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# 1!



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CLIFFORD.

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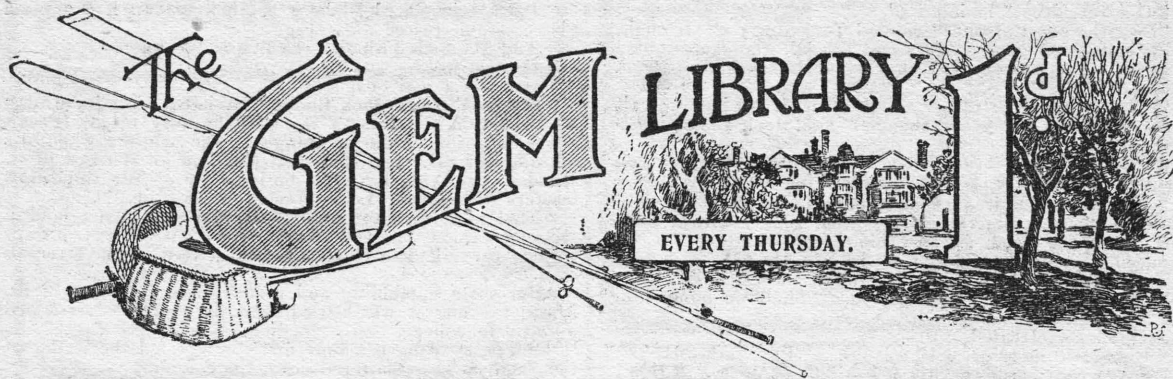


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# HIP-HIP-HOORAY!

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER 1. An Unexpected Holiday.

"HIP, hip!"  
"Hooray!"  
"Hip, hip!"  
"H-o-o-r-a-y!"

The juniors of St. Jim's cheered with a will that told eloquently and deafeningly of their delight.

A whole holiday, and all the more welcome since it was entirely unexpected!

Even the lordly members of the Sixth Form relaxed from their attitude of studied dignity as seniors, and lent their voices to swell the volume of sound that filled the big hall.

D'Arcy minor's shrill treble trailed off in a final "r-a-y," and then, smiling and beaming upon the cheerful faces, Dr. Holmes, the head-master, descended from the dais, and, followed by the masters and prefects, formed the head of a little procession to the door.

Dr. Holmes could be stern enough when he found good cause to be; but he was always strictly just and impartial, and the juniors looked upon him with feelings of awe that were largely tempered with a genuine regard, and even affection.

Wally, the younger brother of the swell of St. Jim's, summed up the opinion of the juniors in describing the Head as "A good old sport!" Not a very polished or elegant expression; but decidedly to the point, and convincing enough in loyalty, especially when Wally had

punctuated his remark with a left drive on the nose of Curly Gibson, who had scoffed at his assertion.

The tail of Mr. Ratcliff's gown had barely disappeared when there was a scramble for the door, and Third and Fourth Forms jostled and pushed their way through the ranks of the Fifth.

"Go it, ye cripples!" gasped Digby, of Study 6. "That's it, jam your beastly elbow into my eye! I don't mind!"

"Go hon! Was that your optic?" cried Monty Lowther.

"You don't say! Why, I thought it was your ear! Ow!"

"Sorry!" said Digby sweetly. "I didn't know that was your nose. I thought it was the back of your head. Ha, ha, ha!"

There was the light of battle in Monty Lowther's eye as he tenderly felt his nose; but a sudden rush at the back sent him and the rest of the juniors jammed in the doorway sprawling and staggering into the corridor. Digby disappeared in the crush, and when the members of Study 1 got clear of the throng there was no one to vent his righteous wrath upon.

"Hallo! What's the matter with Monty?" exclaimed a curly-haired junior. "Why, you look quite angry! What's up? Lost something?"

"No, I haven't lost anything!" snapped Monty Lowther. "I'm looking for a certain silly ass who wants a thick ear!"

"Oh, naughty, to let its angry passions rise!" said Tom Merry. "Cheer up, old son! Don't worry about giving thick ears away now. What are we going to do?"

Recollection of the whole holiday before them cleared the frown from the junior's brow, and he grinned at his chum.

"Got any ideas?" he inquired.  
 "Not the ghost of one!" replied Tom Merry. "It ought to be something good—some extra special, diamond-studded wheeze! 'Tisn't every day that whole holidays drop from nowhere!"

"No; it would be rather rough on us if we had to wait another seventy-five years, though!" said Jack Blake, strolling up.

"Hallo, worm!" cried Tom Merry. "So they let you wriggle through, then! Got any ideas for to-morrow?"

"Haven't given it a thought yet. I dare say we shall hit on something big though," replied Blake, with a lofty air. "All the good wheezes come from Study 6. If we think of a second-best idea, we'll let you know."

Tom Merry eyed the leader of Study 6 thoughtfully.  
 "Shall we, Monty?" he inquired. "Shall we bump him for his cheek?"

Jack Blake retreated.  
 "Hold on!" he cried, with a laugh. "Pax, fatheads!"  
 "Saved your bacon that time!" said Tom Merry. "Don't be cheeky again, or you'll certainly go through it! Where's Manners got to?"

"Out in the quad, I expect," said Monty Lowther. "Let's go and find him, or he'll be getting into mischief."

The quadrangle was glowing red with the setting sun, and the old elms cast their long shadows across the ground and up the grey, time-worn walls of the college.

For a moment the juniors stood in the entrance-hall blinking at the strong glare of the fine sun.

"I expect he's over there," said Tom Merry, pointing to a big elm, in the shade of which stood a cluster of juniors.

"I can see Figgy, anyhow," replied Blake. "What the dickens are they yapping about? Looks as if there was a giddy meeting on."

"Suppose we go and see?" suggested Tom Merry. "We can't allow those kids to plot and plan on their little lonesomes."

The three juniors crossed the quad unnoticed by the crowd under the elm.

"Seems as if they were having a rare old confab!" said Jack Blake. "Hear old Figgy spouting?"

"They're bucking up, too!" observed Tom Merry. "Something's in the wind!"

Judging from the sounds of the excited voices, there could be no question that something was going on.

"I tell you," shouted Figgins, the long-legged member of the New House—"I tell you it's no good thinking of that. You're a set of silly asses!"

"My eye!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Figgy's quite excited."

The arrival of the three broke up the ring gathered round Figgins, and eager questions were hurled at Tom Merry and Jack Blake.

"Don't you think it's the rottenest suggestion ever made?" shouted Herries.

"Absolute rubbish!" howled Digby.

"I never heard of such a thing!" shouted Manners.

"I think it's jolly good!" cried Figgins, very red in the face.

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Don't you think so, Merry?" demanded Manners.

"What? What the policeman are you all shrieking about?" exclaimed Tom Merry, bewildered by the fire of questions.

"Why, Figgy's rotten wheeze, of course!"

"What wheeze?" said Jack Blake wearily. "Are you all gone mad, looney, dotty?"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's, known to his intimates as "Gussy." "I wogard that wemark of yours, Blake, as extremely diswepctful, and altogetah too sweepin'. I infer that you do not wogard me as bein' deficient in bwain powah!"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy—unless you can explain what all this cackle is about!"

The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his monocle and regarded his chum severely.

"I pass ovah your wudeness," he said icily; "and, undah the circs., I will—"

"You see, it's like this—" interrupted Digby.

"I shall administrah a feahful fwashin'—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I absolutely wefuse to wing off! I—"

A couple of juniors seized the swell of St. Jim's by the elbows, and ran him out into the middle of the quad.

"Here, Dane, quick, let's have it now there's a moment's peace and quietness! What's the wheeze?" said Tom Merry. Clifton Dane grinned.

"Oh, only a slight disagreement, that's all! Figgins suggested a visit to the Tower—"

"Bah!" ejaculated Blake. "I thought you had a mind above mouldy prison walls, Figgy!"

"And Skimpole proposed the British Museum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter.

"My hat!" cried Jack Blake. "What a nice, joyful day we should have! I don't think! The very idea! It's all very well, that kind of thing, in the winter, when it's nothing but rain and cold and fog, and all the rest of it. Besides, you kids have no business to discuss important matters without us. Let's adjourn to the study."

"That's the ticket!" said Tom Merry. "Let's hold a meeting. Come on, you chaps! Buck up, Fatty; p'raps we can prevail upon Gussy to stand a feed on the strength of it."

After some squabbling and protest from the swell of St. Jim's, the matter was settled, and the rival Co.'s trooped over to the college.

"Suppose we have a tune first?" suggested the leader of the Shell, as they clattered down the corridor.

"I feel so thirsty!" said Fatty Wynn, in a husky voice.

