Eastwood House——"

"It was a ripping idea."

"Yaas, I wathah flattah myself that it was wippin'. I asked you fellows——"

"And we accepted," said Blake blandly. "At a time like this, you can rely on all your old chums to back you up."

"Yes, rather," said Herries and Digby, with great heartiness.

"Thank you vewy much. Then it occurred to me that, as a mattah of form, I ought to w'ite to my governah and ask his permish——"

"Well, I suppose he would take it as a compliment," said Blake.

"Yaas, and now he has weplied——"

Blake jumped up.

"You—you ass!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that your governor has refused permission? My hat! Now all the fellows know that we are going to spend the week-end at Eastwood House! Why, we shall be the joke of the School House!"

"And the New House, too!" grunted Herries. "Figgins & Co. have got hold of it already."

"Well, of all the giddy asses," said Digby, in measured tones, "I think Gussy is about the giddiest. His governor's refused permission——"

"He hasn't wefused permish., deah boys!"

"He hasn't! Then what did you say he had for?" demanded Blake.

"I didn't say so, deah boy—you did."

"Oh, don't begin to argue now. If your governor hasn't declined the honour we intend to do him, what is the trouble about? Explain!"

"I am twyin' to do so, but you asses keep on intewwupting me. When I am intewwupted I am thwown into a fluttah, and then it is imposs——"

"Will you come to the point?" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I am comin' to it as fast as I can. My governah says, first of all, that I am an impertinent young wascal—wathah a diswespectful way of addwessin' me, but you know what these governahs are—and then he says I am quite at liberty to use Eastwood House for the week-end, and that he will give instwuctions for the place to be put at our disposal——"

"Bravo!"

"Good egg!"

"But there is a condish., dear boy."

"Oh! And what is the condition?"

"It's wathah a wotten one. That is why I was annoyed, and——"

"What is the condition?"

"I am comin' to that. It weally looks as if my governah wegards us as youngstahs, you know, who cannot be twusted alone——"

"What is the condition?" shrieked Blake.

"Pway don't get excited, deah boy. The condish. is that we take a master with us."

"Oh!"

"I wegard it as wathah wotten. Lord Eastwood says that if a mastah at St. Jim's is willin' to spend the week-end with us at Eastwood House, we can have that little house-party, othahwise——"

"Otherwise we can't?"

"Pwecisely, deah boy."

"Then," said Blake, "I recommend your writing to your governor and telling him that, in the opinion of this study, he's no sport."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy, sitting down at the table and drawing pen and ink towards him. "Pewwaps a little plain speakin' is what is wequired undah the circs. I have always thought that a chap's governah ought to know his place."

"Hold on!" gasped Blake, who had not, of course, meant it to be taken seriously. "What are you writing?"

"I will wead it to you. 'Deah sir'—it is bettah to be a little formal when administahin' a wepwoof—'Dear sir,—I was vewy much surpwised on weceipt of your lettah. I wegard it as dewogatowy to the dig. of this study to expwess doubts as to our ability to take care of ourselves. Undah the circs., we shall decline to go to Eastwood House, as it is quite imposs. for us to take a holiday and have the twouble of lookin' aftah a mastah at the same time. I weally considah——"

"You frabious ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You burbling duffer!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a burblin' duffah! I wegard it as impewative undah the circs. to administah a wepwoof."

"My dear ass, governors expect to be allowed to do these things unreproved. My only hat, if I wrote to my governor in that strain there would be trouble! Upon the whole we'll give Lord Eastwood his head, so to speak, and take a master with us."

"But, undah the circs., a wepwoof would——"

"Never mind the circs. It's just barely possible that Lord Eastwood is right, you know, and that a master ought to be there to look to things."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that. It's quite poss. My governah is weally a vewy intelligent chap in his way."

"You can put that letter in the fire."

"But there isn't a fish, deah boy!"

"Ass! Tear it up, then, or eat it!" growled Blake. "Can't a chap speak figuratively if he wants to? The only question to be settled is——"

"What about the dog-biscuits?" asked Herries.

"Blow the dog-biscuits!"

"That's all very well; but Towser——"

"Blow Towser! The question is, what master shall we take with us? Which of the School House masters is the most deserving of being taken on a little run?"

"I plump for Railton," said Dig. "He might come, if you put it to him gently."

"Yaas, wathah! I suggest that we all go in a body to Mr. Wailton, and pwess him to come. We can put it to him as a sport."

"Come on, then!" said Blake. "No good getting on with the packing if the week-end isn't coming off. Let's go and interview Railton."

And, leaving their bags just as they were, gaping open and half packed, the chums of Study No. 6 made their way to the House-master's quarters.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Decides to Go Away for the Week-End.

BUMP!

Bump!

Bump!

"Bai Jove, what's that?"

Bump, bump, bump!

The chums of Study No. 6 stared up the passage in amazement. At the upper end was a box-room, in which the juniors of the School House kept empty trunks and lumber of all sorts. The box-room door was open now, and three youths were dragging out a big trunk. It was a huge cane and-leather trunk, belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, which had cost a fabulous sum, and was the envy and admiration of all the fellows in the lower Forms.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Bai Jove, what on earth is Tom Mewwy doin' with my trunk?"

"It's some little game, I suppose."

The Fourth-Formers ran along the passage. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell, were bumping the big trunk along, up-ending it, and rolling it over to make it travel. They gasped and paused as the astonished four came up. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon them with indignant amazement.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, that's my twunk!"

"Is it?" said Tom Merry, leaning on the trunk to rest, and looking at D'Arcy across it. "By Jove!"

"Why, you know it is, you ass! It's my best twunk!"

"Good! That's all right!"

"Is it all wight? I wegard it as all w'ong! What are you dwaggin' my twunk out of the box-woom for?"

"We want it."

"I wefuse to allow my twunk to be used for any silly jape," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "If you want a twunk for a jape, you can use that wotten Sawatoga that Buck Finn bwought fwom Amewicah. It's in there."

"My dear kid," said Tom Merry, "you ought to know by this time that I'm a fellow of taste. I wouldn't be found dead in Buck Finn's Saratoga trunk, if I could help it!"

"Yaas, I agwee with you that Finn's Sawatoga is a howwah, but——"

"We're going to borrow this. I should have asked your permission, but it slipped my memory. You see, we're going away for a week-end."

"Bai Jove, so are we!"

"Yes, I heard about your little excursion," said Tom Merry blandly. "That's really what put the idea into our heads."

"Oh, we could have guessed that!" Jack Blake remarked. "You Shellfish always follow in our footsteps in the matter of wheezes."

"Well, we admit the soft impeachment in this case," said Tom Merry. "If you week-end, why shouldn't we week-end?"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "I week-end, thou week-

The big trunk come rushing on, and D'Arcy caught it with his knees. He sprawled forward and clung on wildly as it was rushed towards the stairs. "Help! Bia Jove! Wescue!" he shouted.

endest, we week-ends. We week-end, you or ye week-end, they week-end. I week-ended, thou week-endedest——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Blake, stopping his ears with his fingers as Manners went on conjugating that new verb. "Draw it mild"

"Yes, rather," said Monty Lowther, "or we shall come to a weak-end, some of us!"

"Rotten!" said Tom Merry.

"I have no objection to you chaps week-endin'," said Arthur Augustus. "But as for my twunk——"

"You see, we're going to do the luggage-in-advance business, and save carrying our bags," explained Tom Merry. "Hence these tears—I mean, hence this trunk! We're going to put all our things into it and send it on."

"Yaas, that's wathah a good ideah, but——"

"If you'll kindly get out of the way, we'll shove it on. Oh, I forgot! Can we have the trunk, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah! I shall be vewy pleased to lend it you, but——"

"That's all right. Clear!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"My dear chap, you've lent us the trunk, and now we've got no further use for you," said Monty Lowther. "Travel along."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Give the thing a shove, you chaps!"

The Terrible Three shoved together, and the big trunk careered along. The chums of No. 6 flattened against the wall to avoid it, and the Terrible Three went on their way.

Bump, bump, bump!

The trunk was rolled down the Shell passage, and in at the door of Tom Merry's study. Then the door closed. Through the shut door came a sound of laughter, as if the chums of the Shell were enjoying some little joke among themselves; but the Fourth-Formers did not hear it. They were going on their way.

"Bai Jove, that's a feahful cheek of Tom Mewwy!" D'Arcy remarked. "Fancy bowwowin' a fellow's twunk without askin' his permish!"

"I say, I've been thinking——" began Herries.

"Oh, keep off the dog biscuits!"

"It's not the dog biscuits. I was thinking that if Gussy lent me his trunk, instead of lending it to those Shell bounders, I might take Towser down to Eastwood House in it."

"Bai Jove!"

"He would be all right in it," said Herries, mistaking

NEXT WEEK:
Tom Merry & Co. Make Merry.

"HIP - HIP - HOORAY!"

A Long, Complete Tale. By Martin Clifford.

D'Arcy's expression. "I could bore a few holes through the lid to give him air."

"Yaas," gasped D'Arcy, "I'm likely to let you bore a few holes thwough the lid of a nine-guinea twunk, to keep a beastly bulldog in it!"

"Towser's not a beastly bulldog——"

"Shut up!" said Blake. "Here's Railton!"

They were near the door of the House-master's study now, and Mr. Railton was just going into it. He looked somewhat tired; the week's work told upon him more than it did upon the cheerful Fourth-Formers. He glanced at the juniors as they hurried up, and held the door open in his hand.

"If you please, sir——"

"Do you wish to speak to me?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Come in, then."

Mr. Railton sat down, and the juniors stood before him. They felt a little nonplussed as to how to begin, and they exchanged glances without speaking. Mr. Railton looked surprised.

"You have something to say to me, my boys?"

"Yes, sir. Certainly."

"Will you kindly say it, then? My time is valuable."

"Yes, sir, I know it is. The fact is——" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! The fact is——"

"This is how the matter stands, sir," said Digby. "The fact is——"

"The fact——" began Herries.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Oh, no, sir. The fact is——"

"Pewwaps you had bettah leave it to me to explain, Blake. I dare say I shall make the mattah much cleawah to Mr. Wailton. The fact is, sir, that we—we think you have been lookin' wathah wun down lately."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"You may not be aware, sir, that we take a gweat intewest in your health, and wegard it as a sewious mattah for you to be wun down."

"I will give you credit for good intentions, D'Arcy, and will not regard what you say as impertinence——"

"Oh, sir!"

"But I must ask you to kindly leave me undisturbed, and——"

"But weally, sir——"

"The fact is, sir," said Blake, "we want you——"

"Pewwaps I can manage it bettah, Blake——"

"Ring off, you ass!" whispered Blake. "I——"

"I wefuse to wing off. I can explain it to Mr. Wailton. The fact is, sir, we have turned the mattah ovah in our minds, and we considah that a week-end in the countwy would do you a feahful lot of good, sir."

"D'Arcy!"

"So we want you to wun down to Eastwood House for the week-end, sir."

"I don't quite understand you, I fear, yet."

"This is how the matter stands, sir," said Blake, taking the plunge. "We're going down for the week-end to D'Arcy's place, sir—you remember giving us permission? Lord Eastwood has written to D'Arcy that we can't go unless a master is willing to go with us, to see that we don't get into mischief. Of course, there would be no danger of that——"

"Of course not," assented Mr. Railton, with a smile.

"We'd rather you came, sir, than any other master—and as a matter of absolute fact, sir," said Blake confidentially, "we'd like you anyway."

"You are very kind, Blake."

"I weally wish you had left it to me, Blake. I was puttin' it evah so much bettah to Mr. Wailton."

"I am afraid you were not sticking so close to the facts, D'Arcy."

"Weally, sir! As a mattah of fact, I have been vewy much concerned lately about your health, and I weally considah that a week-end at Eastwood would set you up, sir. Honest Injun, sir."

"I will think it over," said Mr. Railton "I quite understand Lord Eastwood's desire to have some responsible person in charge of a party at his house during his absence. I do not wish your little holiday to be spoiled, so——"

"We can't go unless you come, sir."

"I will try to arrange it, either for myself or another master——"

The chums looked blue.

"I—I wish you could fix it, sir," said Blake. "You understand us so much better than the other chaps—I mean the other masters, sir. It would be jolly with you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, well, we will see," said Mr. Railton, with a smile. "When do you leave?"

"Six o'clock train from Rylcombe, sir."

"Very good; I will let you know in an hour."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

And the juniors, feeling pretty well satisfied in their minds, left the study. They felt sure that Mr. Railton would come if he could arrange it; and, as Blake said, with Mr. Railton in the party it would be almost as jolly as having no master at all with them.

CHAPTER 3.

Taggles takes the Trunk.

"SHALL we want the cricket things?" asked Monty Lowther, looking up from the huge trunk which was being steadily filled with the belongings of the Terrible Three.

"Yes, rather! We may get a game of cricket."

"Nothing like being prepared," said Manners. "Shove in the whole outfit. That's one advantage about that trunk. It will hold everything we've got if we like."

Bats and stumps and ball were crammed in. Lowther suggested that there was room for poles and nets, but Tom Merry thought that would be taxing the capacity even of D'Arcy's big trunk too far.

The chums of the Shell had already shoved in all the things they were likely to want for a week-end, and a great many things they were not likely to want. As Monty Lowther said, you never could tell.

"This week-end biz. is a capital idea," Tom Merry remarked, as he dropped in Manners's camera on top of the cricket stumps. "You'll want that, Manners?"

Manners gave a howl.

"I don't want it broken, ass!"

"Does it break?" asked Tom innocently.

"You—you duffer! I'm going to carry that myself. Do you think I would trust my camera on a railway?"

"Then you can have it out again," said Lowther, taking up the camera. "Catch!"

"Don't chuck it, you ass!"

"You're mighty particular about an old camera!" said Lowther, laying it on the table. "Still, I'm glad you're going to take it. I want you to get a snapshot of Gussy's face when he sees us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three left off packing for a full minute to roar with laughter. Tom Merry wiped the tears from his eyes.

"It's a great idea," he said. "We must admit that it emanated from Study No. 6. But when we heard that D'Arcy & Company had asked permission to leave school on Friday for the week-end, how long did it take us to make up our minds to go and do likewise?"

"About a second," said Lowther.

"Wrong!" said Tom Merry. "I was on it like a shot. You can only do it in decimals. It was about point-nought-nought-nought-one seconds."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And didn't the Head play up like a little man!" said Tom Merry. "I dare say he thought that if a week-end was allowed to fellows in the Fourth, a week-end ought to be allowed to the Shell. That stops any suspicion of favouritism. We asked first in the Shell—and it was a case of first come, first served. We've got it. Lucky the Head didn't think of asking us where we were going to spend the week-end!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This trunk's finished," said Lowther. "The carrier man ought to be here by now. Hark! I can hear somebody's fairy footsteps on the stairs."

There were footsteps on the stairs, but far from fairy ones. That heavy tread could only belong to Taggles, the school porter.

There was a thump at the door, and Taggles looked in. Taggles was in a state between civility and grumpiness. Tom Merry's study generally tipped pretty well, but at the same time they were often stony, so the tip was not certain. The tip was uncertain; but the ascent of the stairs, and the carrying of the trunk, were certain enough. So Taggles was rather more inclined to grumpiness than to civility.

"Hallo, Taggles!" exclaimed Lowther, jumping up. "Hold on a minute—just as you are! Don't move!"

"Which I've come——"

"Don't move," cried Lowther, snatching up pencil and paper from the table. "Just as you are for a couple of hours, and the thing will be done. I'm thinking of painting Apollo for the Academy, and if I take a rough sketch now——"

Taggles turned pink. He didn't know whom Apollo was, but he could see that Lowther was being humorous. Tom Merry and Manners roared.

"Apollo!" gasped Manners. "Make it Caliban."

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Which I've come 'ere——"

"Which we can see you have," said Lowther, laying down the pencil. "If you've come for the trunk, we'll leave the sketch till later; but mind, I want you to sit as my model for Apollo. Here's a trunk."

"Which it isn't strapped."

"Take hold of the strap, my son, and help me fasten it."

The trunk was locked. There were big leather straps round the outside for additional security. Tom Merry felt in his pockets.

"Can you lend me a shilling, Manners?" asked Tom Merry.

Manners felt in his pockets in turn. Taggles brightened up considerably. He naturally assumed that the shilling was for him.

"Take hold, Taggy!"

"Certainly, Master Lowther, with pleasure, sir!"

Taggles took hold of the strap to pull it tight. He set his knees against the trunk, and took the thick strap in both hands. Lowther was holding the trunk firm. Taggles pulled—and pulled—and Lowther slyly gave the trunk a little shove towards him.

The result was startling.

Taggles's pulling, and Lowther's shoving, the trunk, of course, rolled over towards the porter, and Taggles sprawled on his back on the floor.

"Oh!" he roared "My heye!"

Lowther dragged the trunk back.

"Here, get on," he said; "you ought to fasten the straps before you lie down and rest, Taggles!"

Taggles spluttered with rage.

He had bumped pretty heavily upon the floor, and he was not pleased.

"Which you did it on purpose," he roared.

"I hope you haven't been drinking, Taggles," said Lowther severely. "Think of the example to youths like us!. It's simply shocking to see a man of your advanced years rolling about the floor of a study, before the shocked eyes of three quiet and well-conducted youths——"

Taggles staggered up.

"Which you can fasten the trunk yourself, Master Lowther. There!"

"I dare say I can do it better alone," said Lowther; "I've had nothing stronger than tea to-day."

And he fastened the straps.

"Here's that bob, Tom," said Manners, producing the coin from his waistcoat pocket. "Shall we give Taggy a hand down the stairs with that trunk?"

"No, you won't," said Taggles, who knew what assistance from the chums of the Shell would be like, "it's 'ard work, but I can manage. It ain't labelled."

"We don't want it labelled till it's in the carrier's cart," said Tom Merry.

Taggles stared.

"You see, we're keeping it a little secret where we're going for the week-end," explained Tom Merry. "All the fellows will be staring at the trunk as it goes out. I want you to see the label stuck on after it's in the cart."

"Which I'll do it with pleasure, Master Merry."

"Good! You're a nice man, Taggles, always doing your duty faithfully without looking for tips, or anything of that sort. Thanks awfully for the bob, Manners. Come along to the tuck-shop and have some ices."

Taggles's face fell.

"Which I thought—'ere, I'm blessed if I can carry this 'ere trunk! It's too 'eavy! If it falls downstairs and busts, I ain't responsible. As for that blessed label, you can stick it on yourself."

"But I don't want it stuck on myself, Taggles; I want it stuck on the trunk."

Taggles snorted. Tom Merry slipped the shilling into his pocket, and Taggles snorted again. His hand came out with a two-shilling piece in it, and Taggles brightened. It was really interesting to watch his face.

"Have you any conscientious objection to receiving a two-shilling piece, Taggles?" asked Tom Merry seriously.

"No, sir; not at all, Master Merry."

"You are quite sure you will not look upon it in the light of bribery and corruption? I don't want to undermine the manly independence and self-respect of an honest and hard-working school-porter. Well, here you are, then."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Taggles, as he stowed the label in one pocket, the florin in another, and took the trunk on his shoulders. "I think I can manage this all right, sir; and I'll see to the labelling, sir."

"Good for you, Taggy. You have a kind heart, and I shall remember you in my will."

Taggles stumped out of the study, leaving the Terrible Three grinning. A buzz of voices greeted the school porter in the passage, and Tom Merry and his chums followed him to lend him any assistance he might need—and they found he needed it.

CHAPTER 4.

Luggage In Advance!

THE week-end idea was considered a particularly ripping thing by the juniors who were fortunate enough to have permission to leave St. Jim's on Friday evening, and to stay away till Monday morning. But the juniors who did not have permission to do so did not look upon it in the same light. Most of them would have liked a similar little run; but, at the same time, they only said that the week-enders were lucky beggars, and hoped they would have a good time. But there were some who were annoyed and envious. Gore, the cad of the Shell, was furious on the subject. He hinted pretty broadly at favouritism, and he found several sympathetic hearers.

"Lot of good it would be for me to ask for a week-end," he said to Mellish. "Eh? Or for you, either!"

"That's what I think," said Mellish. "Fancy those kids in Study No. 6 getting a week-end off, and then Tom Merry—and only the other day they were allowed to go to Liverpool! I call it rotten."

"Beastly!" said Crake. "It's all very well to say that

they're the top pupils, and work hard to make up for lost time. We'd all work hard if we could have extra holidays."

"Of course we would," said Gore, who knew perfectly well that he wouldn't do anything of the sort. "It's rank favouritism."

"Rats!" said Bernard Glyn cheerily. "You know you wouldn't work hard, Gore. If you would, you're old enough to be in the Fifth. You chaps are a set of silly, cavilling asses."