"All right; I dare say we can manage a bottle of pop as well. Follow your uncle."

Tom Merry led the way into Study 1, and some interest was awakened by the sight of a brown paper parcel lying on the table.

"Hooray!" shouted Manners. "The records have come! What a bit of luck! Mind your feet, you chaps! Get your head out of it, Gussy!"

The junior whipped out his pocket-knife, and Tom Merry set the gramophone in position.

"Shut the door!"

For the time, all idea of holding a meeting was forgotten, and the pile of black, shining discs absorbed all attention.

## CHAPTER 2.

### "Uncle Johnson,"

"WE'LL have this one!"  
 Tom Merry took a new disc from his pile of records.

"Uncle Johnson!" he cried. "How's that?"

"Good!"

"Ripping!"

"That's something like! Classical stuff's all right. But we don't want the weep-for-ever-among-the-poppies sort of thing now. Shove it on!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

The juniors assembled in the Terrible Three's study shouted or grunted their opinions in terms various and ear-splitting. Their approval was unanimous—with one exception.

The dissenting voice made itself heard as the din subsided.

"I don't agree!"

"What's that you're mumbling about, Gussy?" cried Tom Merry, the leader of the Shell, as he wound up the gramophone. "What's the matter with 'Uncle Johnson'?"

"Nothing!" roared Jack Blake. "Shut up, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's, disregarded his chum's advice with an air of haughty dignity.

"Undah the circs., deah boy," he said, addressing himself pointedly to Tom Merry. "I considah we might have a wecord fwom 'Carmen.' I used to sing the Toweadah Song, you know—"

"And well I remember it!" groaned Jack Blake.

The swell of St. Jim's went on, ignoring the interruption:

"It is a weally wippin' selection! Or if you wufwah, we could have one of the pieces fwom Wagnah's 'Twistan and Isolde.' These wottahs might impwove their taste, and p'waps if you followed up with anothah fwom the 'Gottah-damawung,' it would still—"

A chorus of howls cut D Arcy's speech short, and, after an ineffectual attempt to make himself heard, he retired to the window.

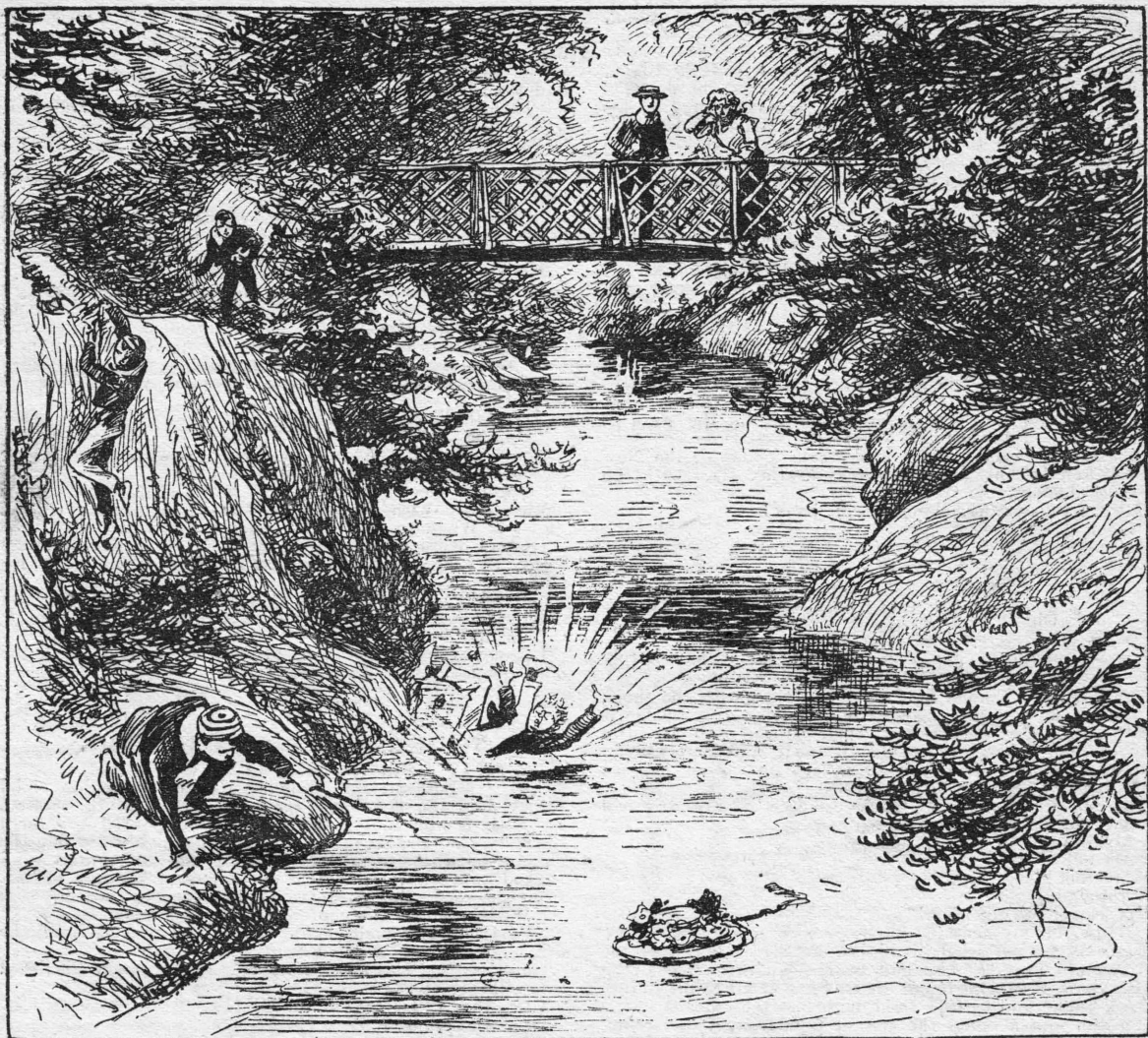
For a short moment there was peace, and the gathering of the clans made themselves as comfortable as the limits of Study 1 would permit.

Blake, as head of the Fourth Form, occupied the armchair usually reserved for Tom Merry.

Figgins upheld the dignity of the New House by enthroning himself on the coalscuttle. The rest of the juniors, Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, Digby and Herries, of Study 6, and Fatty Wynn and Kerr, of the New House, wedged themselves on the table, and divided the three small chairs among them.

Clifton Dane, the hypnotist of St. Jim's, belonging to no particular Co., but a favourite with all, kept Arthur Augustus company in the comparatively isolated position by the window.

Just as Tom Merry was about to start "Uncle Johnson," Arthur Augustus broke the dignity of his own silence.



In his eagerness to rescue Cousin Ethel's hat the junior staggered, rolled down the bank, and flopped square on his back into the stream!

"I pwotest!" he said. "And considah that the occasion could be marked by the selection of a supewiah wecord to that vulgah and—"

A well aimed cushion stopped the swell of St. Jim's, and sent him reeling into Dane's chest.

"Make him shut up!" roared Blake. "The silly ass hasn't even heard 'Uncle Johnson!' Make him keep quiet, Dane; or we'll deputise Fatty to come and sit on his chest."

Arthur Augustus readjusted his eyeglass, and opened his mouth. He shut it without a sound, and relapsed into a state of lordly disapproval.

The signs of warfare expressed by the faces of the juniors left no possible doubt in his mind as to their intentions.

"Get on with it, Merry!" said Blake. "Gussy's going to shut up now!" he added grimly.

Tom Merry grinned, and released the stop catch.

The turntable started on its round, the scratching of the needle followed the hum of increasing speed, and then the banjoist began "Uncle Johnson" with a preliminary flourish.

"Twang a tang, tang, tang, tang Toodle om pom, pom pay!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, as the notes of the banjo came clear and merrily from the trumpet.

"Bai Jove, that's wathah good!"

"Rather good!" So I should think!" sniffed Digby.

"It's ripping!"

D'Arcy nodded with dignity, and unconsciously kept his head going. As the music grew faster, so his head went quicker, his eyeglass dropped out and dangled to and fro unnoticed.

Arthur Augustus was not the only one in motion. Every one of the eleven juniors seemed to have caught the infectious gaiety of the air, and arms, legs, and heads nodded and jerked in unison.

Fatty Wynn, despite his corpulence, was all of a quiver. The Celtic strain was at work, and his little fat legs jerked heel and toe spasmodically.

Now sonorous, now tinkling, the lively air, backed with the running pianoforte accompaniment, gripped the juniors, till the study was a mass of wriggling youngsters.