And the Liverpool boy strolled off, leaving Gore & Co. scowling. As Glyn was not going off for the week-end, his opinion might be taken as a disinterested one. But it did not gratify the grumblers.

"I'm jolly well not going to take it lying down," said Gore. "We ought to make a demonstration of some sort—something to show how our feeling runs on the subject. They're going by the six o'clock train from Rylcombe, and I hear that Merry is sending his luggage in advance. By Jove, and here it comes!"

Taggles was coming along the passage with the huge trunk on his shoulders. It was about as much as Taggles could manage comfortably, and he looked a little alarmed as the discontented juniors gathered round him.

"Let's help him," said Gore, with a wink to the others. "That's pretty heavy, isn't it, Taggles?"

"You let it alone, Master Gore——"

"Lend a hand, Mellish."

"Certainly."

"Oh! Ow! You've done it now!"

Taggles staggered, and the trunk came to the floor with a crash. Gore & Co. burst into a roar of laughter.

"Taggles, you are clumsy!"

"You pushed it over!" shrieked Taggles. "I'll——"

"Never mind, we'll get it downstairs for you."

"I say——" began Mellish uneasily. Pushing the trunk downstairs might mean smashing it open, and that might mean trouble. But Gore was reckless.

"Lend a hand here! All together!"

The trunk, which was on castors, went shrieking along the linoleum under the pushing of a dozen hands. Taggles followed, protesting and threatening.

"Hold on, deah boys! Whatevah are you doin' with that twunk?"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice. He came out of Study No. 6, attracted by the uproar in the passage. The trunk was travelling along at a great rate, leaving deep scars in the linoleum from the castors.

"Get out of the way!" shouted Gore.

"Wats! That's my twunk!"

"You'll go over then!"

The big trunk came rushing on, and D'Arcy caught it with his knees. He sprawled forward over the trunk, and clung to it wildly as it was rushed on towards the stairs. It was a free ride, but the swell of the School House did not seem to be enjoying it.

"Help! Bai Jove! Wescue!"

"Hold on there!" shouted Tom Merry, racing along the passage with Manners and Lowther at his heels.

"Rats! We're helping Taggles to take the trunk down."

"Wescue, deah boys!"

Tom Merry caught Gore by the collar and swung him away. Lowther and Manners hit out right and left, and they cleared the passage in a surprisingly short space of time. There was wild confusion for a few moments, and yells and struggles, and trampling of feet, and then the enemy fled.

The Terrible Three, dusty and a little dishevelled, but victorious over long odds, remained masters of the field of battle. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gasped for breath, and tried to put his collar straight.

"Bai Jove! This has thwown me into quite a fluttah, deah boys! The young wascals were goin' to chuck the twunk downstairs."

"Rotters!" gasped Tom Merry. "You'd better have let us help you, Taggy. Come on, kids, we'll watch the trunk as far as the carrier's cart."

"Yaas, wathah! I'd come with you, deah boys, but I weally think I had bettah go and change my collah."

Taggles shouldered the trunk again, and carried it down, and marched out into the quad., and the dusty chums of the Shell followed him as a sort of guard of honour. The big trunk attracted a considerable amount of notice in the quad. Three youths in flannels came over to look at it from the direction of the New House. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, and Figgins had a bat under his arm.

"Hallo!" said Figgins affably. "Sending away the family washing?"

"Oh, just going for a week-end!" said Tom Merry airily. "Sending the luggage on, you know."

"More week-enders," said Kerr. "I hear Gussy & Co. are going. Where are you chaps off to?"

"We'll send you a picture-postcard to tell you," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry you Fourth-Form kids can't get off."

Figgins & Co. chuckled. The trunk and its guardians passed on, and it was duly deposited in the carrier's cart, and Taggles duly labelled it there.

Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. were chatting and chuckling. Tom Merry's remark semed to have furnished them with food for amusement.

"Curious how these School-House kids never see things," Figgins remarked. "It hasn't occurred to them that other chaps may be going on week-end trips."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be a surprise for our kind host when we arrive at his house."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say," said Fatty Wynn anxiously, "it's all very well to arrange a surprise for a chap, Figgy, but there's one thing you haven't considered."

"What's that, Fatty?"

"Why, about the grub. When you take a chap by surprise, you have to take pot-luck. I don't mind roughing it, of course—a chap ought to be prepared to rough it always; but when it comes to going short of grub——"

"My dear Falstaff, you'll find the grub all right."

"Well, I'll take your word for it, Figgy; but, mind, you're responsible if there's any difficulty about supper," said Fatty Wynn impressively.

"Don't worry, Fatty If we ran short of grub, I'd do some cooking myself—you know how I can cook."

"Yes, I do," said Fatty Wynn, not very enthusiastically.

"Oh, come!" said Figgins warmly. "You jolly well remember how I cooked a fig-pudding, the time grub was short in the New House!"

Fatty Wynn involuntarily pressed his hand to the third button of his waistcoat, as if he felt a reminiscence of a pain there.

"Yes, I do remember, Figgy, and I make it a stipulation that if we run short of grub this week-end, you don't cook any fig-puddings."

"Look here, Fatty Wynn——"

"I don't want to be unpleasant, Figgy, but I must say plainly, that I bar your fig-puddings," said Fatty Wynn firmly. "I wouldn't feed Herries' bulldog on your fig-puddings. I wouldn't give 'em to young Wally's Pongo. I——"

"Peace," said Kerr, interposing between his two chums, who were both growing rather excited, as they always did when that subject came up. "There won't be any shortage of grub, and Figgy won't have to do any cooking. Let's go and get our things packed, as we've got to catch a train to-night."

"Yes; but if Wynn says——"

"If Figgy says——"

"Oh, ring off, both of you! What's the good of ragging when we've got the best jape of the season on hand?" demanded Kerr.

And Figgins & Co. went off towards the New House, and were soon busily packing three bags for the week-end.

Tom Merry and his chums came back after seeing the big trunk off, and looked in at Study No. 6. The chums of the Fourth had finished packing their bags, and were enjoying a well-earned rest and a substantial tea. Jack Blake was looking very satisfied with himself and things generally, and he gave Tom Merry a genial nod.

"It's all right," he announced.

"What's all right?"

"About Railton."

"What about him?"

"Oh, of course, you don't know! D'Arcy's noble governor insisted upon a master being in the party, and we asked Railton. We considered him the most deserving case. He's just let us know that he can come. Somebody is going to take the Sixth for him to-morrow morning, and he's coming to Eastwood with us for the week-end. Ripping, isn't it?"

"I wegard it as weally wippin'," said D'Arcy. "Wailton is a decent chap, and won't be a dwag on us."

"Oh, is Railton coming?"

"Yes. You seem to be put out," said Blake, looking at Tom Merry. "Blessed if I see how it matters to you."

"Oh, it doesn't, of course."

The Terrible Three went on their way, and the Fourth-Formers discussed their tea. Blake looked a little puzzled.

"I don't quite catch on," he remarked. "It looks to me as if those Shellfish had something up their sleeves. I wonder if they were thinking of any jape to work off on us, and Railton's presence has spoiled it?"

"Bai Jove! I wegard it as extwemely pwob. I weally

Tom Merry bent down anxiously over the form of the fallen fag. "Wally, Wally!" he cried. "Answer me, old chap!"

think we shall have a wippin' week-end, deah boys," went on Arthur Augustus. "The weathah is perfect, and my governah will have had all awwangements made for our weception at Eastwood. I am half-sowwy that young Wally is not comin', but, aftah all, he nevah tweats me with the wespect due to an eldah bwothah."

"We didn't settle about the dog-biscuits," said Herries, looking up from his egg.

"That's all wight, deah boy. There are evewy vawiety of dog-biscuits there, and Towsah will be perfectly comfy in the kennels."

"H'm! I don't know about leavin' him in the kennels. Couldn't he come into the house?"

D'Arcy smiled a sickly smile.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy. Anythin' you like."

"Bosh!" said Blake. "You're not going to palm off that beast on us like that, Herries. You'll be wanting to bring your cornet next."

"I could give you a tune in the train going down."

"Anybody causing wilful damage on the line is liable to a fine not exceeding £20," said Blake. "You'd better leave your cornet here. I suppose your noble governor has given them a hint at Eastwood about the grub, Gussy?"

"That will be all wight, deah boy. I weally don't know who is in charge there, now, as the butler is in London with my governor. But——"

"By Jove, that's a pity! I shall miss his whiskers."

"I don't know," remarked Digby. "Lord Eastwood's butler is a little bit overpowering. I believe he keeps the noble earl in his place rather strictly, and he doesn't like boys, either."

"Yaas, upon the whole, I am not sowwy the butlah is away, deah boys. We shall be much more comfy without that imposin' person." D'Arcy looked at his watch. "I wathah think it's time we called for Mr. Wailton, deah boys. Which of you is goin' to cawwy my bag?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"It is not a conundwum, Blake. I shall have my cane, and a coat on my arm, and I weally do not see how I am to cawwy a bag."

"Leave it there, and whistle to it to follow," suggested Digby. "That's the only way to get it along, if you don't carry it."

And Blake, Herries, and Digby picked up their bags, and left the study. D'Arcy hesitated a moment, and then he picked up his own, and followed.

CHAPTER 5.

The Send-Off.

"THEY'LL be here in a minute," said Gore.

"Right-ho! We're ready!"

Gore & Co were on the platform in Rylcombe Railway Station. There were seven or eight of them, all looking ripe for mischief. They had determined to give the week-enders a send-off.

What time the Terrible Three were going, they did not know; but they knew the train D'Arcy and his friends were to catch, and they were at the station waiting for the arrival of the chums of Study No. 6.

Gore & Co. were prepared for business. They meant to give the Fourth Form chums a send-off they would remember. Each of them had a paper bag in his hand, containing several choice specimens of the oldest eggs that could be obtained in Rylcombe for love or money.

Gore pictured Arthur Augustus with an egg smashing on his silk hat, and another on his beautiful waistcoat, and chuckled to himself.

"This is simply a great idea," he remarked. "Simply great."

"I expect there will be trouble," Mellish remarked.

Gore sniffed contemptuously.

"If you're afraid of trouble, you'd better slide now. Besides, it's all right. They can't lose the train, or they miss the connection at Wayland, and they couldn't get to Eastwood to-night. They must go on, and they'll go on as eggy as you like. It will be a screaming joke."

"The train's signalled," said Crake.

"They ought to be here. I can hear them, I think! Now, get your eggs ready, but don't chuck them till they're getting into the train."

"Right you are!"

And the malcontents faced the steps that led on to the platform. Each of them had an egg in his right hand, concealed behind him, and the paper bag containing a further supply in his left.

"Here they come!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked on the platform. The swell of St. Jim's, from the top of his silk hat to the toes of his handsome boots, looked a perfect picture. He set his bag down on a seat, with a sigh of relief.

"Bai Jove, the twain's signalled, deah boys."

"Well, we're in time," said Blake.

Blake, Herries, and Digby, also carrying bags, followed D'Arcy on the platform. They saw Gore & Co., and looked surprised. Gore grinned as he pictured what they would look like when the eggs started. But the grin died away from his face as an athletic form followed the juniors.

"Railton!"

The School House-master was carrying a bag, too, and was putting the tickets into his pocket with the other. He glanced at Gore, and seemed surprised, and came over to the party on the platform.

"Are you going away, then, Gore?"

"N-no-no-no, sir."

"Then what are you doing here?"

Mellish glided quietly behind an automatic machine, and the rest looked down on the platform. They had not expected Mr. Railton. The eggs in their hidden right hands seemed to burn their fingers.

Mr. Railton repeated his question sharply, with a glimmering of the truth in his mind. His face had grown very stern.

"If—if you please, sir, we—we came to see Blake off," said Gore desperately.

"Oh! In a friendly spirit, I trust?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Of course, sir!"

"Why are you holding your right hand behind you, Gore?"

"My right hand, sir!" stammered Gore.

"Yes. What are you holding in it?"

"H-h-h-h-holding in it, sir?"

"Yes," rapped out Mr. Railton. "Show it to me at once."

Gore thought of dropping the egg upon the platform, but the squelch of it would infallibly have betrayed him. Slowly and reluctantly he brought his right hand round to view, and the egg was disclosed. Mr. Railton's brows grew darker.

"What was that egg intended for, Gore?"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The howwid wottah!"

"If—if you please, sir, we—we've been shopping, and—and bought some eggs, sir," said Gore. "As we were coming here to see Blake off, sir, we—we had to just bring them with us. That's all sir."

"Indeed! And why have you taken one egg from the bag, and why are you holding it in your hand, Gore?"

Gore was fairly caught, but he was not at the end of his invention yet. He was never at a loss for a falsehood.

"I—I'm fond of eggs, sir," he said, avoiding Mr. Railton's eyes. "It's good for a chap to suck raw eggs, sir—awfully good for the health—and—and I was going to suck this one, sir."

"Oh, you were going to suck that egg, Gore?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Then pray do not let me prevent you. Go on."

"W-w-w-w-w-what, sir?"

"Let me see you suck the egg, and then I shall believe your statement," said Mr. Railton sternly. "Quick, I have no time to waste."

Gore shuddered. He had purposely chosen the oldest eggs in Rylcombe, and he had picked out the one he judged to be the ripest for the first shot. To suck that egg he would have required more nerve than to face a battery of cannon. The mere thought made him feel giddy inwardly.

"Well, Gore, I'm waiting!"

"I—I—I—I—— Oh, sir! I—I——"

"You have spoken falsely!" said Mr. Railton, with withering contempt. "That egg was intended to be thrown at someone, and I can guess whom. Throw it away!"

Gladly enough Gore threw the egg upon the green embankment beside the platform. It was like a weight lifted from his heart.

"And now," said Mr. Railton, "all of you do the same with the rest of the eggs! Now, return at once to St. Jim's, and write out five hundred lines each of 'Virgil,' which I shall expect to see when I return on Monday."

Gore & Co. gasped with dismay. The imposition would account for the whole of their Saturday afternoon. Mr. Railton was not a master to be trifled with. But for his presence at that moment, Gore's followers would have given Gore an expression of what they thought of him, which would have been painful to Gore. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped forward, throwing himself into the breach as it were.

"Pway, Mr. Wailton, may I speak a word?"

"Certainly, if you have anything to say!" said the School House-master, looking at him.

"I should take it as a favah, sir, if you would pardon these wottahs!"

"D'Arcy!"

"There is no doubt, sir, that they meant to pelt us with those wotten eggs, and it was a mean, dirty twick, sir, and just like Goah! At the same time, it would be vewy uncomfy for me to weflect that they were w'itin' out impots. to-mowwow aftahnoon while we were havin' a good time. If you would be kind enough to forgive them, sir, I am sure it would be a lesson to Goah!"

Mr. Railton hesitated a moment. The train was coming into the station.

"Very well," he said at last. "Gore, I pardon you this time, at D'Arcy's intercession. If you have any proper feeling, you should feel thoroughly ashamed of yourself!"

Gore was silent. A minute more, and the train was starting, with Mr. Railton and his youthful companions. The malcontents watched it roll out of the station. Mellish drew a deep breath.

"Jolly decent of D'Arcy," he said. "It would have meant gating for the afternoon to-morrow. You have bungled it this time, Gore, and no mistake!"

And the others said the same, emphatically, and walked off, leaving Gore to follow alone, scowling.

CHAPTER 6.

Wally Wants a Week-End.

"WALLY!"

"Wally!"

"Where's that kid, Wally?"

Jameson and Gibson, of the Third Form, were looking for D'Arcy minor, more familiarly known in the Form as Wally. Some of the Third-Formers, indeed, called him by his full name of Walter Adolphus, but that was only when—in Wally's own phraseology—they were looking for a thick ear.

Wally was generally very much in evidence, but just now he failed to answer to his name. Up and down the passages went his chums of the Third, looking for Wally, and calling his name in vain.

"Why, there he is!" exclaimed Jameson, suddenly and indignantly.

And he pointed to a form standing by the window at the end of the corridor.

"The—the young bounder!" said Gibson. "He must have heard us all the time."

"What's the matter with him?" said Jameson, in surprise. "Look at him!"

Wally did not turn his head at their footsteps.

He was standing with his hands deep in his trousers-pockets, in an attitude of the most intense reflection. They came closer to him, and they stared at him, but he did not come out of his brown study. Jameson gave him a dig in the ribs that sent him gasping against the wall, and then he woke up to his surroundings.

"Hallo! What—how——"

"We've been calling you," said Jameson, deeply aggrieved. "You must have heard us."

"I thought I heard a row!" said Wally. "It might have been you calling, or Taggles at work with that creaky old lawn-mower. I was thinking. Have you seen Selby?"

"Our respected Form-master is in his study, and he can stay there for me," said Jameson. "I don't want to see him again. He's more crabby than ever this afternoon."

"Just my luck!"

"What do you mean? What do you want to see him for?"

"To ask leave for a week-end!"

Jameson whistled.

"Bosh! He's more likely to give you a licking! Talk about bearding the giddy lion in his den—why, that would be a gentle jape, compared with asking Selby for a week-end now!"

"Still, it's only paying him a compliment to ask him before I go!" Wally remarked thoughtfully. "You see, my governor's away at Eastwood, and my brother Gus will very likely get into some bother if I'm not there to look after him. Then the butler's away, too, so Gus will be quite on his own. I put it to you—can I leave him in the lurch like that?"

Jameson and Gibson grinned. They knew exactly how much concern Wally felt for his major.

"Upon the whole, I'm going; besides, I told you chaps I'd take you on a little run. You'd like a week-end at Eastwood, I suppose?"

"What do you think?" said Jameson emphatically. "But——"

"I've been thinking it out. Selby will have to give us permission; if he doesn't, we shall bolt!"

"But it can't be did! There's Railton in the party. What do you think he would say if we joined them, and——"

"We sha'n't join them. I'm going to turn up at Eastwood. Wait here for me while I go and speak to the Selby-merchant!"

"Better think over it——" began Jameson.

But Wally was gone. When D'Arcy minor got an idea into his head, he could be quite as determined as his brother Gus.

He tapped at Mr. Selby's door, and Mr. Selby's voice bade him enter, in a tone that would have discouraged everybody but D'Arcy minor. He entered, and the Third Form-master looked him over, taking in every detail of his appearance, from his untidy mop of hair to his loose-laced boots and inky fingers.

"Well, D'Arcy minor, have you come to show me exactly how much untidiness a boy in my Form can exhibit at a given moment?" asked Mr. Selby, who had a sarcastic tongue, and generally let it go when he was talking to Wally.

"No, sir," said Wally meekly. "I came to ask permission to go home for the week-end, sir—to Eastwood."

"What!"

"My brother Gus has gone, sir, and I thought you might allow me to go, too——"

"And you think you are sufficiently advanced with your lessons to be allowed to miss morning school to-morrow?" said Mr. Selby.

"I hope so, sir!"

"Well, your hope is entirely unfounded! I shall certainly not permit anything of the sort! You may leave my study, D'Arcy minor!"

"If you please, sir——"

"You may go!"

D'Arcy minor did not seem in a hurry to go. He was standing close to the open door, and his right hand was groping behind him, unseen by the Third Form-master. Mr. Selby would probably have had something like a fit if he had known that Wally was extracting the key from his lock, but he did not know it.

"Well, D'Arcy minor, what are you waiting for?" snapped Mr. Selby.

"I should awfully like to go to Eastwood, sir, for the week-end——"

"Leave my study at once!"

The key was now in Wally's possession, and he retreated from the study and closed the door after him. In doing so he slipped the key into the lock on the outside without the sound of it being noticeable.

Then, with a grin upon his smudgy face, he hurried back to Jameson and Gibson. They met him with the monosyllabic interrogation:

"Well?"

Wally shook his head.

"He won't give me leave."

"I told you he wouldn't——"

"Never mind what you told me, Jim! Look here, Selby's key is in the outside of the lock on his door——"

"How on earth did it get there?"

"Never mind! Go and lock the door——"

"Lock the door!"

"Yes; and bring the key away, and don't make a sound to alarm the Selby-bird!"

"But—but——"

"Do as I tell you, ass!"

Jameson made no further demur. He went along quietly to the Form-master's study, and having ascertained that no one was in sight, he silently turned the key in the lock, and then abstracted it. He rejoined Wally, who signed to him to put the key in his pocket.

"Take that key away and hide it somewhere," he said. "Mind you don't let me know where you put it."

"Why not?"

"Because I shall most likely be questioned about it, ass!"

"Oh, I see!" said Jameson, with a grin.