Cries of approval went up, followed by sighs and expressions of regret as "Uncle Johnson," with a final and rousing crash, came to an end.

"Again!"

"Encore!"

"Let's have uncle once more!"

"Yes, wathah! I wetwact my wemarks, Blake," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Wathah! Let's have it ovah again, Mewwy!"

"Thought you would, Gussy!" replied Jack Blake cheerfully. "You're a funny kipper, but not quite such a silly ass as you try to make out."

"I we—"

"Shut up; Uncle's starting again!"

The admonition was scarcely necessary, for as soon as the banjo began its enticing rattle and twang, Digby sprang to his feet and clutched the swell of St. Jim's round his gorgeous waistcoat, and whirled him madly round. D'Arcy very nearly lost both dignity and balance.

"My—my waist—my—wottah!"

Arthur Augustus protested, but, all the same, he could

not stop. The impetuous junior had him fairly going, and the pace increased.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep the pot a-boiling, Dig!" shouted Jack Blake, slapping his hands in time. "My aunt, mind the door!"

"That's all right!" gasped Digby, manfully lugging his unwilling partner along. "Go it, Fatty! That's the style!"

Tom Merry and the others roared with laughter as the Falstaff of St. Jim's clasped the astounded leader of Study 6 to his portly bosom, and by sheer weight hove him round.

"Go it!"

"On the ball!"

"Buck up, Dig! Fatty's going three times to your two!"

"Buck up, New House!"

The couples swirled round and round. Digby pranced and Fatty Wynn pounded, and the juniors took good care to give them room, and tuck their feet away.

Fatty Wynn was puffing and blowing, but there was the light of determination in his eye, and he kept his partner nimbly skipping.

"We'll show 'em!" he grunted.

The study was now in the unrestrained condition of a lunatic asylum gone crazy, and bordering on the state of an American wheat pit just before the bell rings.

Figgins, the usually quiet and sedate leader of the New House, had lost his head, and was beating time with the shovel and tongs.

Bang, bang, twang, clang, crash, bang!

"Go it!"

"Boo-oo-oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hoo!"

Crash!

"Wow! Oh!"

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

His warning came too late, and the junior had barely time to skip aside when the catastrophe took place.

The partners, winded and almost helpless with the shock of the impact, reeled apart, and a fresh series of howls went up as Digby and Arthur Augustus shot into the little knot of Fourth-Formers against the wall, and Fatty Wynn and Jack Blake found a resting-place on top of Figgins and Clifton Dane in the fireplace.

The finishing bars of "Uncle Johnson" were drowned by the cries of the wounded.

"My head!"

"My eye!"

"My foot!"

"Fathead!"

"Ass! Shrieking idiot!"

"Ge-gerroff my chest!"

Fatty Wynn sprawled his eleven stone of tissue over the unfortunate Figgins, who had gone clean through the top of the coalscuttle, and found his seat not at all to his liking.

Jack Blake and Clifton Dane both had their heads in the fire-grate, and a bump the size of a small egg was rising on the back of the latter's head.

On the other side of the room, matters, if not worse, were decidedly more active. In an endeavour to save his precious waistcoat from further indignities, the swell of St. Jim's had clutched Manners round the neck with his left arm, and Monty Lowther with his right. The two heads came together with a bump that brought forth howls of anguish, followed by reprisals, that carried the three of them into Kerr and Herries, who were busy with Digby.

The six juniors became a wriggling, squirming mass of legs, arms, and dishevelled heads.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The leader of the Shell occupied a unique position. For once he was not in the scrimmage, and he spent the next few minutes in a delirium of laughter.

Bits of wearing apparel were beginning to make their appearance on the study floor, and the combat began to show signs of a tired feeling.

A rumpled head, crowned with a twisted collar, and with a necktie like a piece of chewed string hanging from its left ear, came out of the scum.

"My—my eye!" gasped Tom Merry, nearly reduced to tears of merriment. "My—my only eye, it's Gussy! Oh, look at it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

Clifton Dane, tenderly feeling his badly-treated head, forgot his own state at the sight presented by Arthur Augustus, and burst into a peal of laughter.

Figgins, with his long legs waving in the air, for the moment forgot his own position in the coalscuttle, and joined in.

Fatty Wynn sat on the hearthrug, mopped his shining brow, and cackled feebly.

Dusty, rumpled, and looking anything but a worthy representative of the lordly house of Eastwood, the swell

of St. Jim's crawled out from the mass of still wriggling juniors, and, rising from his hands and knees, groped for his eyeglass.

The collar on his head slid to a jaunty, rakish position, and the necktie dangled against his cheek.

"This wibaldwy is outrageous!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in his agitation applying the end of the necktie to his eye.

"Oh, wats!" He flung the offending necktie away in disgust. "Wats!"

A fresh outburst of "wibaldwy" greeted this show of temper.

"Gussy, Gussy!" admonished Tom Merry. "You're getting peevish in your old age. What—oh— Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's had discovered his eyeglass, and for one brief moment was quite unaware that the glass had gone, and his eye was merely surrounded with the gold rim. His look of withering scorn, intended to reduce the howling juniors to a state of a proper appreciation of their own iniquity and insignificance, only sent them into a gasping condition of shrieking laughter, verging on the hysterical.

"Wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The truth of the case suddenly dawned on Arthur Augustus, and he dropped the useless rim.

"Quite a cheerful afternoon!" said Digby, brushing his clothes down with his hand. "That's a ripping record, Merry! We must— Hallo! Hold him somebody!"

Digby's voice reminded the swell of St. Jim's of something, and he made a stride in his chum's direction. He only took one step, and his vengeance was deferred, for his foot landed on Fatty Wynn, and with a howl the one and only tripped and went to the floor with a bump.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

Uproar broke forth again, and in the midst of it all the door opened.

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## CHAPTER 3.

### The Meeting and D'Arcy's Bright Idea.

"WHAT the dickens—" Kildare, tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, stood in the doorway. Long experience of the Fourth had taught him that under the leadership of Tom Merry there was no prank that they were incapable of, but the chaotic condition of the study and the ruffled and even ragged appearance of the eleven juniors caused him to look from one to another in amazement.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Just a little friendly gathering, Kildare, to celebrate the event, you know," replied Tom Merry airily.

"But—" The captain of St. Jim's waved his hand comprehensively.

"Oh, that's 'Uncle Johnson'!"

"'Uncle Johnson'?"

"Yes. You see, some of them got rather excited, you know, and—and—"

"And showed their excitement in a very forcible way, so I should say," interrupted the captain. "Gr— Is that you, D'Arcy?"

The swell of St. Jim's felt very dignified, but in appearance he failed dismally, and an involuntary chuckle went round.

"What was that you said about 'Uncle Johnson,' Merry? Where is he?"

The chuckle over D'Arcy's deplorable state became a giggle at Kildare's bewilderment.

The captain frowned.

"That'll do, you youngsters!" he said sharply.

The juniors instantly became serious as owls.

"Now, what's this about 'Uncle—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The captain's return to the subject of "Uncle Johnson" was an irresistible cause of merriment, and for a brief moment the Fourth-Formers swayed with uncontrollable delight.

The only one that did not laugh was Arthur Augustus, that is, excepting Kildare.

The senior was one of the best tempered at St. Jim's, but a perfect saint could hardly have kept an even frame of mind under the storm of laughter; but the captain did not lose his temper, he simply put his hand in his pocket and drew out his notebook and pencil.

Jack Blake had his head thrown back, and was roaring with delight, but directly he saw the notebook his guffaw stopped abruptly, and the others followed. The last cackle of glee came from Digby, and as it rang out in the silence he eyed the book and pencil with an apprehensive look.

"Shall I say a hundred each?" inquired the captain, with a grim smile.

"Weally, Kildare, I—"

"D'Arcy, one hundred. Digby, Manners, Lowther, Tom—"

"Oh, I say, Kildare! Let me explain," cried the leader of the Shell hastily. "You see—"

"As one gentleman to another," interrupted Arthur Augustus, "I considah the mattah had bettah dwop. I—" "Be quiet, ass!" muttered Jack Blake. "Can't you see Kildare is ratty."

"I absolutely wufese to be called an ass. Kildare is not watty. It's a misapprehension. I will—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!" said the captain. "Now, then, Merry, you young rascal, explain!"

Tom Merry pushed his hand through his curly hair, and fidgeted uneasily.

"You see, I—we—that is—"

The junior stopped, and thrust his handkerchief into his mouth.

"Yes?" said Kildare, quietly turning over a page of his notebook. "I—we— What comes next?"