A little later the three fags strolled out into the quadrangle. When their Form-master wanted to leave his study there was likely to be a disturbance, and they did not wish to be upon the spot at first. Wally knew the value of an alibi as well as the famous Sam Weller's parent.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Wally. "Where are those Fourth Form bounders off to?"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were going down to the gates from the New House. Each of them carried a bag and a coat on his arm. The fags cut across to intercept them.

The Third were supposed to be a little in awe of the Fourth, but Wally was never known to be in awe of anybody or anything.

"Where are you off to, Figgy?" he asked cheerfully.

Figgins frowned.

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions!" he replied.

"Oh, come off!" said D'Arcy minor. "Are you all week-ending now? I'll be bound your House-master hasn't given you leave! We know Ratty!"

"That's where you're wrong!" said Figgins. "Our House-master has been on a new tack lately, and has developed a good temper that has lasted nearly a week. He has given us permission, and we're off for the week-end."

"Where are you off to?"

"Oh, we're going to the country!" said Figgins.

And then, for some reasons, the New House trio laughed.

Wally looked a little puzzled as he watched them go out of the gate. Instead of going down to the village, they clambered over a fence and took a short cut towards the wood. Wally wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"They're taking a short cut to Wayland," he said. "They're going to catch the same train as Blake will catch with the six o'clock local from Rylcombe. Looks to me as if they had something on."

"There's something on in the School House," grinned Jameson. "Hark!"

From the School House came a distant sound of knocking. It must have been pretty loud on the spot for them to hear it at such a distance.

Wally chuckled joyously.

"It's the Selby-bird beating his little wings against the bars of his giddy cage!" he remarked. "Come on!"

And the three fags—two of them with some inward trepidation—returned to the School House, to find a crowd gathering in the corridor outside the door of the Third Form-master's study.

CHAPTER 7.

No Exit!

KNOCK, knock, knock!

"Open this door!"

Thump, thump!

"Will you unlock this door?"

Bang!

"I shall punish the perpetrator of this outrage most severely!"

Crash!

Mr. Selby was getting excited. He had been knocking on the door of his study for some time, and the noise of it rang through the School House. Fellows were gathering in the passage from far and near.

The Third Form-master had gone to his door to open it without a suspicion that anything was wrong. He had stayed to finish some work, and left his tea, and so by this

time he was pretty sharp-set. When he was sharp-set, his temper was sharp-set, too, and Mr. Selby had fallen into a way of indulging his temper that was far from creditable to a master in charge of young lads.

He snatched at the handle of the door to open it with a spiteful jerk, and when it remained firm, his hand slipped from its hold, and he nearly fell down. Then he murmured something that it was just as well that the Third Form did not hear, and grabbed at the handle again. Then it dawned upon him that the door was locked on the outside. The fact that the key was missing from the inside of the lock left no doubt upon the subject.

Then commenced the knocking that woke the echoes of the School House. Mr. Selby was in a white heat of temper, and he thumped on the door with his fist till he barked his knuckles and hurt himself considerably. Then he took up a pair of tongs from the grate to use instead.

The fellows outside were amazed. Fags were grinning and chuckling, and even the seniors who came along could not keep quite grave. It sounded as if some lunatic were trying to break out of his cell.

Kildare of the Sixth came running up at last, and he tapped on the door. Mr. Selby ceased his blows for a moment.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Kildare, through the keyhole.

"I cannot get out!"

"Indeed!"

"The door is locked!"

"Why do you not unlock it, sir?"

Mr. Selby raved.

"It is locked on the outside, you fool!"

Kildare turned red. He was captain of St. Jim's, and head of the Sixth. To be called a fool was not pleasant, and had not Mr. Selby been in a raging temper, he would never have used the word.

"The key is not on the outside of the door, sir," said Kildare. "However, the matter is no concern of mine."

And he walked away, leaving Mr. Selby to his own devices. It was not his business to set a trapped Form-master at liberty, and if Mr. Selby couldn't be civil, he could get out of the difficulty the best way he could. Mr. Selby called out to him again, but the captain of St. Jim's did not even turn his head.

"Open this door somebody!" roared Mr. Selby. "Is no one there?"

"We're here, sir," said Lefevre, of the Fifth.

"Open this door!"

"Can't, sir! There's no key!"

"Find it, then!"

Lefevre grinned.

"Where shall I look, sir? I don't mind taking any amount of trouble, sir, but where shall I look? The School House is a big place to look for a key in. That's what I say, sir. Where shall I look?"

"Fetch a master here!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Lefevre carried the news to Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. Little Mr. Lathom came along, blinking through his spectacles, and and very much astonished.

"Unheard-of!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "Astounding! A Form-master locked up in his study! I have really never heard of such a thing."

"Can you open this door, Mr. Lathom?"

"I—I fear I cannot, Mr. Selby. You see, the door is of solid oak, and would certainly resist any force I could bring to bear upon it. Then the lock is a very strong one, and I am afraid I could not break it."

The fellows in the passage giggled, and Mr. Selby murmured things. It was quite true. The lock and the door, like everything else in the building, were of the strongest make, and would have defied anything short of a battering-ram or a cannon. Mr. Selby was a prisoner in his study until the key could be found, or a locksmith's services obtained.

Mr. Selby realised it, and he raged like a tiger in the study. He was hungry, and he knew that it would be a long time before a locksmith could come. There was not one nearer than Wayland, and it was doubtful if the man would be able to come at once. The prospect of being kept a prisoner in that study till a late hour at night was appalling.

"Something must be done!" said Mr. Selby, in a choked voice. "This is a trick—a trick of some rascally junior! I will have him expelled from the school!"

"Dear me, perhaps some of you boys know where the key is?"

Jameson, the only fellow who knew where the key was, discreetly withdrew. There was a general shaking of heads from the rest.

"Mr. Selby must have locked himself in, in a fit of absent-mindedness, sir, and taken out the key," said Lefevre. "That's what I say. He locked himself in!"

Mr. Lathom tapped at the door.

"Mr. Selby, is it possible that you have yourself removed the key in a fit of absent-mindedness?"

"Don't be an idiot!" roared the exasperated master within.

"Dear me, he is very excited! I shall certainly not stay here to be addressed in such terms!"

And he walked away. Mr. Selby rapped on the door.

"Don't go! Send for a locksmith! Tell the boy who took the key that I will pardon him if he brings it back and unlocks the door."

The noise, and the news of the Form-master's mishap brought fellows in from all quarters. Three Shell fellows with coats on their arms came along, dressed for going out, but stopping a moment to see what the trouble was. They were the Terrible Three, just starting off for their week-end.

"My hat," said Monty Lowther, "Form-master locked in his study! Well, I'm not surprised at it. Selby gives the Third a high old time when he's got his back up."

"Send for a locksmith!"

Tom Merry laughed softly.

"I shouldn't wonder if I could guess who was at the bottom of this!" he murmured. "Well, it's no business of ours. Come on!"

"I rather think I can guess, too," said Manners, with an expressive glance at the scamp of the Third as he passed him. Wally closed one eye.

The Terrible Three went on their way. Behind them the crowd thickened till the passage was crammed. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came along, looking very much disturbed. The noise was interrupting his work. He heard Mr. Selby's complaints, and promised to send for a locksmith.

"Unfortunately, there is not now a locksmith in Rylcombe," he said. "But I will certainly send Binks over to Wayland at once."

"Am I to remain a prisoner here all that time?" bawled Mr. Selby.

"I really see no alternative," said the Shell master tartly. "If you can suggest one, I am quite at your disposal."

"Find the boy who locked me in!"

"How am I to find him?"

"Use your brains!" roared Mr. Selby, who was in too furious a temper to care what he said—"use your brains, sir!"

Mr. Linton set his lips tightly, and walked away without another word. Mr. Selby banged on the door with such force that he bent the tongs.

"I will—I will give a sovereign to any person who can contrive to pick the lock of the door!" he shouted.

"My hat," said Dane, "there's a chance for you, Skimmy!"

Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, was on the spot, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his big forehead. He blinked through his big spectacles at Clifton Dane without replying. He was evidently thinking things out. There was a buzz of encouragement from the other fellows. They wanted to see Skimpole at work.

"Go it!" exclaimed Kerruish. "The chap who can invent a flying-machine ought to be able to pick a lock! Go it, Skimmy!"

"Faith, and ye're right!' said Reilly. "Bring yer brain to bear on the subject, Skimmy darling."

Skimpole nodded, and strode to the door. He tapped on it, and Mr. Selby left off banging with the tongs.

"Mr. Selby, you—er—want this door to be opened?"

"Yes, of course!' roared the Third Form-master. "Can you open it?"

"I think so, sir. On scientific principles I think it would be possible. The resistance of the door being calculated at so much, the pressure required to burst it open would be so much more, and therefore——"

"Have you anything to break it open with?"

"Er—no, I fear I haven't; but I could calculate——"

"If you have nothing sensible to suggest, Skimpole——"

"Excuse me, sir. I have another idea. By connecting up the lock, by means of wires, with a sufficiently powerful battery, a current of electricity could be directed upon the lock, with the result that it would be reduced to ashes."

"Have you a battery?"

"Well, no, sir, I haven't a battery, but——"

"Don't talk nonsense to me, boy!"

"I wasn't talking nonsense, sir. This is science. People who say that the words are synonymous in meaning are quite mistaken. You see——"

"If you say another word, Skimpole, I shall cane you!"

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole, as he walked away, "some people seem to be utterly ungrateful. It is not much use trying to help Mr. Selby when he is in a difficulty."

"Let me see you suck the egg, and then I shall believe your statement," said Mr. Railton sternly. "Quick, I have no time to waste!"

CHAPTER 8.

Wally Makes Terms.

WALLY tapped at the door of the study. Mr. Selby seemed to be too enraged to know what he was doing, for he banged away with the bent tongs on the thick oak, though it was no longer necessary to announce the fact that he was shut up in his study. That fact was known by this time all over the School House.

"Who is it? Can you open the door?"

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't pick locks," said Wally; "but——"

"Is that you, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where the key of my door is?"

"No, sir," said D'Arcy minor, with perfect and praiseworthy truthfulness. He hadn't the faintest idea where Jameson had hidden it.

"Ah! Do you think you could find it, D'Arcy minor?"

"I will try, sir, if you like."

"I think it very probable, D'Arcy minor, that you could find the perpetrator of this outrage if you chose," said Mr. Selby thickly. "However, if you can find the key, I will promise to ask no questions."

"Yes, sir. It's a beautiful evening, sir, and I could go out to cricket practice, sir; but I'd rather try to be of service to you, sir. If I find the key, would you be kind enough to grant me a little favour, sir?"

"What do you want?"

"Well, sir, I wanted to go away for the week-end——"

"D'Arcy! I—I——"

"If you'd let me leave this evening, sir, and return on Monday morning along with my brother, I should take it as a great favour, sir."

"I—I—I——"

"And if you could give me leave to take Jameson and Gibson with me, sir, I should be awfully obliged."

There was a pause.

Mr. Selby on his side of the door, was murmuring things that did not penetrate the thick oak.

He was in a cleft stick, and he knew it. He was pretty certain that D'Arcy minor could find the key if he chose. But if he did not choose, the Form-master was a prisoner for hours—perhaps for the night—unless he adopted the uncomfortable, undignified, and perhaps perilous course of descending fom his window by means of a rope or a ladder. Mr. Selby had no desire to make an exhibition of himself

in the quadrangle to a swarm of grinning boys. But the only alternative was to make terms with Wally.

"D'Arcy minor, if you bring the key here I will promise you to ask no questions on the subject. That is all."

"Can't I have the week-end, sir?"

"Decidedly not!"

"Very well, sir. I'll look for the key, but, of course, as I don't know where it is, I haven't much hope of its turning up."

And Wally made as if to retire. Mr. Selby heard him moving away, and called him hastily back.

"D'Arcy minor! On second thoughts, I think you—you deserve some reward for finding the key, and—and if you find it and open the door, you shall have the week-end."

"Thank you, sir! And Jameson and Gibson, too?"

"Yes," said Mr. Selby, with an effort, "and—and Jameson and Gibson too. Pray find the key as quickly as you can."

"Certainly, sir! Thank you so much, sir! You are very kind!"

"Make haste with the key."

"I'll do my very best, sir."

And Wally hurried off with his chums. They stopped at the other end of the passage to double up with laughter.

"My only Aunt Jane!" gasped Wally. "Isn't it great?"

"Immense!" said Jameson, wiping the tears from his eyes. "Fancy making the Selby merchant climb down in this style! It's great—enormous!"

"Stupenjious!" grinned Curly Gibson.

"We must find the key now. No good finding it too soon, however, or he'll get suspicious."

"I think he's jolly suspicious now, if you ask me."

"We needn't give him anything to go upon, though. Besides, he's a bad-tempered person, and it will do him good to cool his heels for an hour or two. We've lost the six train now, and we've got to pack, you know, so there's no hurry."

And the three young scamps walked coolly away to their own quarters, and proceeded to pack. The hammering within the Third Form-master's study had ceased. Mr. Selby felt pretty certain that D'Arcy minor would succeed in finding the key, and he had composed himself as well as he could to wait. And the crowd in the passage dispersed, it being recognised that the fun was over.

In half an hour Mr. Selby, losing patience, was knocking at the door again. Then Wally looked for the key, and—with the assistance of Jameson—found it under a desk in the Third Form-room.

He hurried to Mr. Selby's study with the key, and the Third Form-master, hearing him coming, ceased to knock. Wally tapped at the door.

"It's all right, sir! I've found a key, and I think it's the right one."

"Try it," said Mr. Selby, in a choked voice.

"Yes, sir. Half a mo', sir!"

Wally slid the key into the lock. It turned quite easily, and Mr. Selby gave a gasp of relief as he heard the click. He tore the door open, and looked down thunderously upon the innocent face of D'Arcy minor.

Mr. Selby would have liked to say things to the junior—things hot and strong—but he had passed his word, and he could hardly go back on it.

"It's all right now, sir," said Wally cheerily. "I'm so glad I found the key, sir!"

"You may go, D'Arcy minor."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Wally scuttled off. Mr. Selby went down in search of a belated tea, and the scamps of the Third Form hugged themselves with glee over the success of the scheme. Wally borrowed a time-table from Darrel's study, and looked out the trains.

"It's all right," he said. "We can walk to Wayland and take our time about it, and catch a train to Winchester. It's all right. I'll go and fetch Pongo, and you chaps can meet me at the gate."

"Going to take Pongo?" asked Jameson, with a curious inflexion in his voice.

"Of course. You don't think I'd go for a week-end without Pongo, do you?"

"Oh! I thought this was going to be a pleasure trip!"

D'Arcy minor glared at his chum.

"If you don't like Pongo's company, Jameson, you can stick here."

"I love it," said Jameson sweetly. "I'd rather travel with Pongo than with—a—a—a prince! I'm looking forward to travelling with Pongo. When I die, you will find the word Pongo written on my heart——"

"Oh, don't be funny! You can leave that business to Lowther of the Shell."

"And when Pongo dies," murmured Gibson, "you'll find a brick tied round his neck, and——"

"What's that you're mumbling about, Curly?"

"I was only saying that I'm just as fond of Pongo as Jameson is."

Wally snorted, and went off in search of his shaggy favourite. The fags jammed their bags shut, and fastened them somehow. From Jameson's bag a brightly-coloured fragment gaily floated, which on closer inspection would have proved to be a leg of a pyjama garment. But the Third Former did not mind little things like that. Jameson and Gibson carried three bags to the gates, where they met Wally.

Bow-wow! Gr-r-r-r!

That remark came from Pongo. He was highly delighted at being released from his chain, and he was very frisky, and he showed a playful desire to sample Jameson's trousers with his teeth. Jameson, who had a bag in each hand, skipped out of his way, and yelled to Wally.

"Keep that beast away, D'Arcy minor!"

"Oh, figs!" said Wally. "He won't bite! It's only his fun!"

"Keep him off, I tell you, or I'll biff him with these bags."

"Look here, young Jameson, don't be a pig! Pongo's entitled to one free bite, and he's never had it yet."

"I'll—I'll give him a free biff!" gasped Jameson. "I'll—I'll biff him into little pieces if you don't call him off!"

Wally gave an ear-splitting whistle, and Pongo trotted to his heels. The three fags left the school gates, and took the short cut to Wayland. Jameson offered Wally his bag, but Wally declined it.

Jameson breathed hard through his nose.

"Do you think I'm going to carry your beastly bag to Wayland?" he demanded. "Do you think I'm a beast of burden?"

"I know jolly well you're a beast of some sort," said Wally cheerfully. "A beast of burden is the nicest kind of beast, so I don't see why you should object to being a B B. I'll carry the bag if you like, but I shall have to let go Pongo's chain if I do."

"Never mind!" said Jameson hastily. "I don't mind carrying the bag."

And he carried it.

CHAPTER 9.

Figgins & Co. Join the Party.

"BAI Jove! Here's Wayland, deah boys!"

The train stopped in the station. Blake, Herries, Dig, and D'Arcy had been chatting pleasantly enough with Mr. Railton during the short journey in the local train from Rylcombe. Mr. Railton was very pleasant—more cheery and chatty than the juniors had ever known him before.

He seemed to have thrown off, with his school duties, his school manners, and he was no longer the grave House-master of the School House, but a good-natured, pleasant companion, who could chat with the boys about cricket and dogs and field sports as if he were one of themselves.

The minutes fled by rapidly, and the week-enders were surprised when Arthur Augustus announced that the train was stopping at Wayland Junction.

Blake threw open the door of the carriage, and lifted out the bags that were handed to him. He took Mr. Railton's bag last, and held it. It was the largest and the heaviest of the five, but Blake meant to carry it. As he remarked to Digby, they didn't have a House-master under

their wing every time they went on a journey, and it would only be form to make much of Railton.

Herries was hurrying along to the guard's van for Towser. Mr. Railton looked round for his bag, and signed to Blake to hand it to him.

"I'm going to carry it, sir," said Jack.

The House-master laughed.

"Nonsense! It's too heavy for you."

"That's all right, sir. Please let me have it. D'Arcy will carry mine."

Arthur Augustus looked rather straight. He quite approved of Blake's carrying the House-master's bag, but he had expected Blake's bag to be passed on to Herries or Dig. Mr. Railton smilingly yielded the point, and Blake retained possession of the bag. There wasn't much carrying to be done just then, as there was only a platform to cross to reach the express. The latter train was already coming into the station.

"Here's the expwess, deah boys! Bai Jove, what's that wubbin' against my legs?"

"It's all right," said Herries. "It's only Towser's nose."

Arthur Augustus jumped clear of the platform.

"Ow! Keep that beast away!"

"He's all right. He likes to rub his nose on anything soft——"

"Then he's starfed at the wrong end of Gussy," said Blake. "Sit down, Gussy, and let him get at your head."

"I wegard that as a wotten wemark, Blake. Keep that feahful beast away, Hewwies, or I shall kick him!"

"I wouldn't give much for your leg afterwards," said Herries.

"Wats! I am not afwaid of a dog, but that beast has no wespect for a fellow's twousahs. Evewy decent dog wespects a fellow's twousahs"

"Here's the train!"

The express stopped, and Mr. Railton opened a carriage door. The juniors tumbled in, and the bags were piled on the rack.

"Bai Jove, I think we shall have this cawwiage to ourselves!" said D'Arcy. "That will be all wight, deah boys!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo! What's that?"

It was a shout from the platform.

"'Urry up there!"

D'Arcy looked out of the window. Three youths were racing along the platform, and he recognised Figgins & Co. at a glance.

Each had a strapped travelling-bag in his hand, and each evidently meant to catch the express. Figgins was first, his long legs covering the ground like lightning, and then came Kerr, and finally Fatty Wynn, perspiring freely.

Figgins caught sight of D'Arcy looking out, and grinned. He caught the handle of the door and swung it open, and the School House swell started back.

"Bai Jove!"

"Here we are!" gasped Figgins. "Come on, kids!"

He scrambled into the carriage, throwing his bag in first. The bag plumped upon the knees of the astonished Mr. Railton.

But Figgins was in too great a hurry to notice that there was a master in the carriage. He leaned out and bawled to the Co.

"Buck up, there! Put it on, Fatty!"

"'Urry up there!" shrieked the guard. "Stand clear!"

"That's all right, old boy! We're not going to lose the express."

Kerr clambered in. Fatty Wynn put on a spurt to the open carriage door. His jacket was flying open, and in his haste all sorts of things were dropping out of the pockets. He left a trail of bananas and apples and sandwiches behind him on the platform.

He reached the door just at the same time as the guard.

Figgins grasped his shoulder to help him in, and he just escaped the indignant clutch of the guard, who slammed the door viciously after him, and waved his flag.

The train started.

Figgins sank gasping into a seat. The seat was already occupied by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Figgins plumped heavily on his knees. There was a howl from the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ow! Gerrooff, you wottah! You're cwumplin' my twousahs!"