Tom Merry looked round in despair, and devotedly wished "Uncle Johnson" at the bottom of the sea. Then, on the principle that actions speak louder than words, he took the record off the gramophone and handed it in silence to the senior.

Almost mechanically the captain took the disc. The juniors held their breath.

Kildare looked closely at the record, and the corners of his mouth went up.

The juniors took heart at once, and they grinned cheerfully, as with a short laugh the senior handed "Uncle Johnson" back to Tom Merry and shut up his notebook.

"Why the dickens didn't you explain at once?" he said. "However, that does not matter now. I should advise you to put that record away in a drawer and lock it. Now, don't let me hear any more noise, or I shall gate the whole lot of you."

"All right, Kildare. We won't kick up a shindy!" cried Tom Merry. "I'll see that these kids behave themselves."

"Mind you do," said the captain as he turned to go. "And under the circumstances I will take back those lines, but—"

"Hip, hip— Ow!" shouted Digby.

"Thanks, Kildare!" cried the others.

"Good old Kildare!" exclaimed Jack Blake as the study door closed. "Good old— Hallo! What's the matter with you?"

"Digging me in the ribs like that!" cried Digby. "What d'you mean by it?"

"That! Oh, you don't take any notice of a dig, do you? Besides, what d'you want to go pip-piping like that for? Didn't we say we weren't going to kick up a shindy?"

"That's all very fine," grumbled the junior.

"Never mind, it was only a dig. Ha, ha, ha! See?"

Monty Lowther laughed hilariously at his own joke, but the rest observed a stolid silence.

"Ha, ha, ha! A dig for Dig. See?"

The inquiry was almost pathetic, but there was no response.

A sad expression dwelt on every face.

"I say," said Monty Lowther, tapping Tom Merry on the shoulder. "Don't you see the joke?"

"Joke—eh? Where?"

Tom Merry looked round as if he expected to see it somewhere about on the floor.

"Joke, did you say?" he muttered vaguely. "Joke?"

Monty Lowther turned away with a sniff.

"Never came across such a set in all my natural," he muttered. "Can't see a joke like that. Jolly good, I call it!"

Tom Merry grinned at his chum's discomfiture, and then eyed the swell of St. Jim's, who was vainly trying to restore his personal appearance to something approaching its accustomed state of dapper elegance.

"It's not a bit of good, Gussy. Might just as well try to comb your hair with a frying-pan as with your hands. Besides, look at your face; it's like Farmer Simkins's mare—piebald. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Even Monty Lowther forgot his chagrin, and joined in the general laugh at the expense of Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's glared, and then rushed to the glass.

"Bai Jove!" He shrank back in positive horror at his reflection. "Bai Jove, I must change! Pway excuse me, deah boys. I will return in a sec."

Arthur Augustus bolted for the door.

"Don't be late in the morning, Gussy!" shouted Jack Blake, as the swell of St. Jim's whisked up the corridor.

"Jingo, I forgot!"

"What's the matter now?" cried Tom Merry.

"Why, that tea!"

"Oh, goodness, yes! Gussy's the man with the money, and he's gone to change. That means at least a couple of hours. Let's have a whip-round, and see what we can raise."

The proposal aroused no great enthusiasm, and the juniors looked at one another doubtfully.

Tom Merry banged some small change down on the table. It sounded a lot, and for one brief moment Fatty Wynn's face brightened. But it was only a passing ray of sunshine, for the junior's voice announced gloomily:

"Ninepence!"

"I'm afraid I'm not much better," said Jack Blake. "Lemme see. One, two, three, three and a half. Here's another halfpenny. That's all. Fourpence!"

"I've got tuppence," announced Digby.

"Sevenpence, here!" cried Manners.

"Three ha'pence!" grunted Lowther.

"One-and-three!" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha! A giddy millionaire at last!" shouted Jack Blake. "How are you, Merry?"

"Tuppence!"

"Oh, we can't buy up the show on that! What about you, Fatty? Come on, shell out!"

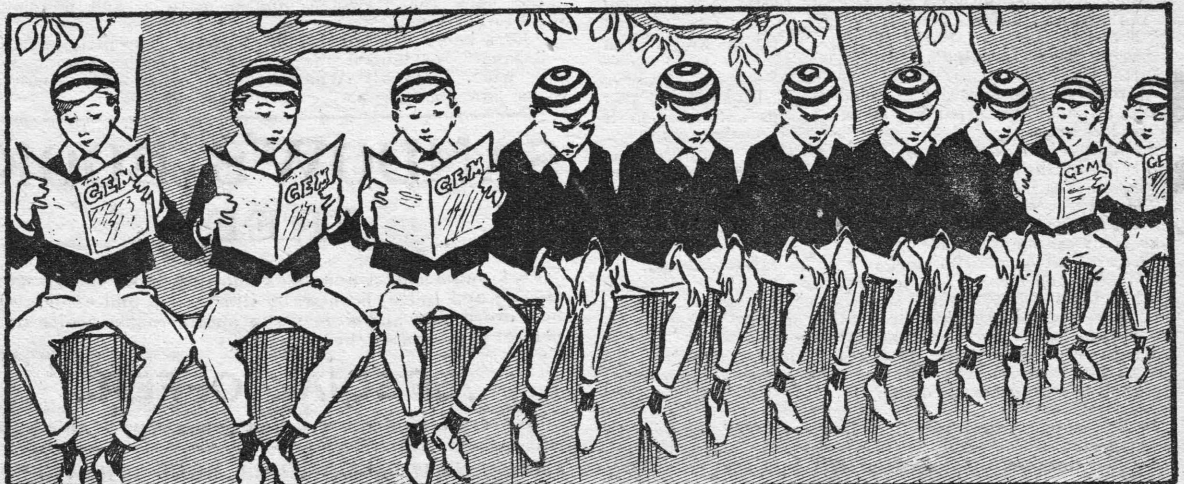
The Falstaff of St. Jim's advanced to the table, and with a show of reluctance planked down a coin.

"Lift up your fist, Fatty!" cried Tom Merry, leaning forward. "I believe we've struck oil at last. Bah! Fat-head!"

"My only hat!" gasped Jack Blake, picking up the coin.

"A ha'penny, and all that beastly fuss. Here, Fatty, you take that back, and go round to the tuckshop and order tea

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for us all. Hang the expense! And mind you don't lose the change."

Fatty Wynn grunted and retired, muttering something about feeling faint.

"There's Kerr— Oh, he's not here! What about you, Dane—flush?" cried Tom Merry.

"No, I'm not; wish I were," said Clifton Dane. "I've only got about sixpence."

"That's done it!" said Jack Blake. "We can't get enough to feed a canary on, let alone an octopus like Fatty. We shall have to fall back on Gussy after all."

"Well, while we're waiting let's fix up the question of to-morrow!" exclaimed Herries. "I want to go and feed Tower."

"Oh, bother that pup!" said Digby unfeelingly. "I wonder you don't want him to have his supper, or whatever you call it, off the Head's gold plate."

"By jingo!" cried Tom Merry. "That was a ripping idea of the governors of the old coll. I wish we'd thought of it. They kept the thing so beastly dark. Why, the Head must have been here a jolly long time! Twenty-five years! I suppose they meant it as a sort of silver wedding memento. Anyhow, we came off pretty well. What with week-ends and this extra 'whole, why—well, we shall get tired of holidays by-and-by."

"I don't think!" said Jack Blake. "I can just fancy us presenting the Head with a piece of gold plate. Why, we should have to go without feeds for the rest of our lives! Ha, ha, ha! Look at Fatty!"

The fat junior was hunched up on a chair, and looking as lugubrious as a wet week.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you chaps to cackle," he mumbled; "but I'm as hungry as—as anything. I always get famished this time of the year, and"—he went on inconsequently—"if I promised a chap some ginger-beer I would carry out my promise."

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose that's a hint for me!" cried Tom Merry, going to the cupboard and rummaging about. "By jingo, I believe they're all empty! No, they're not."

The leader of the Shell went down on his hands and knees, and groped about at the back of the cupboard. He soon found what he wanted, but he kept up a chatter while he gave the stone bottle a vigorous shake.

There was a twinkle in Jack Blake's eye as Tom Merry handed the bottle into Fatty's eager grasp, but none of the others had observed anything.

"Has that—er—any brothers or sisters?" inquired Digby suggestively.

"No, it's an 'orphan!"

"Never mind then, I'll have some of Fatty's."

"Oh, will you!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, sitting bolt upright and struggling with the string over the cork. "You get some of your own; I can't sp—"

Pop! Swish!

"Ow! Wooh! G-r-r-r! Oh-o-o-oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Fatty Wynn's greedy little speech had been cut short by the sudden expulsion of the cork, and he was drenched and left gasping in a shower-bath of the precious and so selfishly coveted ginger-beer.

"Ugh-gug! I—I—I'm so-soaked! Ugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let—let me give you a wipe down, Fatty," suggested Herries, holding his hand out for the bottle still clutched by the gasping junior.

"N-no!" spluttered Fatty Wynn. "You go away. I'm all right. I—g-g-g—ah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Greedy little porpoise!" cried Jack Blake, as Fatty applied the half-emptied bottle to his lips and drained it to the last drop.

"I believe you shook it up!" roared Fatty, dropping the empty bottle in the fireplace, mopping his brow, and glaring at the smiling face of Tom Merry.

"Did I? Well, p'raps my hand did shake a bit, you know. Never mind, you'll get over it presently, and it'll save you washing your face for tea."

The Falstaff of St. Jim's began to look rather excited.

"What d'you mean?" he demanded.

"I believe Fatty thought at first he was going to pop off!" observed Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!"

In an instant every face became grave.

Monty Lowther's laugh at his own joke died dimly away. His face got very red, and an expression of wrathful indignation came into his eyes.

"You set of—"

At that moment the study door flew open, and, arrayed in all his glory, the swell of St. Jim's came in, and a hubbub arose that drowned the junior's protesting voice.

"Jingo! I am glad to see you, Gussy!" shouted Jack Blake, catching hold of his study-chum's hand and shaking it vigorously. "I am glad!"

"So am I!" roared Tom Merry, bringing a hard fist down on D'Arcy's shoulder. "I am glad!"

Directly Blake let go of the swell of St. Jim's hand, Digby seized it, and began pumping it up and down as if his life depended on wrenching it off.

"Bai—bai Jove!"

"I am glad to see you!" panted Digby.

"Jolly glad! Delighted!" roared Manners. "Give us your flipper!"

"Bai Jove! Wottahs! Welease me; you're wumpling my waistcoat!"

Whack!

"I am glad!"

Bang!

"Wottahs!"

"I'm so delighted!"

"Welease me!"

Bang!

"Wescue!"

"I am glad to see you!"

"Welease my hand!"

Whack!

"Ow!"

"Wottahs!"

Rumpled and indignant, the swell of St. Jim's wrenched himself free.

"You outwageous wottahs!"

"M-m-m—yes, I believe we've overdid the welcome," muttered Jack Blake.

"Hard lines!"

The juniors jumped.

In the doorway stood Gore—George Gore—the Cad of St. Jim's. Big and lazy, and too much of a shirker to ever do any good.

"Hallo, chaps!"

The junior advanced a few steps with a grimace that he fondly imagined was a genial grin.

"Hallo! Quite a happy meeting!"

Dead silence.

"I said 'hallo!'"

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass and surveyed the intruder.

"Jolly glad to see you, Gussy!" said Gore, patting the swell of St. Jim's familiarly on the shoulder. "Got anything on for to-morrow?"

Arthur Augustus withdrew a step haughtily.

"Wemove your hand!"

Gore scowled, and looked as if he was going to make some angry rejoinder; but changed his mind.

"All right!" he said. "Keep your wool on! I suppose a chap can speak? That's a nobby gramophone of yours, Tom Merry! Got any new records?"

The leader of the Shell stared hard. The geniality of Gore was beyond comprehension. Tom Merry forgot to answer.

Gore did not seem to mind, however, and addressed himself to Jack Blake.

"What the dickens does he want? He's up to some dodge!" muttered Digby.

It was seldom that the leader of Study 6 was at a loss, but the inexplicable attitude and assumption of familiarity on the part of Gore nonplussed him for a moment.

But Jack Blake seldom minced matters, and he chose the straight road.

"Look here," he said sharply, "what's your little game?"

"Game!" exclaimed the cad of St. Jim's opening his eyes wide. "Game! What d'you mean? I only came in to see how you chaps were getting on, and—and—"

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Beneath the clear, uncompromising glance of the junior the cad's gaze shifted, and his voice faltered.

"I—I came to see about to-morrow," he added lamely.

"Oh!"

There was a world of meaning in the single exclamation, but the cad of St. Jim's was not particularly keen-witted, and he plunged on recklessly.

"There's a fair on at Ribdale to-morrow," he said, "and I thought p'raps you chaps would like to make up a party and—"

"That's very thoughtful of you," interrupted Jack Blake.

"Yes—I mean no. It's nothing. We could have a whip-round and share the exes."

"What a cheek!" muttered Manners.

"What sort of a fair is it?" inquired the leader of Study 6.

"Oh, the usual thing, you know—roundabouts and things. Plenty of fun."

"Nothing else?"

"Oh, shooting-ranges and that kind of thing, you know."

"But we don't—" commenced Tom Merry. Then, catching Blake's eye, he stopped abruptly.

"Isn't there anything else?" proceeded Jack Blake.

Gore cast a swift searching glance at the junior's face.

"What else d'you want?" he demanded peevishly. "A blessed world's fair, or what?"

"No!" replied Jack Blake. "We don't want that, or any of your beastly funny business; nor yet do we want to get expelled."

"Expelled!"

"Yes, expelled."

"Here, that's a bit strong, Blake!" exclaimed Digby.

"The Head—"

"You shut up, Dig!" snapped Jack Blake.

"But—"

Gore retreated a step towards the door, and as Jack Blake made a swift stride forward, a look of comprehension flashed into Tom Merry's face, and he thrust a hard fist between the cad's collar and neck.

"Leggo!" shouted Gore.

"Yes, you beauty," cried Tom Merry, "I'll let you go when you're outside. Then you can go to the beastly races by yourself."

A howl of rage went up as the rest of the juniors realised the cad's subterfuge, and a rush was made. It would have gone hard with George Gore had they laid hands on him then, but Tom Merry and Blake were too quick.

The cad was hustled to the door, and sent flying into the corridor with the toe of Jack's boot.

"Lemme get at him!" howled Manners. "I'll—"

"No, you won't do anything of the kind, old son!" cried Tom Merry, blocking up the doorway.

"I shall pahsue the wottah, and administah a feahful fwashin'!"

"You get back, Gussy," said Jack Blake, shutting the door. "If you don't quell your thirst for blood—Gore I mean, I'll—well, I'll rumple your waistcoat."

The swell of St. Jim's retired hastily.

## CHAPTER 4.

### A Bad Lot!

"H E'S a bad lot!" said Jack Blake. "But we can't be bothered with him now. What about tea? It's all right, Monty; you can stop simmering with rage, and put the kettle on."

"Don't mention it!" cried Tom Merry, with a laugh. "Make yourself at home. Manners, hand his lordship a chair."

The kettle was duly placed on the oilstove, and then every eye, as if moved by a common spring, turned on Arthur Augustus.

Fatty Wynn hunted for his cap, and stood waiting.

The swell of St. Jim's was busy in front of the mirror adjusting his necktie to the fraction of an inch.

The juniors waited patiently.

Presently Jack Blake gave a little cough.

Arthur Augustus took no notice.

"Ahem!"

"The kettle's nearly boiling!"

"A-hem!"

The swell of St. Jim's turned slowly, still fingering his tie.

"Bai Jove! Have you chaps got colds?"

"Oh, no!" said Jack Blake easily. "We're just getting ready for tea!"

"Bai Jove, yes, I'm extremely hungwy! I—"

Arthur Augustus turned to the mirror again, and the coughing broke out afresh.

Fatty Wynn began to fidget uneasily. To the voracious youngster the prospect of tea seemed to be a long way off, and he took the bull by the horns.

"Fork out, D'Arcy, the tuckshop will be closed."

The swell of St. Jim's swung round and stared at Fatty Wynn in amazement.

"Are you addressin' me?"

"Who d'you think?" grunted Fatty. "You're standing a feed, aren't you?"

"Bai Jove!"

In his astonishment the swell of St. Jim's dropped his monocle.

"Bai Jove!" he repeated, in a bewildered tone. "Pway explain."

"Look here," interrupted Jack Blake. "No, Fatty, you shut up. Look here, Gussy, you're going to stand us a feed. We're stony, so there's nothing else to be done. Come on, now, deliver up the treacle-pot, or off goes your head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I—"

"No buts, Gussy!" cried Blake. "Stand and deliver, or we'll stand you on your head and, shake the golden coins from your purse. No larks or buts. Dub up!"

The leader of Study 6 was taking things with a high hand, and Arthur Augustus lifted his chin aggressively.

"Your wemarks, Blake, are wibald and wudicrous. I absolutely wefuse to deliver up the tweacle-pot, or to allow you to stand me on my head. I should feel extremely pleased to stand you boundahs a tweat, but—"

"Hear, hear!"