"Sorry!" gasped Figgins, without moving. "That was a close shave; but we've caught the express."

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr. "We——" He broke off, and stared, as his eyes fell upon Mr. Railton.

"I've lost a lot of the grub," said Fatty Wynn. "Looks to me now as if we shall very likely get hungry before we get to D'Arcy's place."

"My place!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Yes, rather!" grinned Figgins. "We—— Oh, is that Mr. Railton?"

"Yes, it is Mr. Railton," said the School House-master quietly. "Will you explain what this means, Figgins?"

"My—my hat! Are you with these bounders—I mean these chaps, sir?"

"Certainly!"

"I—I—I didn't know that, sir. My hat!"

"Have you leave to be here, Figgins?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Our House-master has given us leave for the week-end."

"Indeed! And where are you going?"

Figgins hesitated.

The School House juniors were looking at him curiously. They had a glimmering of the truth, and they could not help grinning—except D'Arcy. He was thinking of the knees of his trousers, upon which Figgins was still sitting.

"You—you see, sir——" stammered Figgins.

"Pway excuse me for intewwuptin' you," said Arthur Augustus, with elaborate irony. "but you are wuinin' my twousahs, Figgins."

"Oh, blow your trousers!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort—I mean——"

"Ring off, Gussy!" said Jack Blake. "Let's hear what Figgins has to say for himself."

"I wefuse to wing off. Figgins is spoilin' my twousahs, and if he does not immediately wemove himself, I shall stwike him."

Figgins chuckled and rose from his seat on D'Arcy's knees. D'Arcy anxiously smoothed out the creases and wrinkles in the hitherto immaculate "bags."

"You see, sir," said Figgins, a little haltingly—he had not expected to have to explain himself to a House-master—"you see, sir, we—we heard that these young 'uns were going for a week-end to Eastwood, and we thought they might get into mischief. You know what D'Arcy is, sir."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"So we thought we ought to come and look after them, sir," said Figgins. "We're going to Eastwood for the week-end."

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Railton could not help laughing.

"Without the formality of an invitation?" he asked.

"Well, sir, we don't stand on ceremony with an old friend like Gus. You can always rely on Gus to play up like a little man," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard this as a feahful cheek on the part of these New House boundahs; but, at the same time, I shall be vewy pleased to welcome them to Eastwood for the week-end," said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "The only thing I object to is Figgins sittin' on my knees and wumplin' my twousahs."

"It's all right, Figgy," said Blake, in his hearty way. "It's a pleasant surprise, and we're all jolly glad to have you."

"Good!" said Figgins. "Of course, we shall make ourselves useful. I am going to look after Gussy."

"You are goin' to do nothin' of the sort, Figgins."

"And I hear that Lord Eastwood's butler is away with his lordship. I should be perfectly willing to buttle in his place, if necessary."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Figgins, I could not allow you to undahtake the duties of a butlah, even if you were capable of doin' so, which I stwongly doubt. Besides, although the butlah is away, there is a substitute in his place—a vewy weliable person named Jelf—so I hear fwom my governah. I have not seen him, but I think he must be a vewy decent and wespectable man, because my young bwothah Wally cannot stand him. If Mr. Wailton does not object, I shall be delighted to welcome you wottahs to Eastwood."

"Of course, I shall be pleased," said Mr. Railton, with a smile.

"Then it is settled, deah boy."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Figgins affably. "You can rely on us to make ourselves at home, Gus, and to see that we want for nothing."

"Yes, rather!" said the Co. heartily.

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy Gives a Solo.

IT was a merry party in the train going down to Eastwood. Mr. Railton was on the best of terms with the boys, and the boys were on the best of terms with Mr. Railton and with each other. The carriage was in a buzz of talk all the time, and though there were not enough seats to go round, nobody minded that. D'Arcy would have minded if Figgins had remained sitting on his knees, but Figgins had considerately got off. Mr. Railton told them a cricket story of his college days, to which the juniors listened with great interest, and a yarn of adventure in the

Australian bush. Arthur Augustus listened to the latter with such intense interest that his mouth remained open all the time, and his eyes were fixed in a glassy stare upon Mr. Railton's face. When the story came to an end, D'Arcy seemed to wake up, as it were, and he gave a long-drawn sigh.

"Bai Jove," he said, "I wish I had been there! Pway are there any bushwangahs left in Austwaliah now, Mr. Wailton?"

The House-master smiled.

"I am afraid they are quite things of the past, except in a very small way," he said. "However, experiences with bushrangers are pleasanter to talk about than to go through."

"Yaas, wathah; but I weally think we made a mistake in goin' to Amewicah for our little twip that time, deah boys. Austwaliah is a much gwandah countwy. I have some welations in Austwaliah, too—they live at Bwisbane. I hear there is an Austwalian chap comin' to St. Jim's, and I dare say he may know my people."

"There is certainly an Australian boy coming to the school," said Mr. Railton, with a smile, "but he comes from Melbourne, which is a very considerable distance from Brisbane."

"Yaas, but I dare say he may have met my welations. It will be wippin' to have some news of them at first-hand, you know. I've got an uncle there. He was wathah a wastah, so I undahstand, but I should like to hear fwom him. He may have become a millionaire out there, you know."

Mr. Railton laughed, and the topic was changed; but D'Arcy several times referred to the Australian boy who was coming to the school, and expressed a hope that he would hear of his Brisbane relations from him. Gussy was not strong on geography, and he apparently saw no reason why a man who lived in Brisbane shouldn't be on nodding terms with a fellow in Melbourne.

"Bai Jove, I've got a good ideah!" went on D'Arcy presently. "Tow Mewwy has a gwamophone, sir."

"Yes, I am aware of that," said Mr. Railton. There were few dwellers in the School House at St. Jim's who could fail to be aware of it.

"Well, sir, it would be only decent to give the Austwalian boy a bit of a welcome when he comes, and I think I will speak to Mewwy about it, and get him to put some Austwalian singah on the gwamophone," said Arthur Augustus. "Some of our gweatest sopwanos hail fwom Austwaliah, sir—like Madame Melba. Speakin' of singin'," went on D'Arcy modestly, "if all the gentlemen pwesent would like it, I would not mind givin' a tenor solo to enliven the journay."

"Mercy!" murmured Blake.

"I wegard that as a wotten wemark, Blake. If Mr. Wailton does not think it would be bad form to sing in a twain, I will give a tenor solo."

The House-master concealed a smile.

"I don't think the singing would be heard above the noise of the train in the other carriages," he said. "Why not?"

"You don't know D'Arcy, sir," said Digby. "He's not satisfied with 'Waltz Me Round Again' and 'The World is Mine.' He goes for tenor solos from Wagner."

"I wegard Wagnah's tenor solos as wippin', Dig, and I considah you an unmusical beast. Suppose I twy the Pwize Song fwom the 'Meistersinger'?"

"Isn't that just a little—er—above your weight?" suggested Mr. Railton.

"I don't know, sir. I have heard fah infewiah singahs tacklin' it at Covent Garden," said D'Arcy modestly. "Howevah, pewwaps the Steersman's Song fwom the 'Flyin' Dutchman' would be more suitable. Shall I sing it in English or German?"

"Both," said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"A little of each," suggested Kerr, "that would make variety. What do you say, Wynn?"

"M-m-m-m-m!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Eh? What's the matter with you?"

"M-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn could not speak; he had just stuffed a jam-tart into his mouth, and he could only mumble. Fatty was getting hungry.

"Pway excuse me a moment while I get my note," said D'Arcy, producing a tuning-fork from his waistcoat pocket. "I must stwike this on wood.' He absent-mindedly gave Figgins a tap on the head, and Figgins yelled.

"Hallo! What are you up to?"

"Sowwy, deah boy!"

"He was striking it on wood," grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't make a wow, deah boys; I'm just goin' to begin."

"Making a row?"

"Certainly not, Kerr. I am just goin' to begin singin'. I wefuse to admit for a moment that it is the same thing. Pong, pong! Yaas, that's my note."

"Go it!"

"On the bawl!"

Arthur Augustus sang. Whether he had a ripping tenor voice or not, the time and place were not calculated to do it full justice.

The train was rattling and roaring and jolting, and in the noise D'Arcy's words were hardly to be distinguished, and the jolting broke up his notes with an unintentional staccato effect.

Little things like that, however, were not likely to deter Arthur Augustus when he was on the track of a tenor solo. He sang on cheerfully, and as he came to the bar containing the top B-flat, the juniors dramatically jammed their hands to their ears.

Just at that moment, as it chanced, the train gave a long whistle, and the nerve-shattering shriek from the engine rang through the train.

It drowned D'Arcy's top note, of course.

Jack Blake clapped his hands heartily.

"Splendid!"

And the others, taking the cue, clapped violently.

"Ripping! Bravo!"

D'Arcy looked at them in surprise.

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Marvellous!" gasped Blake. "I never heard him get that top B-flat so splendidly before. Talk about Caruso! Why, Caruso isn't in the same street!"

"I—I—I——"

"It was ripping," said Blake. "The wonder is it didn't rip the roof off the train, it was so ripping."

"But I—I——"

"You must have been training for a long time to get that note," said Figgins, slapping D'Arcy on the shoulder. "It was amazing."

"Perhaps a trifle sharp," said Fatty Wynn.

"Well, yes, perhaps a little sharp, but you can excuse that on a top note," said Blake. "I wish we could get it on Tom Merry's gramophone. It would be a splendid thing to scare away burglars, or anything of that sort."

"Weally, Blake——"

"How did you do it, Gussy?"

"I believe you are wottin', you wottahs! That wasn't my top note at all—it was the beastly twain whistle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Mr. Railton had to laugh.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked indignant at first, but finally he smiled, too. The pretence of mistaking the train whistle for his top B-flat was too funny.

"Give us another tenor solo, Gus," said Blake encouragingly. "Let's see you like a soldier fall again."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I fear that the circs. are not favouwable for tenor solos," he said. "I shall be vewy pleased to sing to you at Eastwood. I will go thwough my whole wepertoire, if you like, to-mowwow evenin'."

"I don't think," murmured Blake.

A few minutes later Herries, looking out of the window, announced:

"Winchester!"

"Bai Jove! What a wemarkably short journey! We change here, deah boys."

A little later the party stepped out of the local train at Easthorpe, the station for D'Arcy's home. A vehicle was in waiting, which conveyed them speedily to Eastwood House. As they entered the hall, Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass, and looked at a slim, dark-skinned man who was bowing to him as if worked by machinery.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, with his eyeglass fixed on the stranger, who, in garments and manners looked like a less plump edition of Lord Eastwood's imposing butler. "Bai Jove! Whom may you happen to be?"

"His lordship will have informed you, sir, that owing to the absence of——"

"Oh, I see! You are Mr. Jelf?"

"Yes, sir, and very happy to welcome——"

"Exactly, deah boy! I'm vewy pleased to make your acquaintance, Jelf. I suppose the wooms are all weady?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Mr. Jelf. "I had his lordship's instructions rather suddenly, sir, but everything was prepared at once, sir. It was very sudden, sir." And there was a curious glint in Mr. Jelf's light eyes that made Blake, who was watching him, think that this sudden week-end visit wasn't wholly acceptable to the butler's substitute at Eastwood House. Perhaps he had planned a little week-end for himself. "Everything is ready, and the supper——"

"Yaas, wathah; that's an important point. I am feahfully hungwy, Jelf."

Jameson, who had a bag in each hand, skipped out of Pongo's way and yelled to Wally to call the dog away. "Look here, young Jameson, don't be a pig!" replied D'Arcy minor. "Pongo's entitled to one free bite, and he's never had it yet!"

"Everything is prepared, sir. Your friends have not yet arrived——"

"Yaas, they are here with me."

"But the others, sir, whose trunk came some time back——"

"I was not expectin' any othah visitahs, Jelf."

Mr. Jelf looked surprised.

"But the trunk has come, sir—luggage in advance."

"Eh? I don't quite compwehend."

"The trunk has been taken upstairs, sir."

"I will see it Pway come this way, Mr. Wailton, and I will show you to your quartahs. You chaps know where to go—same quartahs, and you can look aftah yourselves."

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Blake. "We're not going to stand upon ceremony, I assure you. This way, kids."

Mr. Jelf preceded them upstairs. The bedrooms occupied by the fellows from St. Jim's when they came to see D'Arcy all opened off a wide passage. In the passage a huge trunk was standing, where it had been set down, and Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation of surprise at the sight of it.

"Is that the twunk, Jelf?"

"That is it, sir."

"My hat!" howled Blake. "That's the trunk Tom Merry borrowed from Gussy."

"My word!" said Digby.

"This is wathah mystewious," he said. "Tom Mewwy bowwowed my twunk to go away for the week-end, and now I find it here. This is vewy wemarkable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see the cause for your mewwiment, Figgins."

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't you see? Tom Merry didn't tell you where he was going to spend his week-end, did he?"

"No; he kept that secwet for some weason."

"Ha, ha!" roared Blake. "He's going to spend it here!"

"Here!" ejaculated D'Arcy, in amazement.

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you know, I wegard that as wathah funnay! You had bettah make pwepawations for thwee more wottahs—I mean thwee more fwiends of mine, Jelf, deah boy."

"Yes, sir," said Jelf.

And Arthur Augustus piloted the amused Mr. Railton to his room. Herries, of course, had gone to look after the disposal of his bulldog. And the other juniors, as they had promised, looked after themselves and made themselves at home.

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry Arrives.

MR. JELF, whether he was pleased or not, by the arrival of the week-enders, had certainly made excellent preparations for them. The supper was superb, and a big fire roared in the wide, old-fashioned chimney of the room where it was laid. The aspect of the room, with the firelight gleaming on the oak panelling, and the shining crockery and silver, was very genial. And Arthur Augustus welcomed his guests there with the air of a prince.

It was a merry party that sat down to supper.

And what a supper!

Dinners at St. Jim's, though substantial enough, were nothing to it.

And besides the more solid portion of the meal, there were pastries of all sorts, the work of the cook at Eastwood, who was pleased by the keen appreciation the St. Jim's juniors had always shown for her handiwork.

The juniors were of an age that defies indigestion, and they did full justice to the excellent things prepared for them.

Mr. Railton, as D'Arcy observed with pleasure and relief, was keenly enjoying himself.

The swell of St. Jim's was usually pretty well assured of himself, but he had had some slight doubts as to his ability to entertain a House-master.

Mr. Railton was monarch of all he surveyed in the School House at St. Jim's, and juniors trembled at his frown.

For one of those same juniors to be entertaining him as a guest was a novelty, and it was no wonder that even D'Arcy felt a little uneasy at first.

But Mr. Railton was easy to entertain.

He was cheery and chatty, and as genial and contented as could be wished; and the juniors, it need not be said, did not allow themselves to take any advantage of his geniality. He was as chummy as possible, but they were careful not to lose anything of the respect they owed him. Any undue familiarity would have spoiled the whole thing; but D'Arcy & Co. were not likely to err in taste to that extent.

The supper was more than half through, when sounds of arrival were heard without. Arthur Augustus had warned Mr. Jelf to be prepared for fresh arrivals. They had come now. The rattle of wheels on the drive told that the hack from Easthorpe was bringing the Terrible Three to the house.

D'Arcy laid down his knife and fork with a smile.

"It is those wottahs!" he remarked.

Figgins looked up.

"We'll kick them out for you, if you like," he said. "Of course, a chap going to a week-end party without an invitation is an unheard-of thing."

"Absolutely," said Kerr gravely.

"Impossible," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm surprised at Tom Merry."

D'Arcy looked a little bewildered.

"But you fellows——" he began.

"We'll kick them out," said Figgins. "Rely on us. You've only got to give the word."

"But I don't want them kicked out, deah boy! I am goin' to make them vewy welcome. I have given Jelf instwuctions to show them stwaight in."

"We'll show them straight out, if you like. They ought to be made an example of for their cheek."

"Not at all, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "You'll be the death of me, Gussy!"

"Oh! So you were wottin' you wottah! I—— Hallo! Here they are!"

The door was thrown open, and Mr. Jelf announced the new arrivals.

"Come in, deah boys."

The Terrible Three entered.

They wore ingratiating smiles upon their faces, and they bowed very respectfully to Mr. Railton, who regarded them with a smile.

"Good-evening, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "I hope we're not late. Of course, you were expecting us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I hope our luggage has arrived safely," said Monty Lowther.

"Quite safely, deah boy."

"I see you've got supper ready," Manners remarked.

"Quite weady. Would you like to be shown to your quartahs first to take your things off? Jelf, kindly show my fwiends to their quartahs."

"Yes, sir."

The Terrible Three went upstairs. They were feeling a little puzzled. D'Arcy was acting as if an unexpected arrival of week-enders was quite the ordinary thing. They were surprised, too, by the appearance of Figgins & Co. there.

"My hat!" said Lowther, as he plunged his face into a towel, after plunging it into a basin of water. "My hat!"

"Eh? What? Are you talking to the towel?" asked Tom Merry.

Lowther removed the towel from his glowing face.

"My hat!" he said. "Figgins & Co. must have played the same game, and palmed themselves off on Gussy for the week-end! Cheek!"

"Awful nerve!" grinned Manners.

"Yes, some chaps are cool," agreed Tom Merry, dragging a comb through his thick, curly hair. "I wonder if Cousin Ethel will be here to-morrow?"

"Oh, certain!" said Lowther. "Bound to come! Gussy looks very cheerful, considering how his party's been enlarged for him."

"Yes, doesn't he? Come on now, or all the supper will be gone."

They descended.

Supper, hot and plentiful, was ready for them, and they wired in with a right goodwill.

"I didn't expect to see you here, Figgy," Tom Merry remarked, when he had taken the first keen edge off his appetite and had time to speak.

Figgins chuckled.

"And I didn't expect to see you," he replied.

"Some people have a lot of cheek," Lowther remarked casually.

"They have!" said Kerr, with emphasis.

"I am weally happay to welcome you all undah my woof, or more stwictly speakin', undah my governah's woof!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy kind of you to come and spend a week-end with me."

"Well, we couldn't resist such a pressing invitation, you see," said Tom Merry, pausing over his chicken. "We simply had to come."

D'Arcy turned an inquiring monocle upon him.

"I—I do not compwehend——"

"You see, Blake," explained Tom Merry, "Gussy begged so hard, that we had to put off several invitations to spend the week-end with dukes and earls, and came down here instead."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"It was really pathetic to see Gussy," said Lowther. "There were tears in his eyes——"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Almost on his knees," said Manners. "Of course, under the circumstances, we had to come."

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"But I'll tell you what, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "There seem to be some bounders here who have come without being invited, and if you like, we'll chuck them out for you."

"With pleasure!" said Lowther.

"Quite so!" assented Manners.

"Weally, deah boys——"

"We were just making the same offer," chuckled Figgins. "The offer's still open, Gussy, if their faces worry you, or anything of that sort."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Gussy, you're a little man, and your cook's another, and I'm jolly glad I accepted your pressing invitation. And—and if you like, I'll listen to you singing the Prize Song from 'Die Meistersinger.'"

"I hope to give you some extensive selections fwom my wepertoire to-mowwow evenin', Tom Mewwy. I twust you are gettin' on all wight, Wynn?"

"Yes, rather!" mumbled Fatty Wynn, with his mouth full of chicken—"Thanks!"

Fatty Wynn was having an exceedingly good time.

The hour was late when the boys had finished a substantial supper. They were tired, and ready for bed.

Mr. Railton stayed up to smoke a pipe, while the juniors of St. Jim's went up to their sleeping-quarters.

Mr. Jelf looked in half an hour later, and found Mr. Railton seated in an easy-chair before the fire, his pipe in his mouth, smoking, and apparently thinking. He looked round as Mr. Jelf coughed.

"If there is anything more I could do for you, sir——" said Jelf.

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"Nothing, thanks!"

Mr. Jelf retired, closing the door, and walked away with his silent tread, that reminded one strangely of a cat.

Mr. Railton went on smoking.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then Mr. Jelf looked in again.

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Certainly not!"

"Ah—er—excuse me! I fancied you rang sir!"

Mr. Railton smiled slightly, and rose to his feet. He thought that Mr. Jelf was a dutiful servant who did not wish to go to bed till the last of the guests had retired, and he took Mr. Jelf's return as a strong hint that it was time to go upstairs.

The House-master went to his room, and Mr. Jelf extinguished the light. But he did not then go to his own quarters.

He remained in the lower hall for some minutes, apparently listening. He heard Mr. Railton's door close above, and remained listening for a minute or two longer. Then he quietly made his way to the back of the house, and let himself out into the grounds.

CHAPTER 12.

Wally & Co. Have to Walk.

"CHANGE for Easthorpe!"

Wally sat up, and yawned.

"Hallo! We change here! Wake up, you kids!"

It was a late train, and the scamps of the Third were asleep in it when it rolled into Winchester. Wally shook Jameson and Gibson, taking both of their ears for that purpose, and effectually awakened them.

"Change here, duffers! Do you want to go on to Southampton?"

"Groo!" said Jameson.

"Yaw-aw!" said Gibson.

"Pongo! Pongo! Where are you, Pong?"

Pongo crawled out from under a seat, and blinked sleepily.

The three juniors tumbled out of the carriage, Wally carrying his shaggy pet in his arms.

"Here's the local!" he said. "Tumble in, and get to sleep again, for goodness' sake, before you yawn your heads off!"

"I'm sleepy," said Gibson.

"You look it! Shall I chuck you in?"

They entered a carriage, Wally taking Pongo in with him. Jameson and Gibson dropped off to sleep as soon as they sat down, and Wally glared at them. He was hardier himself, and could stand late travelling, or almost anything else, without turning a hair. He nursed Pongo, and Pongo went to sleep on his knees. Wally whistled to pass the time.

The fags of the Third had hoped to catch a train from Wayland at an earlier hour—the train, in fact, that Tom Merry and his chums had caught. They had missed it by ten minutes or so, and had had to wait an hour for the next. That hour was spent in mutual recriminations; all three of them very earnestly investigating into the reasons why the train was lost, and whose fault it was. They were very nearly at blows by the time the next train came in.

However, the journey was nearing its end now.

It was a short run to Easthorpe, and not far from that village to the house. But as the train rattled on through the darkness, a thought occurred to Wally that made him leave off whistling.

He was not expected home, and so there would be no vehicle at the station to meet him. The village hack would be gone home long ago, and there was no other vehicle to be had, unless he knocked up the Eastwood Arms, and hired a trap. The alternative was to walk to Eastwood House.

The walk was little in itself. In the morning Wally would have walked it cheerfully. But at midnight, after a long and tiring journey, it was a different matter. Wally could have stood it himself without flinching, but he had strong doubts about Jameson and Gibson.

The train rattled into a dim country station. Wally shook his companions.

"Here you are!"

"Groo!"

"Yaw!"

"Oh, get out! Here, fetch 'em, Pongo! Seize 'em Pong!"

"Gr-r-r! Bow-wiw! Yap!"

"Keep that beast away!" yelled Jameson, jumping up. "Yah! Keep him off!"

"Get out, then!"

"Look here, young D'Arcy——"

"Rats! Get out!"

Jameson and Gibson bundled out, and Wally flung their bags after them—levelling Jameson with the platform. Then he jumped out with Pongo.

"Stand clear, there! Last train for 'Uckleberry 'Eath!"

The train rolled on. Jameson picked himself up, and glared at Wally. He was inclined to go for the hero of the Third on the spot, and it was not the consideration of what was due to his host that stopped him. Politeness was not carried to any wild excess in the Third Form at St. Jim's. But he was too sleepy to fight.

"Here we are!" said Wally. "I say, porter, is there anything on wheels to take me up to the house?"

The porter, who knew Lord Eastwood's hopeful youngest son well, scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I'm afeared there bean't, young master. The 'ack's gone home!"

"I suppose you couldn't carry us, could you?" asked Wally, with such a perfectly grave face that the slow-witted porter took him quite seriously.

He shook his head.

"I'm afeared I couldn't, young maister."

"You could take one under each arm, and one on your back, and the bags on your head, couldn't you?" said Wally persuasively.

"I'm afeared I couldn't do it, young maister."

"Then we shall have to knock up the Arms for a trap," said Wally. "Come on, you kids, and do stop yawning! You're giving me an ache in the jaw!"

"I'll give you a worse ache in the jaw if we have to walk it!" growled Jameson.

"Oh, shut up!"

They left the station. It was the last train in, and the place was already almost in darkness.

Outside the darkness was thick, and the silence complete. Wally looked round him, and crossed the village street. He bumped a packed bag on the door of the Eastwood Arms.

"What are you making that row for?" demanded Jameson sleepily.

"This is where we get a trap."

"Oh! They're fast asleep."

"I'll jolly soon wake 'em! Yell, you beggars!"

They yelled. They bumped on the door, and yelled, and shouted. Pongo caught the infection, and yelled, too, barking at the top of his powers, which was very considerable.

But the host of the Arms was a sound sleeper. It was a full five minutes before a window was heard to open above, and a night-capped head was put out into the dim starlight.

"Is that somebody there?"

"No," said Wally sarcastically; "the row is making itself. There isn't anybody here!"

"What do you want, a-disturbin' an honest man at this time of night?"

"I wasn't disturbing an honest man. I was waking you up."

"Look 'ere——"

"I want a trap, Jukes."

"Bless me!" said Mr. Jukes. "It's young Master Wally. I'm sorry, Master Wally, but you kain't have a trap."

"Why not?" yelled Wally.

"The 'orse is loose in the fields, and, bless you, it'd take an hour to ketch him!" said Mr. Jukes. "And my man is gone to the village, and I'm that bad with lumbago——"

"Look here, I must have a trap!"

"You can 'ave the trap, if you like, Master Wally; but there ain't no 'orse!"

D'Arcy minor danced with rage. Jameson and Gibson looked at him with fixed, accusing glares.

"This is what comes of missing trains!" said Jameson.

"Who missed a train?" yelled Wally, whose temper was rising.

"You did! You——"

"If you're looking for a thick ear, young Jameson, you're going to work the right way!"

"Yah!"

"I'll jolly well——"

"This is a week-end, is it?" said Curly Gibson. "I'm enjoying myself—I don't think!"

"You can walk back if you like!" roared Wally.

"Yah!"

"I could put you up if you like, young gents," said Mr. Jukes from the window. "I've got beds——"

"That's not a bad idea," said Jameson. "Of course, Wally would pay the bill."

"Rats!" said Wally. "Do you think we're going to have those Fourth Form duffers and Shell rotters grinning at us to-morrow? They'll say we were afraid to walk it in the dark. Bosh! We're not going to stay here. We'll leave the bags here, and save carrying them, though."

"Put 'em in the porch, Master Wally."

"Come down and take 'em in!"

"They'll be quite safe in the porch," said Mr. Jukes, apparently not hearing what Wally said. "Good-night!"

"Come down, I tell you, and——"

The window closed, and Mr. Jukes did not hear any more

of Wally's remarks. The youngest scion of the house of D'Arcy snorted wrathfully.

"The bags will be all right in the porch," he said. "They'll send them up in the morning. Come on!"

"Can't he come down and take them in?"

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

"What are we going to sleep in to-night?" demanded Gibson.

"Beds, I suppose, dummy!"

"My pyjamas are in that bag. I——"

"Take 'em out and tie 'em round your neck if you like, idiot!"

"Look here, young D'Arcy——"

"Oh, shut up! Do you want to stay here jawing all night? We can get all the things we want from Gussy. We can raid his room once we get in. Do come on!"

Wally started down the road to Eastwood, and the others followed him, grumbling very audibly. It was a relief not to have to carry the bags, but they didn't like the walk. Wally whistled to Pongo, who came running round his heels. He took no notice of the growling of Jameson and Gibson.

They tramped on through the darkness, under the shadow of heavy trees. Wally stopped suddenly at a low wall bounding the park towards the lane.

"Give us a bunk up," he said.

"What on earth——"

"It's a short cut through the park; we save a quarter of a mile."

"We shall lose ourselves there."

"Stuff! I know every inch of the place; I was brought up here!"

"It looks jolly dark!" said Gibson, hesitating.

"If you're afraid of the dark you can go round by the lane. I'm going this way!" And Wally swung himself on the wall. "Give me up Pongo!"

"I'm not going to touch the beast!"

"I'll give you a thick ear if you don't!"

Jameson handed up the mongrel, who rewarded him by snapping at his hand, and Wally dropped with the dog to the inner side of the wall. Jameson and Gibson had no choice but to follow. In the wood the night was darker than ever, and faintly from afar came the chimes of midnight from the village.

Curly Gibson shivered as he looked round him into the black shadows.

"Ugh! What a horrible place!"

"Bosh! It's all right! Don't be a baby!"

"Look here, young D'Arcy——"

"Shut up!"

Wally led the way, and they followed. They were careful to keep close to him, for without a guide they would certainly have lost their way in the trackless wood. It seemed a marvel that Wally knew which way to go. But he had spent his earliest years in the woods at Eastwood, and he knew the ground on the darkest night. The vague, black, shadowy trees were well-known landmarks to Wally.

He led the way without a fault, and the juniors were soon threading a path through a thinner wood, where something of the dim starlight came filtering down through the foliage.

Suddenly Wally halted. He grasped his companions, one in each hand, by the shoulder, with such suddenness that they both gasped.

"Silence, you idiots!" whispered Wally fiercely.

"Wh-wh-what's the matter?"

"Didn't you hear it?"

"No. What?"

"That whistle! There it is again! 'Sh!"

Through the wood a low whistle rang from the direction of the house. The three fags of St. Jim's were within sight now of the great facade of the mansion, if it had been lighted up. They could see nothing of it in the dark.

That strange low whistle sent a creepy thrill through the juniors.

It was evidently a signal made by one human being to another, and it showed that they were not alone in the dark wood.

"Poachers!" whispered Jameson.

Wally nodded vaguely. He supposed it must be poachers, but it was strange. What could poachers be doing up so close to the house, in that part of the wood where there was no game, and had been no game for years? They were close upon the gardens, and the spot was the last imaginable one for a meeting-place of poachers.

"Quiet!" he whispered.

They remained still, silent, with beating hearts. The first whistle had been a signal, answered by the second; and the second whistle was followed by a faint sound of footsteps coming from the direction of the house.

The juniors scarcely breathed.

A dark figure loomed up in the gloom, and passed so close to them as they crouched against the trees that Wally could have touched it by stretching out his hand.

It passed on, and disappeared into the black recesses of the wood.

CHAPTER 13.
In the Dead of Night.

WALLY & CO. were quite silent for some minutes, crouching there in the blackness with wildly-beating hearts.

The figure had passed on, and was gone, and they had seen nothing of it save the black shadow flitting by for a second.

Who or what it was they could not guess.

But Wally was certain that the form was not clad in the rough garb a poacher would naturally have worn; he was almost certain that he had caught a glimpse of a white collar.

No sound came again from the wood. It was pretty clear that the man, whoever he was, had met his comrade, and no further signals were necessary.

Wally was the first to break the silence.

"Come on!" he whispered. "No good sticking here!"

"If you ever bring me on any short cuts again——" murmured Jameson.

"Rats! Get a move on!"

The wood was eerily silent. But for that whistle and the flitting shadow under the trees, the juniors would have believed themselves quite alone there. But they knew that two men—men on some ill errand—were lurking somewhere in the dim shadows of the trees.

"Quiet!" whispered Wally, as they moved. "They must be poachers, I suppose. Anyway, it wouldn't be healthy for us to run into them, I expect. Come on quietly! If you would leave off shaking and trembling Curly, you'd make less row!"

"I wasn't trembling!"

"Well, if that's a new thing in gymnastics, you can leave it till we get in! Come on, Pongo—come on, you beast!"

They came out of the trees, and hurried towards the house. After that thrilling moment in the wood, they were anxious enough to get indoors. Gibson's mind was full of pictures of shadowy forms and bludgeons, and Jameson looked very uneasy. Even Wally's nerve was a little shaken.

The house loomed up, dark and silent. Wally did not feel inclined to ring and knock up the inmates at that hour, and so he skirted the mansion, with the intention of finding some entrance for himself at the back. Jameson blundered into a shrubbery, and fell down, and the others had to stop and drag him out. Jameson rubbed himself ruefully and wrathfully in the gloom.

"Nice week-end, this!" murmured Gibson.

"Oh, come on! What's the matter with you, Jameson?"

"I'm hurt!"

"Bosh! Get a move on, for goodness' sake! I don't see what you want to lie down in the shrubbery for, when you can be in bed in a few minutes if you like!"

The English language was not adequate to express what Jameson felt at that moment, so he remained silent. They passed on in the dark, Wally leading the way.

"Ain't you going to knock them up?" growled Gibson.

"Not at this time; one must have a certain amount of decency, you know. Noblesse oblige!"

"Oh, don't work your mouldy French off on me! How are you going to get in?"

"Through a window!"

"Suppose there's a burglar alarm?"

"There isn't!"

"Well, you'll break your neck, I expect!"

"Well, if I break my neck, you can ring the bell, and save yours! Blessed if I know which window to tackle! Hallo!"

"What's up now?"

"This door is unfastened."

"Some careless ass!"

"Lucky for us! Come in!"

Wally opened the door. It gave upon a stone passage, which, as he knew, communicated with the butler's pantry. The juniors went in, and Wally closed the door behind him. He imagined that it had been left unfastened by a careless servant, and so he was careful to fasten it after him.

"That's Jelf's work!" he growled. "I never liked that chap! The old butler would as soon have cut his head off as gone to bed and left a door unfastened. That fellow Jelf doesn't like dogs, which shows he's a beast, and I'm not surprised at his leaving a door open! Come on, Pongo!"

"I'm jolly hungry!" said Jameson.

"So am I! There's bound to be a lot of grub about, if you know where to look for it!" muttered Gibson.

Wally chuckled.

"I know where to look for it; I've been there before! Come on, and I'll see if I can rig up a fire in my room, and we'll get some supper up there, without waking any of the servants."

Gibson and Jameson brightened up a little. The walk in the fresh air had made them more wakeful, and they were terribly hungry. The prospect of a cheery fire in Wally's room and a substantial supper cheered them up wonderfully. But as Wally was leading the way, he suddenly stopped, breathing hard.

"Hark!"

It was a rattle of a door-handle that had caught his ear in the silence. The fags started, and their hearts throbbed.

Someone was trying, from outside, the handle of the door Wally had fastened a minute before.

In the dark the three fags could not see one another's faces, but each knew that the others' were pale as death.

The handle creaked again and again, as if the man outside could not understand how the door came to be fast, and expected to open it with an effort.

"It's a burglar!" whispered Curly Gibson, in trembling tones.

"Must be!" muttered Jameson. "Are you sure you shot the bolt, Wally?"

"Quite sure!"

"Hang it! Where are you going?"

Wally did not reply; he was creeping silently back towards the door. The handle was still now, but he thought he could detect a sound of muttering voices outside. If so, the sound soon died away, and there was silence.

"Somebody trying to get in, and no mistake," muttered Wally, as he rejoined his chums; "I wonder we didn't run into them. It must be the fellows who were whistling to one another in the wood."

"I—I—I—hadn't you better wake the house?" muttered Gibson.

Wally did not reply; he was thinking. There was a creaking sound, and he turned towards a little window that was near the fastened door. The square of the window showed glimmeringly in the dark; and the glimmer of it was interrupted by the shape of a man's head outside.

Wally's heart beat hard.

"Quiet!" he whispered.

For the window was opening from without. Only a few feet of space separated the juniors from the head of the man outside. He was looking intently into the darkness, and they made out the light glint of his eyes.

"Is anybody there?"

It was the man at the window who asked that question, and Wally gave a sudden start and a gasp of relief.

For it was the voice of Mr. Jelf, the new butler.

CHAPTER 14.

Wally & Co. Make Themselves at Home!

"JELF!"

Wally uttered the exclamation, and the man at the window started, and made a sign with his hand—it was as if he was signalling to someone behind him to keep out of sight. Yet how could that be—for how could the respectable Mr. Jelf have any companion there at that hour?

"You know the chap!" gasped Jameson.

"Yes, rather; it's Jelf. I've heard his yaup before."

"Is that you, Master Wally?"

Mr. Jelf's voice was strangely shaking, as he asked the question, and he was peering in with his light eyes intently.

"Yes, Jelf; it's me right enough," replied Wally, promptly and ungrammatically.

"Are you alone, Master Walter?"

"No—two chums with me."

"Oh! Was it you fastened the door?"

"Was it you left it open?"

"Yes," said Mr. Jelf; "I—I have been in the grounds."

"Well, I can see you haven't been in bed," said Wally. "Do you want to come in?"

"Yes. Please open the door."

Wally opened the door, and Mr. Jelf entered. His face was a little pale. The hero of St. Jim's Third shut the door and fastened it again.

"I didn't expect you to-night, Master Wally," said Mr Jelf.

"I don't suppose Gus did either," said Wally, with a chuckle; "but I've come, you see. What on earth were you doing in the grounds at this hour, Jelfy?"

"I have heard that suspicious characters have been seen in the neighbourhood," said Mr. Jelf slowly. You know there was an attempted burglary once, an attempt to steal his lordship's silver. I went out to look round the house before going to bed."

"Good for you, Jelfy; but it was rather silly you left a door unlocked. I suppose that was you trying to get in just now?"

"Certainly, Master Walter."

"You gave us a start. We took you for a burglar, and you're jolly lucky that I didn't set Pongo on you at the window."

Mr. Jelf laughed.

"I am glad you didn't, Master Wally."

"So am I—Pongo is rather particular what he eats," said Wally. "Have you seen any suspicious characters?"

"Oh, no; nothing at all!"

"Well, I have."

Mr. Jelf gave a violent start.

"You—you have, Master Walter?"

"Yes, rather. There were some chaps in the wood whistling to one another, and we caught a glimpse of one of them, who came from the direction of the house," said Wally; "of course, it was too dark to recognise him."

"Ah, that is why I went out!" said Mr. Jelf. "I heard a whistle."

"Looks as if there's a burglary planned for to-night, then. Suppose you telephone to the police-station?"

"I don't think it's necessary, Master Walter. They have cleared off, or I should have seen something of them. I shall not go to sleep for some time, anyway. Can I get you young gentlemen anything?"

"Oh, that's all right, Jelfy; we wouldn't think of bothering you this time of night!" said Wally good-naturedly. "You can cut off to bed."

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Jelf smoothly; "I know my duty, sir. I am sure you would like something brought up."

"Well, if you insist, Jelfy, you shall stand us a feed," said Wally. "Come on, you kids; we're in clover now. I'll turn Pongo loose in the house, Jelfy, in case those rotters should try to get in."

"Not at all necessary, sir——"

"Rats! I know what's necessary. Pongo won't sleep a wink, and if there's a sound he'll wake the house. Come on, kids!"

"Master Augustus might object, sir——"

"Let Master Augustus rip! I'm going to wake him up, anyway. Eh? What did you say, Jelfy?"

"N-nothing, sir."

"It sounded uncommonly as if you were swearing, Jelfy."

"Oh, Master Walter!"

"Well, buzz off and get some supper, and bring it to my room. Get me the things for the fire, and I'll start it."

And Wally, Jameson, and Gibson went upstairs laden with sticks, and carrying a scuttle of coal between them. Wally switched on the electric light in his room, and they started a fire. The crackling of the wood in the grate was a cheerful sound. One boomed out from the clock in the hall.

"Nice time to come home—what?" grinned Wally. "Lucky we're not like the chap in the song, who couldn't come home in the dark. Stick some more coal on, Jimmy."

"Right-ho!" said Jameson.

"I didn't say the whole scuttleful, you ass! Nice mess you've made the grate in, haven't you?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Better air the bed-things," said Wally. "We shall all have to sleep in one bed; can't wake up servants to make beds this time of night. This is what comes of losing trains, young Jameson."

"Well, you lost the train, and——"

"Don't jaw, kid! It's too late. Jelfy, my son," went on Wally, as the new butler entered the room, with a tray and a cloth over his arm, "scare up bedclothes from somewhere, and we'll air them before the fire here. I see my bed isn't made—I'll make Gus sit up for that!"

"Master Augustus didn't know you were coming, sir."

"He ought to have known I wouldn't let him come home for a week-end without me, Jelfy. Don't make excuses for him—he's an unbrotherly beast, and I'm going to wake him up when I've had supper. Upon the whole, it wouldn't be a bad idea to have Gussy's bed, you kids. It's a big four-poster, and there's room in it for half the Third-Form at St. Jim's. We'll turn Gussy out and have his bed."

"Good wheeze!" said the other two with one voice.

Mr. Jelf laid the table. He brought up a plentiful supper, and when he was gone, the juniors fell to, and Jameson and Curly expressed unbounded admiration for the butler and the supper.

"You're jolly lucky to have a chap like that," said Curly Gibson. "Most menservants would have seen you in

Jericho before they'd get supper at this hour, or else they'd have done it with a face like a thundercloud. This chap seems to like it."

"He's a deep card," said Wally meditatively. "I've only seen that chap once before, a week ago; and I didn't like him. Pongo doesn't like him, and he doesn't like Pongo. I knew, of course, that there must be something wrong with a chap who doesn't like dogs, especially such nice, well-behaved dogs as Pongo. Curious that chap being out of doors while that whistling was going on, wasn't it?"