"But undah the cires, I—"

"Hear, hear! Good old Gussy!"

"But undah the cires—"

"Hear, hear! Bravo!"

Tom Merry slapped the swell of St. Jim's vigorously on the back.

Jack Blake also advanced, but Arthur Augustus retreated precipitately, and stood with his back placed close to the wall. He moved his hands in front of him as if a horde of bees were threatening him.

"Your wuffness is most wewpewehensible. I shall wetiah!"

"Now, Gussy," said Jack Blake, wagging his forefinger close to D'Arcy's nose, "don't be a gasbag, and don't be stingy!"

Tom Merry and the others gasped. No one could ever accuse the swell of St. Jim's of being mean; but Jack Blake knew what he was about. He used a heavy shot and brought down his game. There was a grin on his face as Arthur Augustus plunged his hand in his pocket and brought out half-a-sovereign.

It was gone in the wink of an eyelid, and with the coin safely lodged in his podgy hand, Fatty Wynn trotted off. He, at any rate, was not going to trouble beyond the present moment.

"Wottah!"

The single expression escaped the swell of St. Jim's, and he glared indignantly at Jack Blake.

The latter had the grace to grin sheepishly.

"All right, Gussy," he said. "You know very well I was only pulling your leg. But you're such an obstinate image sometimes, that it requires a coke-hammer to bring you to your senses. Anyway, it saved time, didn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rather! I should think it did!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "It's a good job Gussy knows you, though, or he would have risen in wrath and we should have been left starving."

Arthur Augustus took out a gorgeous silk handkerchief and began polishing his eyeglass. There was a frown on his brow, and he seemed to be far from being his usual unruffled self.

Jack Blake hooked his arm in that of the offended one, and shook him gently.

"Come on, Gussy, don't be a beast. It was only a jape. Of course, you knew I wasn't serious. Besides, we only wanted to borrow the tin, in any case. Come on, shake."

The swell of St. Jim's smiled and held out his hand.

"It was a wotten twick, all the same," he observed.

"Don't you make any mistake, old son!" cried Jack Blake. "It was a giddy stroke of diplomacy—that's what that was. The next time I want you to get a move on, I shall call you a thief, or something of that kind. Now chase those tears away, and everything in the study will be beautiful."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't think!" muttered Digby.

"Probably you don't," retorted Manners. "You've only got to step over to the looking-glass, and—"

"Are you looking for a thic' ear?"

Manners gazed up at the ceiling, and did not hear the pertinent question.

The entrance of Fatty Wynn, loaded to his eyebrows with a variety of parcels, cut short any developments, and Jack Blake cleared the table by the simple expedient of lifting the cloth corner ways, and twisting it into a bundle.

"Hold on!" shouted Tom Merry. "You silly cuckoo!"

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There's all the 'Weekly' stuff there! Fathead, you've mixed it all up!"

"Don't you worry, old son," said Jack Blake, as he slung the bundle into a corner. "It's all right. Besides, it won't make much difference if the copy does get a bit mixed. It'll liven things up a bit."

"I'll liven you up if you don't look out," retorted Tom Merry. "Not so much of your old buck, or we'll put you through it."

"Rather!" said Manners. "The cheek of it! Anybody would think this was a beastly kennel like Study 6. Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That'll keep you quiet for a while!" cried Blake, with a laugh, as he grabbed a jam-puff and, with a nicely-calculated thrust, wedged it into the indignant junior's mouth. Eh?"

"M-m-m—"

"Don't understand, but I suppose you mean well."

Manners glared, but ate the tart, and by the time he had finished, the table was laid, and his wrath had evaporated.

For the next ten minutes there was very little talking.

Jam-tarts, jam-rolls, sausage-rolls, and cake kept them all fully occupied, and even the fastidious swell of St. Jim's mixed the order of things, and partook impartially of sausages, sardines, and pastry.

To Fatty Wynn nothing came amiss, but it was not surprising in his case, for the Falstaff of St. Jim's had been known to dispose of strawberry-jam and sardine-sandwiches.

"That's better!" exclaimed Tom Merry, at last, putting down his teacup with a clatter. "I feel a new man again!"

"Again?" queried Monty Lowther.

The leader of the Shell eyed his partner suspiciously.

"Don't you try to be funny, Monty. It doesn't become your style of beauty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh was decidedly against Monty Lowther. An avenging hand had unconsciously administered punishment, for just as he had reached out for the last apricot-tart, a fat fist shot across the table, and Monty Lowther's hand descended on the empty plate.

"Got him!" muttered Fatty Wynn, quite unconsciously, and referring to the tart. "Got him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By the time the laughter at the discomfited junior had died away, the tart had disappeared.

Fatty Wynn looked round in surprise.

"What are you chaps cackling about?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther grunted, and then joined in the fresh outbreak.

Fatty Wynn looked mystified, and then glanced round to see if there was anything in the eating line left. But the table was bare, and he got slowly to his feet.

"I say, Dane, if you don't want that bob, you might let me have it till to-morrow. I shall get some tin in the morning, and—"

Clifton Dane threw the shilling down on the table, and Fatty Wynn waddled to the door.

"Thanks, Dane!" he mumbled. "That was a jolly good feed of yours, D'Arcy, but, you see, you chaps eat such a lot that I really must get down to the tuckshop and have a few tarts or something. I feel quite faint."

"Greedy little cormorant!" cried Tom Merry, as the fat junior shut the door. "No wonder poor old Figgy is so long and lanky! I suppose Fatty wolfs all the grub. You'll have to feed him on fig-pudding!"

The memory of the famous pudding made by the leader of the New House was as green as ever, and the juniors had good reason for their recollection, since Figgins had artlessly tried the addition of syrup of figs to flavour the mixture.

It was a sore point with Figgins—that pudding, but he managed to summon up a feeble grin.

"You never had the pleasure, did you, Dane?" said Blake.

"No; but p'r'aps our worthy chum will oblige again," replied Clifton Dane, with a grin.

"Save us!" gasped Manners. "I hope not. If you'd had some, I believe Figgy would now be resting beneath the daisies."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's up?"

Bang, bang, bang!

Tom Merry stood up and thumped the table with the teapot.

"Order!"

"Mind the teapot!" cried Manners anxiously. "It cost us ninepence, and it's the third in a fortnight."

"Order!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Order! Silence for the speaker!" shouted Jack Blake.

"Ordah!" echoed Arthur Augustus.

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"Shut up!" roared Lowther.

"Silence!" cried Clifton Dane.

"Silence, yourself!" shouted Manners. "You're kicking up all the row! Silence! Order!"

Bang! Crash!

"I said that would happen!" howled Manners, as the teapot flew into atoms.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry seized the milkjug and began a tattoo on a plate.

"Order!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Are you chaps going to shut up?"

The juniors shouted at one another to keep quiet, and at last something like silence was obtained.

"You're a set of silly asses!"

"Hear, hear! It's this Study Six crowd!" shouted Lowther. "They're kicking up all the row!"

"Shut up, Monty!" commanded Tom Merry.

"But—"

"Are you going to shut up, or are you going to be pitched out?"

Monty Lowther muttered something about he'd like to see them try it on, but relapsed into comparative silence.

"Now, then," said Tom Merry, holding the milkjug ready, "we have to decide on a programme for to-morrow."

"Hear, hear!"

The leader of the Shell bowed.

"I'm glad you agree with me."

"Get on with—"

"Cut the cackle!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Order!"

The milkjug looked like flying into smithereens, and in preparing to dodge the fragments, the juniors forgot to shout.

Tom Merry took a long breath, and prepared for a fresh start.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Morrow's Programme.

THE leader of the Shell looked round, coughed, and cleared his throat.

"I've been thinking—"

"Go hon!" muttered Jack Blake.

"I've been thinking," repeated Tom Merry, "and as chairman of the meeting, I call upon Jack Blake to stand up and make his suggestion for to-morrow."

The leader of Study 6 gasped.

"I—I—"

"Won't it do if he remains seated?" suggested Manners sarcastically.

"We're waiting, Blake," said Tom Merry. "Trot out your idea."

"I— Oh, rats!" cried Jack Blake. "I thought you were going to propose something."

"All right," said Tom Merry sweetly; "you haven't any ideas. I call upon Digby."

Digby turned scarlet. He had been chuckling at Blake, but the joke was against himself now.

"Dear me, Digby has nothing to say! Herries?"

Herries sprang to his feet.

"There's a dog-show at—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sit down!"

"Boo-oh!"

"Fancy suggesting a mouldy puppy exhibition!"

"Herries' suggestion!" cried Tom Merry. "Anybody in favour?"

A chorus of boos and shouts of dissent filled the study.

"Very well. I call upon Arthur Augustus!"

"What about me?" shouted Manners. "I— Shut up, Blake!"

"Sit down!" roared the leader of Study 6. "The chairman called for Gussy; you wait."

Grumbling, and vowing vengeance, Manners subsided. He had to.

The swell of St. Jim's stood up.

"Deah boys—"

"Bravo!" shouted Monty Lowther. "Jolly good!"

"Speak up!"

Bang, bang, bang!

The milk-jug came into use, and Arthur Augustus was allowed to continue.

For one thing, it was getting late, and the question of the morrow had to be settled. The Co.'s collectively and individually meant to make the most of it, and there would have been little sleep for any one of them if the matter remained undecided.

"I wefuse to be intewwupted." Arthur Augustus paused and looked round.



It was hard luck; but the swell of St. Jim's listened to the merry voices coming from the tea-room with an air of studied indifference

All were serious, and the swell of St. Jim's beamed. "I wegard the mattah as a vevy sewious one, and I express my surprishe that Tom Mewwy did not call upon me befoah. In a case of this importance, it is perfectly cleah that a set of duffahs' opinions are quite useless, and undah the circs. I wewimand the chairman."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's one in the eye for Merry!"

The swell of St. Jim's bowed.

"The mattah has already been fwashed out to some extent in the quadwangle, and the pwoposals of Skimpole wejected with vigouah. I pwopose—" There was a movement of excitement as Arthur Augustus paused. "I pwopose a wipping picnic, and—"

"Rotten!"

"Look at the last one!"

"What a cock-eyed idea!"

"Sit down!"

"Is that the best you can do?"

The swell of St. Jim's stood his ground, and Tom Merry used the milk-jug.

Bang!

"Rot!" cried Figgins. "I think—"

"Order!"

"I think that—"

"Order, order!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Figgins. "Oh, all right, get on with it! It's a rotten idea, all the same."

Arthur Augustus faced the leader of the New House, and froze him with a glance. At least, that was the intention,

but apparently it had little effect on Figgins, for he sniffed contemptuously.

"I pwoposed a picnic," said the swell of St. Jim's firmly, and keeping his eye on Figgins, "and if you wottahs had not been so wude as to bweak the stwain of my address, I should have pwoposed also that a wiah should be sent this evenin' befoah we wetiah to my cousin, Miss Cleveland; but—"

"Cousin Ethel!" ejaculated Figgins, flushing red and sitting bolt upright. "Jolly good, Gussy! That's a ripping idea! I vote for the picnic. Good!"

"You're mighty enthusiastic 'all of a sudden," said Manners.

"Is it the picnic or Cousin Ethel you're so pleased about?" inquired Digby pointedly.

The leader of the New House ignored these remarks, and thumped the table vigorously.

Tom Merry laughed.

"All right, Figgy, keep your wool on. You sit down, Gussy; you've done your bit, and I call for a show of hands."

Up went Figgins's hand.

Tom Merry leaned across the table and looked at it critically.

"Rather dirty!" he observed. "Better have a wash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's mighty anxious for the picnic now, at any rate," said Jack Blake, with a grin. "Well, I'm willing, for one."

"Are you all agreeable?" cried Tom Merry.

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A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
By Martin Clifford.

NEXT  
THURSDAY:

"A SON OF THE EMPIRE."

All hands went up, and Figgins did his best not to notice the grins on every face.

"Passed!" said Tom Merry laconically. "Now about details. How about funds?"

"I'm expecting some tin to-morrow morning," cried Figgins.

"Good!" said Tom Merry drily. "But anxious as you are, I'm afraid that we cannot allow you the privilege of standing the picnic all on your own."

"Wathah not!" cried the swell of St. Jim's. "I will take the whole responsibility."

"No, you won't!" said Tom Merry calmly. "This is not going to be a beastly one-horse affair. We're all in this, and those who can't dub up their share will have to borrow from the millionaires, and pay it back afterwards. We are already indebted to Gussy for the feed this evening."

"I regard that as a pleasure, and—"

"I dare say you do, old chap," said Tom Merry. "So do we, but we're not going to sponge on you."

"Hear, hear!" shouted Jack Blake.

"He talks like a giddy Chancellor of the Exchequer!" cried Manners. "It's a jolly good wheeze, though!"

After some wrangling, the matter was settled as proposed by the chairman, and then Jack Blake & Co. and Figgins prepared to take their departure.

"Better see this New House boulder off the premises, I suppose," said Jack Blake. "We don't want him walking off with the Head's bit of presentation gold plate."

"Not much fear of that," replied Tom Merry, as they all crowded out of the study. "I expect the doctor's got it in his safe by now."

"Safe!" chuckled Monty Lowther, as they walked down the corridor. "Then it's safe! Ha, ha, ha!"

Eight pairs of feet echoed down the corridor, clattered down the stairs, but there was no talking.

Monty Lowther had committed himself again.

"Don't let's kick up a row as we pass the Head's study," said Tom Merry, when they reached the lower passage. "We don't want him to come out and spot Figgy. I don't think he likes New House boulders over here."

A subdued chuckle greeted this.

Figgins walked on in front. He could afford to pass over any rude remarks, that is if he even overheard. His mind was in the future. He was thinking of the morrow, and—

"I say," he said, stopping abruptly, "you won't forget that telegram—to Miss Cleveland, will you?"

"Pway leave the mattach to me," replied Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I shall not forget to wiah to my cousin."

There was unusual emphasis on the "my," and Jack Blake chuckled.

They passed the Head's study. The door was wide open.

"My hat!" exclaimed the leader of Study 6. "Did you notice?"

"What?"

"Why, the Head's left his giddy gold plate on the mantelpiece. Good job we're looking after Figgy."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, I considah that's most wisky!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, with much seriousness, "we shall have to call the Head over the coals for being so careless. The very idea! You will have to mention the matter to him, Gussy."

"You're wottin', Tom Mewwy!"

"No, not really," replied the junior. "I'm only talking to a silly ass. Here we are! So long, Figgy!"

On the steps leading into the quad, the leader of the New House stopped suddenly.

"I—I say, Gussy, you won't forget, will you? That telegram, I mean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned away with his nose in the air.

"It's all right, Gussy," said Jack Blake soothingly, as they watched the long-legged Figgins cross the quad, and disappear into the New House. "It's only natural that Figgy should feel a bit anxious. You're an absent-minded beggar. By the way, how the dickens are you going to get that wire off?"

The swell of St. Jim's favoured his chum with a stony stare.

"I shall send Binks," he said briefly.

"Ho, ho! Varlet, begone!" muttered Blake. "Ha, ha! The plot thickens! All right, ass. You'd better hunt him up now. D'you think Cousin Ethel will catch an early train?"

"I shall request her to come by the 6.45," replied Arthur Augustus.

"My aunt! Fancy making the poor girl get up at that unearthly hour," muttered Blake as D'Arcy walked off.

"Why, she'll have to get up about five!"

"Cousin Ethel won't mind that," said Tom Merry. "She's not one of your namby-pamby girls. I bet she'll be jolly glad of the chance. What d'you chaps say to going to bed

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now? I'm jolly tired. All this gassing has about did me up."

"Right-ho!"

Bed was the order of the day, or rather night, for the summer twilight had merged into darkness, and the juniors trooped back. As they passed the Head's room they all saw the light from the lamp gleaming on the valuable piece of plate.

The Terrible Three spent a hurried ten minutes in their study, clearing up the disorder caused by the meeting, and then, yawning and sleepy, made tracks for their dormitory.

Jack Blake & Co. had already retired, and Tom Merry bent over the bed next to his own.

The dignity of Arthur Augustus deserted him in his sleep, for he was snoring as unmelodiously as the veriest commoner. But although he was sleeping so soundly, the mind of the junior was filled with the picture of that gold plate in the Head's study, and visions of grim-visaged burglars crowded round, and his dreams fast assumed a nightmarish reality.

"Gussy's driving the pigs to market with a vengeance," said Tom Merry, as he flung his coat off. "I sha'n't be long, either."

"Neither shall I," said Manners gaping. "Oh-o-o-oh!"

Yawning prodigiously the Terrible Three tumbled into their beds, and with happy anticipations for the morrow soon dropped off to sleep, and one by one joined Arthur Augustus in his snore-song.

For ten minutes no unusual sound disturbed the long, dark dormitory, then a bed at the end creaked, and someone sat up cautiously.

"Mellish!"

A hoarse whisper betrayed the figure sitting up in bed to be that of Gore, the cad of St. Jim's.