"Was it?" said Jameson, who was too busy with a cold chicken to think much about anything else.

"Yes; and curious his asking me if I was alone——"

"I dare say he thought you were."

"And curious his saying swear-words when I left Pongo loose——"

"Did he?"

"Never mind; it's a jolly good supper," said Wally, changing the subject. "There won't be any burglary to-night with Pongo loose in the house. He'd wake the dead if he heard a window rattle, and he won't let Jelf touch him. These are jolly good chickens, my sons."

"Ripping good!"

"The coffee is first-rate, too," said Wally, smelling it. "Jelf can make coffee. All the same, we're not going to drink it."

His companions stared at him.

"Why on earth not?"

"Because it's so jolly nice," said Wally, emptying the coffee-pot into the ashes in the grate. "We'll make ginger-beer do. Did I tell you I didn't like Jelf?"

"Yes, you did; and he doesn't like you, either, I reckon," said Jameson; "though, I must say, he's got us a jolly good supper."

"It was rough on him, you see, our turning up so suddenly," said Wally. "It has given him a night job, and disturbed him generally. Did you notice that the chap we caught a glimpse of in the wood wore a white collar, Jim?"

"Can't say I did. Pass the ham! It's ripping!"

"I should have liked some of that coffee," said Curly Gibson. "I think you're a bit off your rocker to-night, Wally. You're talking like an ass and acting like an idiot."

"Force of example, perhaps," said Wally, rising and yawning. "When you chaps are ready, we'll go and have Gus out."

"I'm ready."

Wally led the way to his elder brother's room. He turned the handle of the door and entered, and switched on the light.

Arthur Augustus was sleeping peacefully.

Wally picked up the tongs in the grate, and allowed them to fall upon the fender, with a crash that rang like thunder through the silence of the night.

Arthur Augustus started from his sleep.

"Bai Jove! What's that?"

"Burglars!" roared Wally.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy skipped out of bed. Wally made a sign to the others, and in a second they had pinned D'Arcy by the arms, and were rushing him to the door. The swell of St. Jim's was too surprised to resist.

"Bai Jove! What's the beastly mattah? Wally, how did you come here? Have you wun away fwom school again, you young wascal? Where are the burglahs?"

D'Arcy found himself in the passage. Wally closed the door and locked it. The next moment D'Arcy, shivering in his pyjamas, was hammering at it.

"Wally, open the door, you young wascal!"

"It's all right, I'm going to bed! The burglars haven't entered the house; I expect they're gone to bed, too," said Wally, through the keyhole. "You can go and turn in with Blake or Dig."

"Open the door at once, you young wascal!"

"Rats!"

The three Third-Formers calmly went to bed. They found plenty of pyjamas belonging to Gussy, and though they were a trifle baggy for them, that did not seriously interfere with their comfort. They turned in, in Gussy's big bed, and were fast asleep in two minutes, while the swell of St. Jim's was hammering at the door.

Mr. Jelf came along the passage.

"Dear me! Master Augustus! What is the matter?"

"Those young wascals have taken my woom," said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! I nevah heard of such fearful cheek in my life! Open this door!"

"Hallo! What's that row?" said a sleepy voice; and Blake looked out from his door. "Is it burglars, or a fire, or what?"

"Young Wally has turned up, and he's collared my bed, and locked me out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for wibald mewwiment, Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose I shall have to turn in with you, Blake. I shall certainly give young Wally a feahful thwashin' to-mowwow."

And D'Arcy, simmering with indignation, turned in with his chums; and in the borrowed bed Wally & Co. slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER 15.

Pongo Causes Trouble.

MR. RAILTON came out of his room bright and early in the morning, and stopped at the window at the end of the passage to glance down into the wide grounds and rolling park. He uttered a low exclamation of surprise. A cheerful-looking youth was crossing the lawn, with a dog at his heels. It was D'Arcy minor, up early enough in spite of the late hour at which he had retired to Arthur Augustus's bed.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton to himself. "D'Arcy minor! I must look to this."

"Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Railton, shaking hands with his youthful host. "You are up early like myself, I see."

"Well, as a mattah of fact, sir, I shouldn't have wisen so early, but I knew you were an early wisah," said D'Arcy. "I twust you have slept well, sir."

"Like a top, my lad!"

"I am glad of that, sir. I was disturbed myself."

"Ah! D'Arcy minor, I presume! I see that he has arrived."

"Yaas, sir; and he had the feahful cheek to turn me out of my bed, and take it himself, with a couple of Third Form fags," said D'Arcy. "I was locked out of my own bed-woom, sir!"

"Dear me!" Mr. Railton laughed. "The young rascal!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"I presume that he has left St. Jim's without permission," said Mr. Railton, wrinkling his brows. "I must speak to him."

"Oh, no, sir, I don't think that is pwob. at all."

"You don't think it is what—oh, I see!—probable. Why not? He can hardly have obtained permission from his Form-master, and I certainly did not give him permission."

"But he knew you would be here, sir."

"Ah! You think that would prevent him, as I should send him back, perhaps——"

"Not pwecisely, sir. It would place you in a doocid awkward posish., as a guest at Eastwood, if Wally turned up here without permish."

"Quite right!"

"Therefore, sir, I am quite sure that Wally has not bolted. He is a feahful young scamp, sir, but he is a D'Arcy," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "He would certainly not play any twick that would place you in an awkward posish. while you are a guest undah my governah's woof, sir."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I hope you are right, D'Arcy. I will speak to D'Arcy minor."

And the House-master strolled into the garden.

Wally was giving his dog a run in the fresh, bright morning, and Pongo was jumping and barking round him in great glee.

Pongo wasn't used to being confined to a house of a night, and his detention there had been as irksome to him as to some others. Mr. Jelf had complained bitterly to Arthur Augustus in the morning, and Arthur Augustus was indignant. Pongo had knocked over a valuable statuette—at all events it was found broken in the morning, and Mr. Jelf attributed it to Pongo—and, as he complained, he would have to account to Lord Eastwood for the accident, and it was not fair on him. Arthur Augustus agreed that it was not, and pledged himself that Pongo shouldn't remain indoors another night, which seemed to relieve Mr. Jelf very much.

Wally stopped his racing with Pongo, and raised his cap very respectfully to Mr. Railton.

"Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning, D'Arcy minor. I did not know you were coming."

"Came home for the week-end, sir," said Wally cheerfully. "Arrived rather late last night, but tried not to disturb you, sir."

"You did not disturb me," said Mr. Railton, with a smile. "You seem to have disturbed your brother."

D'Arcy minor chuckled.

"Yes, sir, it was awful fun. We turned him out of his bed, sir, and he had to turn in with Blake. He was as waxy as anything."

"I presume you have permission to take the week-end away from school, D'Arcy minor?"

Wally looked reproachful.

"Oh, sir! Did you think I had bolted!"

"Ahem! I believe you did so on a former occasion," said the House-master.

"Ah, that was different, sir! That wasn't for a holiday, and Mr. Selby confessed that I wasn't so much to blame then, either. But this time I've got permission, sir. I couldn't ask you, as you were gone, but Mr. Selby gave me permission, and Jameson and Gibson as well It was kind of him, wasn't it, sir?"

"Very," said Mr. Railton doubtfully.

"We're going to have a jolly week-end, sir," said Wally. "I shall liven things up a bit, and Jameson and Curly have promised to do all they can to make things lively, too. Pongo has been making 'em lively already. Hallo! Here comes Gus, and I know that his look means a long jaw. If you'll excuse me, sir, I'll cut off!"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Railton, laughing.

"Pongo! Pongo! Pong!"

Wally whistled his dog, and they dashed off together. D'Arcy, who was coming out to interview his younger brother on the subject of shutting the dog up in the house, broke into a run, waving his hand to Wally.

"Wally! You young wascal! Stop! I want to speak to you!"

"Pongo! Good dog! Come on!"

"Wally! Wally!"

Wally did not seem to hear. He ran on, with Pongo barking and leaping round him. D'Arcy dashed after him with a contracted brow. He meant to have it out with Wally. Arthur Augustus, in spite of his dudish ways, was something of an athlete, and a good runner, and he gained on the scamp of the Third.

Wally took a short cut across some flower-beds, leaving them in a deplorable state. Then he skirted some glass frames, and in doing so lost ground, and Arthur Augustus almost touched him on the shoulder behind.

"Stop, you young wascal!"

"Seize him, Pongo!"

Gr-r-r-r!

D'Arcy stopped as the mongrel turned on him, showing his teeth. He was not afraid for himself, but for his trousers. He backed away from Pongo, towards one of the frames, and Pongo pursued him, yapping fiercely.

"Keep that beast off, Wally!"

Wally had stopped now, and was standing with his hands in his pockets, laughing. Arthur Augustus backed away from the snapping dog, and came in contact with the edge of the frame—and sat down!

There was a splintering of glass!

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally.

Arthur Augustus sat in the shattered glass, with Pongo barking round him, and Wally laughing like a hyena.

CHAPTER 16.

Figgins is a Little Too Previous.

"HALLO! What's up?"

Tom Merry came racing up, with Manners and Lowther at his heels. Manners had his camera under his arm. The Terrible Three were out for an early walk before breakfast, and the crash of the glass had attracted them to the spot.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy. "I'm hurt! I believe I am feahfully gashed! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at. Wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep still!" shrieked Manners, tearing the cap off his camera. "Just as you are for a minute, D'Arcy! I——"

"Turn that camewah away! I wefuse to be taken!"

"Keep still just a sec——"

D'Arcy jumped up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Hold on! I wefuse—I absolutely wefuse——"

"You ass!" roared Manners. "You've spoiled the snap now."

"I wegard you as a wottah! I have had a feahful accident——"

"I would have had it framed for the study," growled Manners. "You're an inconsiderate beast, Gussy."

"I wegard you as a wottah—an uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally. "Pongo! Pong! Come off!"

"Call that beast away, Wally! If you don't keep him on a chain, I shall have no alternative but to ordah a keepah to shoot him."

"You'd get a jolly big thick ear if you did," said Wally. "What's Pongo done? He was only defending his master; and a dog is always praised in a story-book for doing that. You were going to bully me——"

"Yes, I can see you being bullied by anybody, you young rascal," said Tom Merry.

"I was goin' to wag you a little, I admit," said D'Arcy. "You have acted in a wuff, wude, and unweasonable way. I am not weferrin' now to your turnin' me out of my bed in the middle of the night—that is no subject for laughtah, Tom Mewwy!—but to your leavin' Pongo in the house."

"What's the matter with Pongo?" asked Lowther, parodying the refrain of a well-known song.

"He's all right!" said Tom Merry and Manners in unison.

"He is not all wight," said D'Arcy. "Hewwies shut up his feahful bulldog in a kennel, and I wegarded that as considewate of Hewwies. Wally left this beast in the house, in diwect defiance of the wemonstwances of Mr. Jelf."

"Has Jelfy complained?" asked Wally, with a peculiar grin.

"Yaas, wathah! Pongo has bwoken a statuette——"

"Rats!"

"It was knocked down and bwoken into fwagments, Wally, duwin' the night."

"Pongo didn't do it. Pongo never breaks anything You could trust him in a china shop."

"Wats! It must have been Pongo; and that statuette was worth six guineas, and so the governah is certain to make a fuss about it. You know the way the governah makes a fuss ovah twifles. He will say that we can't have any more week-ends here if we bweak things up, and it was that beast Pongo——"

"It wasn't Pongo!"

"But it couldn't have been Towsah. Towsah was in the kennels."

"Perhaps it was the cat—or Jelfy! Jelfy was up late, and he may have been sampling the ginger-beer!"

"I wefuse to listen to this dispawagement of a wespectable butlah!" said D'Arcy. "I have pwomised him that Pongo shall not wemain in the house again."

"Oh! He made a point of that, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Right-ho!" said Wally. "I'll turn Pongo out to-night. That all right?"

"Yaas, I can be satisfied with that. It was like your cheek to come here at all, Wally, but I don't want to be unbwotherly. You can stay!"

"Thanks, awfully!" said D'Arcy minor sarcastically. "I intend to stay, but thanks all the same. I dare say you'll be glad I brought Pongo here before the week-end's over. I'm going in to breakfast now."

Breakfast at Eastwood House was what Jack Blake described as a movable feast. They had it when they wanted it, and most of the juniors turned up at different times.

The week-end party had grown to much larger size than was originally planned. Arthur Augustus had brought down three chums and the House-master, and the addition of Figgins & Co. had made eight, and the Terrible Three made eleven of the party. Then came the fags of the Third, making the number up to fourteen. But all agreed that the increase of numbers made the week-end jollier. It was a case of the more the merrier. If there was trouble between the fags and the Fourth-Formers, that would only, in Wally's phrase, make things livelier.

Lively things were certain to be while Wally was about. Between him and Pongo the surroundings could never be slow.

"We are gettin' up a cwicket match this mornin', sir," D'Arcy remarked to Mr. Railton. "Would you care to play, sir?"

"With all my heart!" said the House-master cheerily.

"There will be one foeman worthy of your steel, sir—Mr. Dodds, the cuwate of Hucklebewwy Heath. You know the place where Miss Fawcett, Tom Mewwy's governess, lives. He is bwingin' his local team ovah for a match to-day."

"Good!"

"I am afwaid they will be wotten bad cwicketers," said D'Arcy. "They are farmer chaps, you know, and Mr. Dodds has taught them to play. But Mr. Dodds is a wippin' cwicketah. He played us at St. Jim's once. My cousin Ethel and Miss Fawcett are comin' ovah with the party, and I'm expecting them before lunch."

Figgins looked round quickly. Kerr was talking cricket to him, but Figgins left a remark unanswered at that moment.

"Did you say your cousin was coming, Gussy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!" said Figgins, with such heartiness that D'Arcy turned his monocle upon him with a fixed stare.

"Weally, Figgins, I am vewy glad you are so pleased——"

"I was just thinking," said Figgins hurriedly, "that it would be only attentive to meet them at the station."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"When do you expect them here?"

"In time for a vewy early lunch."

"Let me see, there's a train in at Easthorpe at twelve," said Figgins. "I suppose they will be coming for that. Will you be sending something down to fetch them?"

"You see——"

"Excuse me," said Figgins, "there's Kerr calling. I think I shall be going for a stroll down towards the village this morning, Gussy."

"But, you see, Figgins——"

But Figgins was gone. He linked arms with Kerr and Fatty Wynn, and strolled away.

Arthur Augustus looked after him attentively till he was out of sight. The swell of St. Jim's appeared to be a little puzzled.

Jack Blake slapped him on the shoulder a few minutes later, and D'Arcy jumped.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Thinking something out?" asked Jack cheerily. "What do you say to a cycle ride?"

"I was thinkin'. I was speakin' about my Cousin Ethel comin', and Figgins has gone down to the station to meet the twelve twain."

"I think I might stroll along too," remarked Blake.

"Yaas, certainly, but——"

"Come on, Dig! I say, Herries, are you coming?"

"Blake—Blake——"

But Jack Blake was hurrying after Figgins.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy walked slowly towards the house. The Terrible Three met him on the drive, and stopped him. D'Arcy looked at them.

"Where are the kids?" asked Tom Merry.

"They've gone to meet the twelve twain at the village, because Cousin Ethel is comin'," said D'Arcy. "They wouldn't give me time to explain that Ethel wasn't comin' by twain."

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

"Yaas, it is wathah funnay, when you come to think of it," said D'Arcy, breaking into a smile. "I twied to tell them, but they wouldn't give me time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They are comin' ovah fwom Hucklebewwy Heath in a bwake, as a mattah of fact," said D'Arcy. "I mean the cwicketahs, you know. Cousin Ethel and Miss Fawcett are goin' to dwive ovah in a twap."

"Good!" said Tom Merry heartily. "My old governess will be surprised and awfully pleased to see me here unexpectedly, and so I think I ought to go down the road to meet her."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I'll jump on my bike and be off," said Tom Merry. "I mean Gussy's bike, of course. That is the best of being the son of a giddy earl. You have a bike at school, and a bike at home, all ready to lend to your best chum when he wants to go and meet your cousin. D'Arcy is an awfully lucky chap."

"Weally, I am thinkin' of goin'——"

"You are going to get the things ready for the cricket? Good! It's ripping weather for a match. Lowther and Manners will help you. I know where to get the bike; don't trouble to come."

Tom Merry hurried off, leaving D'Arcy rooted to the ground. Lowther and Manners uprooted him, so to speak, by taking him by the arms and marching him off to the lawn which was to be used as a cricket ground. There they kept him busy making arrangements, Mr. Railton coming out to help. Meanwhile, Tom Merry buzzed along merrily on D'Arcy's bicycle to meet his old governess and Cousin Ethel.

CHAPTER 17
Cousin Ethel.

BUZZ-Z! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

Tom Merry rang loudly as he came in sight of a trap on the road from Huckleberry Heath, and a stalwart young man who was driving pulled in the horse. There were two other persons in the trap—Miss Priscilla Fawcett and Cousin Ethel. Tom Merry jumped off his bicycle, and ran up to the trap with a face red with exertion, cap in hand.

"Dear me, it is my darling Tommy!"

"Tom Merry!" exclaimed the curate of Huckleberry Heath, while Cousin Ethel smiled. "I did not expect to see you here, Tom."

"No," said Miss Fawcett. "What a joyful surprise! His head-master has probably insisted upon his taking a holiday, as he is in a weak state of health."

Tom Merry laughed as, standing on the step of the trap, he shook hands with the occupants.

"I'm as fit as a fiddle, dear. I'm week-ending with Gussy."

"You look very red, Tommy. I'm afraid it is a hectic colour in your cheeks," said Miss Fawcett anxiously.

"It's scorching on the bike, that's all."

"Dear me! Have you been scorching?" exclaimed Miss Priscilla, greatly distressed. "We found the sun very warm, and had to put up our parasols. I must get down immediately, and in one of these farm-houses I may find the materials for a poultice for your dear little face."

"I—I mean I was riding fast," said Tom, "not scorching in the sun. It's slang."

"Oh, I see! You have greatly relieved my mind, Tommy; but I am sorry to see you dropping into the use of slang. I hope you do not talk slang as a rule."

"Certainly not," said Tom Merry. "It's a rotten habit—simply imposs., you know. I'm always awfully careful—I don't think. I thought I'd come and meet you on the road. I'll get in the trap, if you like, and stick my jigger behind."

"Mayn't it damage it, Tommy?"

"It doesn't matter, it isn't mine."

"Dear me! Tommy, I hope you are not becoming careless of other people's property."

"That was a joke, dear," explained Tom Merry. "I can manage. It's Gussy's bike, and I wouldn't damage it for untold tuck. That's all right."

"Are you sure it is safe, Tommy darling?"

"Well, we shall hear if it falls off," said Tom.

"If you are ready——" began Mr. Dodds.

"Quite! Cut ahead!"

"Oh, Tommy, what a way to speak to Mr. Dodds!"

"It's Tom's way," said the curate, smiling. "I know Tom. I am glad Tom is at Eastwood, as it will make up a stronger team. I warn you that my farmer lads are in good form, Tom."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We'll give 'em a tussle, sir."

The trap bowled on. The brake with the cricketers was following at a slower pace. As they drove on, Miss Fawcett made many affectionate inquiries about Tom Merry's health, and whether he wore flannel next to his skin, and kept his feet quite dry—questions which Tom answered hurriedly, and which brought continual dimples to the cheeks of Cousin Ethel.

The hero of the Shell was glad when they reached Eastwood.

As the trap entered the drive, several dusty juniors came in sight, walking home from the village. Figgins & Co., and the chums of Study No. 6, had watched the twelve o'clock train in at Easthorpe, and their feelings when they saw Cousin Ethel in the trap were too deep for expression.

They raised their caps, and Tom Merry waved his hand genially, as if he took the salutes to himself.

"Beast!" murmured Figgins. "I'm going to speak to Gussy."

"So am I," murmured Blake.

The trap dashed up to the house. Gussy was still busy on the cricket-ground, when half a dozen wrathful juniors rushed up to him. Blake caught him by one shoulder, and Figgins by another, and both pulled him at once, with the result that his jacket came nearly off. D'Arcy stared at them in surprise.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boys?"

"I've been to the station——"

"I've been to the station——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you ass——"

"Why, you duffer——"

"Ha, ha, ha! It was wathah funnay. You wouldn't give me time to tell you that Cousin Ethel was comin' ovah in a twap. You see, she's been stayin' a couple of days with Miss Fawcett, and she's bwingin' the twap back with her. I twied to explain—— Ow!"

They bumped him down in the grass, and left him there.

D'Arcy groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and jumped up wrathfully.

"Bai Jove, I'll give them a feahful thwashin'!"

"Hold on!" shrieked Wally.

"What's the mattah with you, Wally?"

"Honour your guests under any circumstances," said Wally, wagging an admonitory finger at his elder brother.

"I'm surprised at you, Gus."

"I'm simply astonished!" said Jameson. "How do you feel, Curly?"

"Shocked!" said Gibson.

"Bai Jove! But weally it is wathah bad form to bump your host ovah on the gwass."

"Two wrongs don't make a right."

"Yaas, that is vewy twue. I say, Blake—I say, Figgins!" bawled D'Arcy, at the top of his voice. "I say, you wottahs, if you were not my guests I would give you a feahful thwashin'!"

They sent back a shout of laughter, and D'Arcy snorted and went on with his measuring. He had a long tape in his hand, and was measuring the pitch. Lowther had brought out the stumps under his arm. Wally offered to help with the measuring, and he contrived to get the tape wound round D'Arcy's legs, and to throw him into endless confusion.

"You cut off, you young wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus at last. "I wefuse any furthah assistance fwom you."

"I call that ungrateful, Gus. However, I'm off!" Wally jerked his brother's cap from his head, and walked off with it.

D'Arcy made a rush after him, tangled his feet in the tape, and fell with a bump into the grass.

"Ow! Wow!"

Wally looked back with an expression of surprise.

"Tired, Gus?"

"Ow! Oh! No!"

"What are you lying down for, then?"

D'Arcy did not reply. He disentangled himself from the tape, with an expression upon his face that boded ill to Wally when he got loose. But D'Arcy minor did not wait. He threw the cap to Arthur Augustus, catching him on the nose with it, and walked away, whistling to Pongo.

There was a sound of loud barking and growling. Herries had been to take his bulldog for a run in the wood, and had just returned. Towser, of course, made a beeline for Pongo, and Pongo was off like a shot, with the jaws of the bulldog close behind. They disappeared round the house.

"Hang it!" growled Herries. "They'll be fighting in a minute."

Wally chuckled.

"It's all right. Pongo can take care of himself."

"Rats! Blow Pongo! I don't want Towser to bite him. Towser's rather particular what he eats," said Herries, and he hurried after the dogs. But he did not succeed in recapturing Towser.

"I think this ground's all right now," said Lowther, surveying the cricket-pitch. "A bit close to the windows yonder if there's any hard hitting, that's all. Hallo, here's the brake!"

The brake containing the amateur cricketers from Huckleberry Heath rolled into view. It contained a sturdy set of lads—farm lads and young mechanics of Huckleberry, whom the curate had formed into a cricket team. D'Arcy hurried off at once to greet his guests. Arthur Augustus, in spite of some curious manners and customs, had nothing at all about him that could, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered snobbish. He seemed to be quite unconscious of the fact that he was the son of an earl and the richest man in the county, as he greeted the cricketers, most of whom were a little awed at coming to the great house. They were soon put at their ease by the hearty greeting of Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Jelf had seen to it that there was a substantial lunch ready for the new arrivals, and it was a merry meal.

Mr. Railton was very glad to meet Mr. Dodds, who was an old acquaintance, and he joined in a discussion upon the state of Tom Merry's health with Miss Fawcett in the gravest possible manner.

Everybody, of course, wanted to sit next to Cousin Ethel, and everybody meant to show her, after lunch, what good cricket was really like.

There was some little difficulty on that score, however. D'Arcy had only expected to have three St. Jim's fellows with him, and he had intended to make up the team with some fellows from Easthorpe. Now, however, he had an overplus of cricketers. There were enough fellows of the Fourth and the Shell to make up an eleven, without counting Mr. Railton. Wally & Co., however, meant to play. Wally pointed out that it would be ridiculous to leave out the best batsman they had, and so he, at all events, would have to be put in.

"And who's going to captain us?" said Blake.

"Mr. Wailton, of course," said Arthur Augustus. "I am sure Mr. Wailton will do us the honah of acceptin' the post."

"Certainly," said Mr. Railton.

"Bravo! It's for the captain to make up the eleven," said Figgins. "Mr. Railton can pick out the chaps he thinks best."

Mr. Railton looked a little perplexed.

He did not want to make invidious distinctions, and though some of the juniors, like Tom Merry and Blake, and Figgins were first-rate cricketers, some of them were "much of a muchness," as Blake expressed it.

Blake and Figgins, and Tom Merry had to go in, as the best bats, and Fatty Wynn, of course, as the champion junior bowler of St. Jim's. The places of the rest were decided by tossing a penny, odd man out, and the juniors contentedly abided by the result of chance. Wally was in, so he was satisfied. Lunch being over, the teams adjourned to the cricket-ground, and the stumps were pitched for the match.

CHAPTER 18.

A Curious Cricket Match.

MISS FAWCETT was accommodated with a comfortable garden-chair, and Cousin Ethel with another beside her. Mr. Railton and Mr. Dodds tossed for choice of innings, and the latter won, and elected to bat first. The Huckleberry Heathers opened the innings with Mr. Dodds and a big, ruddy-faced youth named Hutton. Mr. Railton put Fatty Wynn on to bowl against Mr. Dodds.

Fatty Wynn was a bowler of renown at St. Jim's, but Mr. Dodds was an old Blue, and one of the finest amateur cricketers in the county. He had, as a matter of fact, played for his county, and won great credit there. Wynn's bowling would have been dangerous to many county cricketers, but it was easy to Mr. Dodds. The curate swiped the balls away with ease and grace, and the runs piled up rapidly. And an odd run at the finish of the over gave him the batting still.

"Over!" said the umpire.

The match being a quite informal one, the sides had agreed that a single umpire would answer all purposes, and Mr. Jelf had been impressed into the service. He did not know much about cricket, but he knew enough to umpire!

Mr. Railton bowled the next over, but he did not make any impression upon Mr. Dodd's wicket. The runs mounted up while the curate had the bowling, but the other wickets fell pretty rapidly, especially when Mr. Railton was bowling. Fatty Wynn, too, was a terror to the Heathers.

Cousin Ethel smiled as she looked on. The match was, as a matter of fact, between Railton and Dodds, and the boys were only filling up time. Miss Fawcett caught the smile on Ethel's face.

"Is my dear Tommy winning?" asked Miss Fawcett, as if it had been a game of chess they were watching. Miss Fawcett knew as much about cricket as she did about football, and as much about football as she did about the language of the Esquimaux.

"No one is winning yet, dear."

"Have they taken any goals yet?"

"Any—er—goals! They don't take goals in cricket, dear Miss Fawcett."

"No!" said Miss Fawcett. "They did in my young days, but I hear they are altering everything now. Do they still have scrummages?"

"Yes; in Rugby football."

"Not in cricket?"

"Oh, no."

"Ah, they are changing everything," said Miss Fawcett. "I wish I could think that all these changes of modern times were for the better. But one must hope and trust so."

Cousin Ethel clapped her hands.

"What is Tommy doing now?" asked Miss Fawcett. It did not occur to her that Cousin Ethel might be watching anybody but Tommy.

Cousin Ethel coloured.

"I—I did not notice. Figgins has just caught a man out."

"Dear me! What was he doing?"

"Batting, dear."

"Is he not allowed to bat?"

"Oh, yes; of course."

"Oh! You said Figgins had caught him, as if he had been doing something wrong."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Oh, no. Catching is part of the game."

"Oh, I see! Some new development of the game, probably, with which I have not kept pace," said Miss Fawcett.

Ethel wondered what Miss Fawcett could have known about cricket in her younger days, but she did not say so.

"How do they stand now, Ethel?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"How many points have they taken?"

"Mr. Dodds's eleven are eight down for ninety."

Miss Fawcett did not understand, but she did not inquire. The ninety runs were nearly all due to Mr. Dodds. There was a shout from the field as Mr. Railton brought another wicket down; and a few minutes later a throw-in from Tom Merry materialised in the loss of a wicket, and Mr. Dodds's side were all down for ninety.

The fieldsmen who had had plenty to do, came off the ground looking ruddy and warm. D'Arcy, of course, came over to the ladies. D'Arcy was wearing a Panama hat, and he looked very handsome in it.

"Wathah warm work!" he remarked. "Good game, though!"

"Yes? How many runs have you scored, Arthur?" asked Miss Fawcett.

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"I've been fieldin', Miss Fawcett."

"Yes? I thought I saw you running."

"Yaas, wathah! I was wunnin' aftah the ball, you know."

"And don't those runs count in the score?"

"N-n-no."

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla, with a sweet reminiscent smile. "All runs counted in cricket in my young days. How things change, to be sure!"

D'Arcy hastily changed the subject. He did not want to smile, but Miss Fawcett on cricket and football was too amusing.

"I wathah think we shall beat them," D'Arcy remarked. "That Dodds chap is awfully wippin', you know; but Wailton is hot stuff."

"Simply scorching," said Figgins, strolling up. "We shall pull it off! Do you find it worth watching, Miss Cleveland?"

"Oh, quite!" said Ethel. "I have been very much interested. What a splendid catch that was you made."

Figgins coloured with pleasure.

"How awfully good of you to notice it," he said. "Do you know, I wondered if you were looking when I made it. Railton was pleased. It was rather a difficult catch, and some chaps would have muffed it."

"Yaas, wathah! I couldn't have caught that bettah myself," said D'Arcy.

"I am quite sure you are right, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel. And D'Arcy had not quite made out what she exactly meant when the call came to the second innings.

It was a single innings match, and so all depended on this innings. Mr. Railton opened with Tom Merry and D'Arcy. Mr. Dodds went on to bowl. D'Arcy was staring at a wrecked wicket the next moment.

"Bai Jove!"

"How's that?" shouted the Huckleberry Heathers.

"Hout!" said Mr. Jelf.

"Bai Jove! Wasn't that a twial ball, sir?"

"Not at all!"

"Then I pwesume I am out. It is vewy surpwisin'." And Arthur Augustus carried out his bat, looking very much surprised.

"Dear me!" said Miss Fawcett. "Is Augustus out?"

"Yes," said Ethel. "He was bowled."

"How curious! A bold player ought really to stay in a long time," said Miss Fawcett. "Perhaps, however, he was overbold, and ran unnecessary risks."

Ethel did not give her opinion. Figgins went in next, and the girl was watching Figgins. But Figgins was not long there to watch. Mr. Dodds's second ball went through his wicket like a knife through cheese.

"What price duck's eggs?" grinned Wally, as the great Figgins came out. And Figgins made no reply. He was looking dazed.

Kerr was in next, and then Blake, and then Digby, and then Fatty Wynn. Each of them retired to the tent with a big round nought to his credit, and Mr. Dodds was credited with the double hat-trick.

The faces of the Huckleberry Heath team were jubilant; while the St. Jim's countenances correspondingly lengthened. Six down for nought was a bad start. Tom Merry had been standing idle at his end all through that disastrous over. But now Mr. Railton came in and joined him.

And then a change came. Tom took a single run, which gave Mr. Railton the bowling. And then the master of the School House proceeded to make the fur fly, as Blake jubilantly expressed it.

Fifteen for the over raised the spirits of the Saints. Then Mr. Dodds tackled Tom Merry's wicket. But Tom, though he did not venture to hit out against the curate's bowling, kept his end up, and lived through it, till the battling again came to the House-master.

Tom was content to keep his wicket intact, and leave the scoring to Mr. Railton. And the House-master showed that he was quite capable of doing what was expected of him.

The runs piled up, and the score stood at forty-five when Tom Merry's wicket fell to a lightning ball from Mr. Dodds.

The other juniors came and went, all of them except Tom with duck's eggs, but Mr. Railton was piling up the runs.

There was a shout as the score reached ninety. It would be a draw, at all events. St. Jim's were last man in. Herries was at the wicket, and had one more run to come of the over. If he saved his wicket for that one run, it was quite certain that Mr. Railton would win at the next ball. And Mr. Dodds was now bowling, so it looked easy enough. Herries faced Hutton, and was ready for the ball—when there was a sudden yapping and snarling. Towser raced across the pitch from the shrubbery, with a huge mastiff belonging to the house in full pursuit. Herries uttered an exclamation of alarm, and turned to look after them, and the ball came down and whipped his middle stump out of the ground.

"How's that?" shrieked Huckleberry Heath with one voice.

And Mr. Jelf said:

"Hout!"

Herries did not even glance at the wicket.

"Out, is it?" he said. "All right."

And he gripped the cane handle of his bat, and dashed away in pursuit of Towser's pursuer. He had thrown away the match, but the other fellows only burst into a roar of laughter.

"Well, it's a dwaw," said Arthur Augustus. "As a mattah of fact, it was a one-man-a-side match, and all you youngstahs were simply nowhere."

"And where were you?" inquired Blake.

"Pway don't ask personal questions."

And so ended the cricket-match, which had been a decidedly curious one from start to finish. The Huckleberry Heath team had tea with their opponents on the lawn, and drove away in the summer dusk very well satisfied with themselves and with their reception at Eastwood House. There was only one fellow absent from tea, and that was Herries. He was off in search of Towser.

CHAPTER 19.

A Musical Evening.

DINNER that evening was quite a function. It was realy pleasant to see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dispensing hospitality with an air that his noble parent could not have excelled. Wally, of course, caused trouble by bringing Pongo into the dining-room, and surreptitiously feeding him under the table, but Arthur Augustus affected not to notice it. As he explained afterwards to Blake, it was imposs. to get up in the middle of a dinner-party and give his younger brother a fearful thrashing. And Blake agreed that it was.

Everybody was agreed that the evening ought to be musical. Figgins had seemed to see some difficulty ahead, because he hadn't brought his violoncello. But the others said it didn't matter. Blake said it was very fortunate that he had put his mouth-organ into his bag, and Kerr said it was fortunate he thought so—a remark that made Blake glare expressively at the Scottish junior.

"To my mind," said Arthur Augustus modestly, "I think the items should be mainly vocal. I don't mind contwibutin' some tenor solos."

"I wish I had my 'cello here," murmured Figgins.

"There's my cornet," began Herries.

The juniors almost jumped.

"Where?"

"I've left it at St. Jim's."

"Oh!" It was a general gasp of relief.

"I'm so sowwy, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus hypocritically. "It would have been—er—wippin' to have a cornet-solo. So sowwy you can't wun and fetch it."

And Blake murmured something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like "Liar!"

"Miss Cleveland is going to sing to us," said Figgins. "Kerr can accompany like a shot."

"That is a wathah wemarkable compawison, Figgins. Pewwaps you mean like a cannon."

"I don't mean like a cannon," said Figgins "Sit down, Kerr."

"With pleasure, as D'Arcy is so pressing."

"Weally, Kerr——"

Kerr sat down at the piano.

As a matter of fact, Kerr was a good pianist. He was also a good violinist, and the top of his Form in mathematics and several other things. He could paint, too, and act and recite. Kerr was, in fact, one of those quiet fellows who can do things, and do them well. He was an ideal accompanist. He would always help a singer out, and seemed to know by a kind of instinct just what was wanted, unlike the accompanist most of us know, who looks on the piano as a solo instrument and the song as a voice obbligato. With Kerr at the piano, and Cousin Ethel singing, it was what Blake accurately described as a beano.

D'Arcy, of course, gave tenor solos galore. They asked him if he was tired, but he said he wasn't, and would give them as many as they liked. Gradually a space was cleared about the piano. The drawing-room at Eastwood was so large that it was quite easy to give the singer a wide berth—for all except the accompanist. At the second tenor solo Kerr showed symptoms of indisposition.

He was all right, he told them, but thought he had better take a little rest from playing. Mr. Railton went to the piano, and stood it manfully.

Each of the juniors gave a selection, and Miss Fawcett, who always made it a point to be pleased, said that each item in turn was delightful.

Even Curly Gibson stood up and recited, and Jameson gave imitations of bird-calls, which delighted Miss Fawcett as much as D'Arcy's solos.

When Wally was called upon to sing, he didn't show the slightest signs of nervousness. There was a gleam of fun in Wally's eyes that warned Tom Merry that the scamp of the Third was meditating some jape.

"Don't be an ass, young D'Arcy," Tom Merry whispered to him. "Remember there are ladies present, to say nothing of a House-master and a clergyman."

"Rats!" said Wally cheerfully. "Do you think I am likely to start japing in my noble governor's drawing-room?"

"You've got some wheeze on, you young ass!"

"It's all right. I want Kerr to play for me."

"Mr. Dodd's on the stool."

"Shift him off, then. I want Kerr to play—he played the same song for Gussy."

"You're going to sing one of Gussy's songs?" asked Tom Merry, in alarm.

"Yes. Why not?"

"But—but Gussy can't sing 'em, and you certainly can't."

"Rats! Tenor solos run in the family."

"Don't be a young ass! What song are you going to sing, then?"

"The Prize Song from the 'Meistersinger.'"

"You—you duffer——"

"Don't jaw, old chap; we're keeping the folk waiting."

Tom Merry gave it up. The Prize Song from Wagner's famous opera had been sung by Arthur Augustus, who had, of course, made a hash of one of the most difficult tenor songs ever written. Gussy was blissfully unconscious of the fact, but he had murdered the song, and tortured his hearers. What was Wally likely to do with it in his turn?

But it was no use arguing with D'Arcy minor.

"Kerr, will you come over here?" said Tom Merry resignedly. "Wally is going to give us a tenor solo."

D'Arcy rose from his seat beside Cousin Ethel.

"Wally, I wegard you as a young ass——"

"Order!" said Jameson.

"Weally, Jameson——"

Kerr, grinning, came over to the piano-stool, which Mr. Dodds vacated for him. The company looked at one another. The music was set up before Kerr, who was quite up to dealing with a piano-score of Wagner. D'Arcy minor struck an attitude so exactly like his elder brother's that it elicited a giggle.

"Now, my beloved 'earers," murmured Monty Lowther.

Kerr struck up the prelude, and D'Arcy minor sang. He commenced in a ridiculous falsetto voice, which was a peculiar imitation of D'Arcy's supposed tenor, but carried to an absurd excess.

"Morgenlicht leuchtend im rosigen Schein——"

The juniors giggled. It was evidently Wally's intention to add to the gaiety of the evening by an absurd parody of Arthur Augustus, and he was certainly achieving his object. He went on, sometimes in English, sometimes in German, and making up new words where he did not know the original; and the result was that the song was decidedly mixed as to meaning. But all through he kept up that same ridiculous falsetto, and long before the song was over the audience were in convulsions.

With the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He sat bolt upright, with an expression of exceeding great dignity upon his face. But the others roared.

Wally might have been singing the latest comic song instead of a great musician's masterpiece, to judge by the reception it had.

The song was over at last, and the last bars crashed off the piano, and Wally looked round with an agreeable smile at the convulsed hearers.

"I am wathah sowwy I am not in good voice this evenin'," he said, with a delightful imitation of D'Arcy's delightful accent. "A slight—er—cold, you know."

"Weally, Wally——"

Wally sat down. And the juniors roared. Even Mr. Dodds and Mr. Railton were laughing, and Cousin Ethel. Only Miss Fawcett was serious, but she smiled, too. She had not understood the song at all, but the laughter made her suppose that it was a comic song.

"How very good," said Miss Fawcett. "So funny—so very funny! I did not quite see the point, but it was certainly very comic."

Wally's tenor solo was certainly the hit of the evening. For all through the remainder of that musical evening, the juniors every now and then broke out into giggles, as they thought of Wally and his song, and the face of Arthur Augustus while he was singing it.

CHAPTER 20.

An Exciting Finish.

"IF you please, sir——"

"Yaas, what is it, Jelf?"

The evening was over, and it was well past bed-time. Miss Fawcett and Cousin Ethel had retired, and Arthur Augustus had just seen the last of his guests off to his quarters, when the new butler spoke to him in his respectful way. Mr. Jelf was looking concerned.

"It's about the dog, sir——"

"Yaas, wathah! That's all wight. Wally has undah-taken not to let him loose in the house to-night, Jelf."

"Thank you, sir. I shall be held responsible for the valuable statuette——"

"I will explain to Lord Eastwood that it wasn't your fault, Jelf."

"Thank you, Master Augustus. May I see the dog safe to the kennels?"

"Yaas, wathah! Wally!"

"Hallo, old cock?"

"I wefuse to be addwessed in that diswespectful way, Wally! I——"

"Now, don't you begin, Gus! I'm off to bed."

"Weally, Wally, I insist——"

"Cut it short, then, old man! It's half-past eleven, and I can't stay here later than midnight listening to you!"

"You are a young wottah! Mr. Jelf is waitin' to take Pongo to the kennels before wetirin' to bed——"

"Rats!"

"If you say 'wats' to me——"

"I do, my son, and many of 'em. If you don't want the dog loose, I'll take him into my room. That's the best I can do for you."

"Well, if you keep the door shut——"

"Do you think I'm likely to go to sleep with it open?"

"Pway addwess me with more wespect, Wally! I should be sowwy to give you a feahful thwashin' at this time of night!"

"You'd be sorry when you started," said Wally, grinning. "However, isn't that satisfactory to the Jelf-bird? Pong's coming into my room."

"Vewy well; that is all wight."

And they went to their rooms.

Arthur Augustus, who was tired, turned in at once, and was soon fast asleep. Wally did not undress. His chums, Jameson and Gibson, were already in bed. They were fast asleep, and Wally did not wake them. He might have been expected to startle them by yelling "Fire!" or pouring cold water over their faces, or by tying their ankles to the bedpost. But he did none of these things. He stirred the fire, and turned out the light, and sat down in an arm-chair, with his feet on the fender and Pongo's muzzle on his knee.

He sat there for half an hour, till the last sound had died away in the house and it was clear that all slept—or should be sleeping. Then Wally rose to his feet, with a peculiar glint in his eyes, and donned a pair of rubber-soled shoes in the dark and opened his bed-room door.

The house was very silent.

Midnight had chimed out, and still deeper silence seemed to follow the last stroke. Wally stepped silently into the passage, and closed the door behind him without a sound. He whispered a word to Pongo, and crept towards the stairs. The dog followed him noiselessly. Pongo was a troublesome dog sometimes, but he knew when to obey his master. Not a hint of a sound did he make now.

Master and dog crept down the stairs without a sound. Wally paused at the foot of the staircase to listen.

A faint sound came through the darkness—it was the sound of a door cautiously opened.

Wally listened with straining ears, and heard it softly close again. Then, with a whisper to the dog, he crept on. He made his way to the door by which he had entered the house the previous night. It was, as he expected, unfastened.

D'Arcy minor grinned in the darkness.

"Watch!" he whispered to Pongo.

The dog remained where he was, his eyes glimmeringly greenish in the dark, as the scamp of St. Jim's Third crept away.

It was towards the butler's room that D'Arcy minor was now stealing. In that room Mr. Jelf ought to have been fast asleep at that hour. Wally opened the door and looked in. The room was very dark. He struck a vesta. The light glimmered on the bed and showed that it was unoccupied and had not been slept in.

There could be no further doubt as to whom it was that had left the house. It was Mr. Jelf.

Had he gone out to look for suspicious characters, as he had explained the previous night? Wally, remembering

the signal whistle in the wood and the white collar of the man he had caught a glimpse of under the trees, did not think so.

The scamp of the Third dropped the match, and went quietly upstairs. He went into Tom Merry's room.

Tom Merry was in the middle of a dream, in which he was knocking up an impossible score on the cricket-field at St. Jim's.

He started out of it as he was violently shaken in the darkness. Confused by the sudden awakening, and by finding himself in the grip of someone unseen, he hit out, and there was a muffled cry.

"Ow!"

"Hallo! Who's that?" demanded Tom Merry, sitting up in bed and peering round him.

"Ow! You ass! You've dotted me on the boko!"

"Is that you, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, ass!"

"You shouldn't have woke me so suddenly," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "I hope I haven't hurt you much."

"You've nearly squashed my boko, you idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't make that row, duffer! Do you want to warn them off?"

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"The burglars."

"Is this a jape, young D'Arcy?"

"No, it isn't. Look here, Jelf's a rotter. I found him up to his little games last night, though he doesn't know it," said Wally. "Unless I'm mistaken, he's a thief, and he's in league with somebody outside to steal the silver here. It's locked up in the safe in the library while my governor's away, you see, and only a burglar with his tools can get at it. My belief is that Jelf's letting in the burglar, and is going to work up a yarn of a burglary to cover it."

"Phew!"

"Get out of bed. Jelf's just gone out and left a door unfastened. I've left Pongo on the watch, but I don't want him to scare them off. I'd rather lay a trap for them and catch them in it."

"Look here, Wally, if this is a jape——"

"It isn't a jape, fathead—honour bright!" said D'Arcy minor earnestly. "I tell you they may be in any minute to rob the house."

"My hat!"

"I've called you, and I'm going to call Blake and Figgins and Mr. Railton. That will be enough—with Pongo."

Tom Merry jumped out of bed.

"Good! Buzz off! I don't quite know how you've worked it out, but you can tell me all that to-morrow. Go and call the others!"

"Good! Meet us in the passage when you're dressed!" And Wally glided away.

Tom Merry was dressed in a very few minutes, and he went out into the passage. There he was joined by Blake and Figgins and Mr. Railton, all of them looking startled and a little sceptical. Wally led them down to the library, and brought Pongo in with them. The great room was dark and shadowy, and it was impossible to light the room without giving the alarm to the burglars.

"It's all right," said Wally. "This way—what are you making that row about, Blake?"

"Ow! I've barked my shins on something!"

"Never mind——"

"Ow! But I do mind!"

"Well, don't make a row! Quiet, Pongo! We can keep in cover behind those chairs—don't knock them over, Figgins!"

"I'm not knocking them over."

"Well, mind you don't. We shall be able to cut them off from the door if they go over to the safe—it's in the wall, there, behind a dummy set of bookshelves."

"Very well," said Mr. Railton; "I hope you have not disturbed our night's rest for nothing, D'Arcy minor."

"It's all right, sir!" Wally chuckled. "My word, won't Gus be wild at being left out of this!"

"Hark!" said Tom Merry.

There was a faint, indefinable sound. A minute later the library door was opened, and, though the watchers could see nothing in the darkness, they knew that at least two individuals had entered the room.

The hearts of the watchers beat painfully. There was little further doubt that Wally's information was correct. Mr. Railton's hand closed tightly upon a heavy Malacca cane; Wally kept his hand over Pongo's muzzle.

There was a whispering voice in the darkness.

"Show a glim."

"Wait a moment."

The answering voice was familiar to all of them—it was Mr. Jelf's.

"Rotter!" murmured Tom Merry.

A light glimmered out. Mr. Jelf had only paused to close the door. He carried a lantern in his hand. Two dark figures became visible. They did not look round them, but crossed directly to the opposite wall.

"Is that it, Jelf?"

"Yes, it's behind the bookcase," whispered Jelf. "I can move that—it is simple—but the safe is beyond me. If you can manage it——"

The other laughed scoffingly.

"I have cracked a bank's strong-room before now!"

"Then you ought to be able to manage this."

"Open the case, and I'll show you."

Mr. Jelf pressed a knob and the bookcase swung back from the wall. The iron door of a safe was disclosed. The other man, evidently a professional cracksman, bent his head a little and examined it in the light of the lantern.

"Well?" said Mr. Jelf, in a hushed, anxious voice.

"It won't take me a quarter of an hour."

"Good! I shall be on tenterhooks the whole time!"

"There's no danger. That confounded dog is not in the house now——"

"He's in the boy's room—safe enough from here. If the young hound hadn't turned him loose last night——"

"This job would have been safely done!" chuckled the cracksman. "You should have found some way of dealing with the brute!"

"He wouldn't let me touch him—besides, there would have been suspicion in the morning. They would know that the dog had been dealt with from within."

"I suppose so. It was safer to leave it—if you are going to stay here and cover up your tracks."

"Of course I am—I have my character to consider."

The cracksman chuckled.

"Of course, I forgot that."

"Get on as fast as you can."

Crack!

"What's that?"

"It's all right—it's going! I—fury!"

The cracksman broke off with a yell as the library was flooded with electric light. Mr. Railton had quietly stretched out his hand to the switch.

The two scoundrels looked round, almost paralysed at the sight of the House-master and the four boys and the dog. Mr. Jelf's knees knocked together. He was not of the stuff that heroes are made of.

"You are fairly caught!" said Mr. Railton. "Surrender!"

Mr. Jelf, overcome, dropped helplessly on his knees, and a strong pair of hands closed on his collar. The cracksman gave a desperate glance round and made a furious spring to the door. Mr. Railton was upon him like a tiger. In the powerful grip of the House-master, the ruffian reeled back.

"Look out, sir!" shrieked Tom Merry. "He's got a revolver!"

The light was glinting on a barrel.

Tom Merry sprang forward, tearing at the ruffian's wrist. The revolver was knocked away before he could use it, and it crashed on the floor.

Mr. Jelf made a rush to escape as they gathered round the ruffian. He was grabbed by Figgins, and they rolled over together, falling against Mr. Railton, whose grasp on the cracksman relaxed for a moment.

The ruffian was not slow to take advantage of it. He wrenched himself loose. His way to the door was blocked, but he dashed to the nearest window and burst headlong through glass and sash.

In a moment he was gone.

"After him!" yelled Wally—and he hurled himself recklessly through the broken window after the ruffian.

"Come back!" shrieked Mr. Railton.

But Wally was gone.

The noise had alarmed the house now, and servants and guests were hurrying to the scene. Leaving Jelf in the hands of Figgins and Blake, Mr. Railton and Tom Merry rushed after Wally, and as soon as Jelf was secured, Figgins and Blake followed—and after them went a crowd of half-dressed and excited lads.

The grounds were dark, but a shout from ahead called them in the right direction.

"This way!"

They dashed off, stumbling and falling among shrubberies and bushes. Tom Merry, who knew the grounds well, kept his feet without a fall. In a broad path he came in sight of Wally, almost at the heels of a desperately-running man.

Even as he looked the cracksman turned and struck out, and Wally fell. Tom Merry gave a cry of horror. Pongo, who had followed his master, stopped for a moment beside the fallen junior and then ran on after the burglar. Tom Merry reached Wally and stopped. The cracksman might escape—he was only anxious for the hero of the Third.

Wally lay very still and quiet.

"Wally, Wally! Answer, old chap!"

But Wally did not speak. With a terrible dread tugging at his heart, Tom Merry felt upon the boy's breast for a beating which would show that he lived.

"Thank Heaven!"

There was a faint moan from Wally. A shout came from up the path as Mr. Railton and the juniors came running upon the scene.

"Have you caught him? Is that—Wally?" cried the House-master in alarm.

"He was struck down! The scoundrel's gone!"

Wally stirred, and sat up.

"Hallo, you fellows! My hat, I've had a lick on the cocoanut, and no mistake! I think I must have been stunned! Where's the burglar?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry. "Thank goodness it's no worse with you!"

Wally staggered to his feet.

"After him! Pongo won't leave him! After him!"

A fierce barking was heard in the darkness, and a sound of savage oaths. Wally gave a yell.

"After him!"

"Come on!" cried Mr. Railton.

They rushed after Pongo. The dog's barking guided them. The cracksman came into sight—he was vainly trying to clamber up a wall, with the dog snapping at his heels. When he turned on the dog, Pongo receded—when he essayed to climb again, Pongo attacked. The cracksman was fairly caught. He attempted to dodge along the wall as the pursuers rushed up, but Mr. Railton's powerful grasp was upon him.

"Got him!" shouted Tom Merry.

And in the grasp of many hands, the ruffian was taken back to the house. Five minutes later, D'Arcy rang up the police-station, and in an hour's time the two rascals were taken away in custody.

. . . . . .

It had been an exciting time, and on all hands it was agreed that the credit of the capture was due to D'Arcy minor. They made much of Wally! He bore his blushing honours thick upon him with his usual nerve. Jameson and Gibson came very near to violently assaulting him for not calling them, instead of Tom Merry and Blake, to deal with the burglars. But all the others had only praises for Wally. He had certainly saved Lord Eastwood from a loss amounting to more than ten thousand pounds. Even Arthur Augustus condescended to commend Wally, and Wally received the commendation in a far from grateful spirit.

"It was weally vewy clevah of you, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus. "The whole mattah weflects gweat cwedit upon you, deah boy!"

"Yes, doesn't it?" said Wally. "Not much upon you, though, kid! You'd have gone on snoring while they were lifting the governor's tin!"

"I do not snore, as you know vewy well! Besides——"

"I told you you'd be glad I brought Pongo to Eastwood for the week-end!" grinned Wally. "You remember that, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am vewy surpwised that you saw thwough that awful wascal Jelf, when he succeeded in deceivin' me! It is weally most wemarkable!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You'll never understand it, Gussy, so don't try."

"But it is weally vewy wemarkable, Tom Mewwy! This wascal Jelf has confessed that he had a lot of dirty gamblin' debts—he had been bettin' on the wacecourse, which was vewy impwopah conduct for a butlah—and he had to pay, so he says. And then he thought of wobbin' the governah. I wegard him as an ungwateful wottah. It appeahs that he had evewythin' awwanged for the burglawy on Fwiday night, but the week-end party comin' down intewwupted the little game."

"That's how I worked it out," said Wally. "He met the other chap in the wood, you see, and I heard 'em whistling. And he'd have had him in all the same if I hadn't left Pongo loose in the house—on purpose. I wasn't sure about it, and I was too tired to sit up on spec., or I'd have worked this last night. But I knew there wouldn't be any burglary, anyway, while Pong was on the watch. Jolly lucky for some of you I came down for the week-end!"

"Don't let it get into your head, though," suggested Jameson. "If you go back to St. Jim's with a swelled head, it means lickings in the Form."

"Oh, you go and eat coke!" said Wally. "I think the governor ought to stand me a fiver over this, and we'll have a picnic. I'm jolly well going to ask him!"

"Yaas, wathah! But the most wemarkable thing about it is that that wascal Jelf took me in! I am not surpwised at his takin' the governah in, as he had an excellent wecord, and had nevah been guilty of anythin' of this sort before, but with my twainin' as an amateur detective, I ought to have seen thwough him at once! It is weally vewy wemarkable!"

The others couldn't see anything remarkable in it, but D'Arcy persisted that it was really very remarkable indeed, and they let him have his way.

The exciting incident had decidedly enlivened the week-end. It furnished the juniors with a great topic on their return to St. Jim's. The week-end, like all things good or bad, came to an end at last, and the boys bade farewell to Miss Fawcett, Cousin Ethel, and Mr. Dodds, and a cheerful party entered the train on Monday morning. And Wally went back to school with a crisp fiver in his pocket—a reward from his "governor" for the keenness and promptness he had shown. And three heads were bent together all through the journey, and a whispered discussion went on among the scamps of the Third as to the best possible means of "blueing" the fiver. It was a merry party in the train, and the juniors arrived at St. Jim's in high spirits—and there Mr. Railton was metamorphosed into a grave and serious House-master again, hardly recognisable as the merry week-ender of the past few days. And in the afternoon the juniors were grinding in the class-rooms again, which Monty Lowther said was a weak end to the week-end—a remark which his chums obstinately refused to understand after he had explained it to them half a dozen times.

THE END.

(Another grand long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "Hip-Hip-Hooray!")

The dull mutter of guns far away at sea, somewhere off the Essex coast, had been increasing again in the afternoon, and now it broke out again from time to time, even in the darkness.

"Our fleet's hammering 'em again!" said Sam. "Nearly all the German ships have had to go away North. That'll leave this shore-line pretty open for a raid by Frankie—or somebody else. But it's here on Sheppey that's the real tight place. Von Weisshaus won't hang around and waste time; he's sure to have a go at us very soon, an' he won't spare any pains to wipe us out, whatever losses it costs him. Hark at that!"

The bugles were heard sounding sharply, orders rang out all along the walls, and a machine-gun loosed off with a loud rattle. Seizing their rifles, the boys ran down to the newly-made ramparts, and took up their places with the company to which Spencer belonged.

Before they had reached it, every rifle was blazing away on the west side, and down the hill, dark, irregular masses of men could be seen rushing up towards the walls of Shorlands. A fierce night attack was in progress, and every heart beat faster as the defenders met it. The brothers, lying flat on the banked wall with the rest, shot rapidly and steadily into the thick of the oncoming foe.

"Hallo!" said Spencer, coming up behind as he hurried back from his errand, and taking his place. "A rare old scrum, isn't it? Von Weisshaus was bound to try a night attack, for it means a lot to him if he could mop us up before morning, an' he's got plenty of men. But I didn't think he'd begin so soon."

"Will he do it?" cried Stephen, plugging away desperately with his carbine at the dark forms that were racing each other up the hillside.

"Should say not," said Spencer coolly, recharging his own rifle. "But I can tell you better when the shindy's over."

It occurred to Stephen that if he waited till a fight was over he could tell which way it went himself, but there was no time to dwell on that. All round the long walls of Shorlands the rifles were sputtering, for the German infantry were advancing from every side except that nearest the sea.

Away to the left a company of Hanover carabiniers had already reached the ramparts, and a hand-to-hand fight was raging with rifle and bayonet. But the Germans could not scale the wall in the face of the stout defence made by the Rutlands, and, after a desperate attempt, they had to fall back, leaving many dead and wounded behind.

The main entrance to the enclosure, which had been heavily barricaded and banked up, was commanded by a pair of Maxims, backed by a hundred picked rifle-shots, and the enemy on that side were easily driven back long before they came within striking distance.

But, in spite of the strength of the defences, the victory hung in the balance for some time. It was no blind, forlorn hope that Von Weisshaus had planned. At the height of the struggle it was uncertain for several minutes whether the barriers would be stormed or not, for a great number of attackers at one spot nearly overwhelmed the defence and made their way in. Colonel Blake was able to hurry more defenders to the place in the nick of time, and the assault failed. Then the attack gave way in every direction, and the German troops, fairly driven back, scattered and retreated swiftly.

The machine-guns rattled away furiously at the departing foe, and a few minutes later the fight was over. The German losses, though considerable, were not enormous by any means, for only short-range firing was possible in the darkness, and the enemy were soon away out of sight. A rousing cheer rang all along the walls, and echoed through the night from eight hundred throats.

"Very pretty little scrap," observed Spencer, laying down his rifle, and brushing the dust off his front after all had subsided, and the regular watch was set out again. "They won't come on again to-night; they've had their gruel."

"It looked a bit ticklish at one time," said Sam; "but all's well that ends well. We've wiped up a lot of 'em, an' we've lost hardly any men to speak of, for they never got in with the bayonet, an' there was no firing from them. But, I say, what about ammunition? What you've got can't last long, an' there's no more to be had."

"There's the rub," said Spencer; "but we've got enough for another thirty hours in reason. The yeomen were all loaded up with it like mules; you never saw such a sight. The riflemen all brought a treble supply per man, and we hauled four handcarts along as well with the guns. You saw 'em. All the same, it's short allowance of cartridges as well as grub, but that we couldn't help. We had to take some chances."

"What'll happen next?"

"Nothing much to-night, I fancy. The Germans will bring all their available forces up, and when the day opens they'll begin to hammer us in real earnest. It's their guns we have to fear most. It's true we've got the top position here, but still they'll be able to do us some damage with shell-fire—perhaps a lot."

"Colonel Blake counts on beatin' em—eh?" said Stephen.

"I don't know. He's pretty worried, I think. He was looking uncommonly grave this evening. That's our one great weakness, you see—we haven't guns. Our quick-firers and Maxims are good for repellin' attacks by infantry, but they can't shell an enemy at long range—you want field-guns for that. But we couldn't ferry horsed batteries across from Faversham—indeed, we hadn't got any."

"Suppose you had some big guns?" said Sam. "What then?"

"Why, it would be a cert for us. From up here a couple of good field-guns even, would make it impossible for the German batteries an' troops to stick it out anywhere within range of us. We command the whole district around, you see, an' could simply sock 'em with a direct downward fire, if you understand what that means. But we might as well cry for the moon, so it's no good talking about it. See that!"

The subaltern pointed northwards towards the sea. Across the night sky were seen three quick flashes, like long pencils of light appearing and disappearing. Then came two more. They were not very bright, for the night was thick and misty, but they were quite visible.

"What is it?" said Stephen.

"That's the Orion signallin' with her searchlight to let us know she's here," returned Spencer. "She's to hold communication with us, an' I hope we get some help from her."

"The Orion! That's Frankie's armoured cruiser that helped bombard the forts this mornin'," said Sam, with interest. "What help can she give us, though? The cliffs shut off the Germans from the sea, so she can't shell 'em even if she's near enough."

"She's in Oaze Deeps, I s'pose," said Stephen.

"Or the Four Fathom Channel, beyond the Spaniard Bank," returned Sam; "that's nearer. She don't draw much water, though she's big. There go the flashlights again! She's out of sight, but you can see 'em across the sky."

"She's signalling to Blake," said Spencer. "The worst of it is we can't signal back. We've no searchlight."

"I'm beginnin' to see how blessed helpless an army is when it's cut off from its columns an' communications an' things," said Stephen. "The Orion's better off. You were aboard her, weren't you, Sam? She brought you back to the squadron after the Minotaur was crippled."

(Another long instalment of this splendid war serial in next Thursday's "Gem" Library. Order it in advance.

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3

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