"Mellish!"

Gore leaned out of bed and whispered in the ear of his partner and toady.

Mellish stirred slightly.

With a muttered exclamation, Gore stretched out a hand and shook the sleeper gently.

"Mellish!"

"Ugh! G-r-r-r! W-what is it?"

"S-ssh! You fool!" hissed Gore.

"What d'you want?" grumbled Mellish, rubbing his eyes.

"Wazzertime?"

"Never mind what the time is," whispered Gore. "Wake up! Did you get those cigarettes?"

"Wazzermatter?" grunted Mellish. "Lemme alone!"

Gore gripped the junior by the shoulder.

"Did you get those cigarettes?" he repeated cautiously.

Mellish wriggled uncomfortably.

"N-no!" he muttered. "I—"

"Out with it!" whispered Gore, as loud as he dared.

"I—I asked Binks to get them."

Gore snorted.

"Did you give him the money?" he demanded.

"Yes, of course!"

"Fool! Suppose he's forgotten them? You know very well that we can't get them to-morrow. Someone would be sure to spot us."

Mellish tried to wriggle away from the hand on his shoulder.

"No, you don't!" growled the cad. "I don't believe you sent Binks at all. You spent the tin on some rotten tuck!"

"No—no I didn't!" whined Mellish.

"See here!" whispered Gore. "I'm going to find out about this."

"What!"

"I'm going down to Binks's room, and if he hasn't got those cigarettes you'll know it!"

The cad of St. Jim's got out of bed cautiously, and slipped a pair of trousers on over his pyjamas.

Mellish watched the dim figure steal across the dormitory and vanish silently into the corridor.

"Hope to goodness he gets caught by the Head," he muttered spitefully. "The beast!"

## CHAPTER 6.

### D'Arcy the Sleep-Walker.

"M'ot!"

Binks entered his little room and fumbled about for the matches. He had despatched the telegram to Cousin Ethel, and the run to and from the village post-office had left him hot and panting for breath.

He had only just managed to reach the office in time, and had had to hasten back to get in before Taggles went to bed and locked up for the night.

"Phew!"

The boot-boy lighted his lamp, and then picked up a letter he had brought with him. It was addressed in a scrawling, shaly hand, and the boy's face softened.

"This 'ere's a bit of fat," he muttered. "If I 'adn't 'ave gorn with that telegraft I shouldn't 'ave 'ad this 'ere till ter-morrer. Wonder 'ow mother's gettin' on!"

Binks pulled the sheet of crumpled common notepaper from its envelope as carefully as any lover would treat a missive from his lady-love.

The boot-boy's life was more kicks than ha'pence, and if he dropped his "h's" and committed errors that brought upon him the sneers of Gore and his satellites, he nursed in his heart one bright and comforting memory, and the pale, gentle face of his mother rose between his eyes and her letter.

Binks was rough, and could hold his own with the best when it came to a question of pluck, but he kept himself to himself, so no one knew that nearly all his wages were despatched regularly every month to the sender of the letter.

So far as lay in his power the boot-boy had carried out his father's last words, "Look after your mother." His loyal little heart leaped over the miles that separated mother and son, and every week he laboriously wrote to her.

It never occurred to Binks that his was a hard life, and indeed in comparison St. Jim's was to him a land of peace and plenty to what it had been in London, the city of hustle, bustle, and silent, uncomplaining suffering. There was nothing but an expression of pleasure on his face when the boot-boy sat down by his little table to read his mother's letter.

Binks read slowly at first, but when he turned the page over his hand trembled slightly and his eyes travelled over the lines rapidly.

"I believe she's ill!" he murmured. "I——"  
The lad broke off, and sat silent for a while. His elbows on his knees, his eyes fixed on the floor, and if something wet dropped unnoted on the letter it was the expression of a feeling too deep for words.

Binks was only a boot-boy, but a good heart is not the peculiar attribute of high birth or education.

The letter was cheerful in tone, but the boy was keen, and he could read trouble between the lines of written words. Binks sighed; he had all the patience of his class. He knew he could do no good by bemoaning his fate. His mind turned over one scheme and another for providing some real benefit. His money for the month would be due in a few days.

"I'll ask the 'Ead to let me 'ave it ter-morrow," he muttered. "'E's not a bad sort, and——"  
Binks broke off abruptly, and stared at his door in amazement and a feeling that was pretty near fright.

It opened slowly. Binks grunted and flushed as the cad of St. Jim's came in and closed the door gently.

"Wot d'you want?" demanded the boot-boy, in an angry tone of voice.

Gore was no favourite with Binks, and his intrusion at that unexpected moment and late had caused his indignation.

"None of your cheek, Binks!" snapped the cad. "What's the matter with you? You look as if you'd been snivelling!"

"You mind yer own bizness!" retorted Binks.

Gore gasped.

"You cheeky little beast!" he cried, advancing a step.

"I'll wring your dirty little neck!"

Binks put his letter in his pocket.

"Ha, ha!" cackled Gore. "A letter from some brat in the village!"

The boot-boy laughed mirthlessly. Then his eye gleamed in a manner that caused Gore to undergo a feeling of uneasiness. This was a new side of Binks, and he unconsciously stepped back a pace. Somehow or other Binks seemed to be bigger than usual.

The cad of St. Jim's changed his tactics.

"Don't get your wool off; I was only pulling your leg."

Binks was not deceived by this change of front.

"Wot d'you want? Say wot it is, an' clear hout!"

An evil light shone for an instant in the cad's eyes, but he carefully refrained from any open expression of the rage that was boiling within.

"Oh, I just came down for those-cigarettes."

"Cigarettes?"

"Yes. Didn't you get them?"

Binks looked puzzled for a moment.

"No," he said, after a pause. "I didn't!"

"You had the money!"

"Yes, I 'ad the money."

"Well?"

"Well?"

The two eyed one another. A sneer on the face of the one. Anger on the other's.

"D'you suppose I'd stick to yer money?" flung out Binks savagely.

"So Mellish did give it to you!"

"Corse 'e did. An' did a bunk afore I could give it back to 'im."

"Oh!"

"I ain't goin' ter get no fags, either for you nor nobody else, so you can take yer 'ook."

"Very well, then," said Gore, with an evil grin. "Hand over the tin."

"Sha'n't!"

Gore was astounded. It was a night of surprises for him.

"Why?" he said weakly. "It's mine!"

"Ho, his hit?"

"Yes, it is."

"'Ow am I ter know that? You didn't give it ter me. I ain't going ter let you 'av' it, so you can sling yer 'ook. Quick!"

"I tell you it's mine!" blustered the cad.

"You can tell whoever you like. Tell the 'ead I ain't giving it ter no one but 'im as give it ter me. See?"

There was a decisiveness in that "see" that penetrated to Gore's mind, and he turned to the door.

Boy though he was, he was blind with self-contained and thwarted rage, and he saw red. Out of the red mist came a bottle. It was real enough, and it stood on some boxes close to the door.

Gore laid his left hand on the door-knob, and the fingers of his right closed round the neck of the bottle.

It was sticky with the blacking, but he did not feel it. He turned swiftly with his hand uplifted, ready to strike a blow.

Gore might have spent the rest of his life in regretting the mad action of a second, but his movements had not been lost by Binks, and when he turned, he found the boot-boy's snub nose within half an inch of his own unlegant organ.

The heavy stone bottle fell from the cad's limp arm, and Binks hastily stooped to pick it up.

Gore slid out into the passage.

"Silly hass!" muttered Binks. "Nearly spilt the 'ole blessed lot. The honly one I've got, too!"

No conception of his narrow escape crossed the boot-boy's mind. The only hint of tragedy to him lay in the wasted blacking.

Some idea of what he might have done though, was in Gore's mind, and he shivered and trembled as he sped silently back to his dormitory.

By the time he had reached the upper corridor, however, rage again governed him, and he clenched his teeth viciously.

The cad slackened his pace a little when he approached the dormitory. He walked with bent head, revolving some scheme for revenge.

It was with a feeling of ignoble pride that Gore often boasted to himself that he knew how to take it out of anyone who dared to thwart his wishes and go against his desires.

"I'll give him something to remember!" he muttered. "I know, I'll o-o-o-o-h!"

The cad of St. Jim's stopped by the dormitory door. His teeth chattered, and it was all he could do to keep from screaming aloud in momentary terror.

He had presence of mind enough to draw back as a figure ghostly in the faint light brushed by; but he quivered with fright as a cold hand touched his own. It was the touch of something solid, however, that brought him to his senses.

He peered with starting eyes after the strange, nocturnal prowler.

"It—it's D'Arcy!" he murmured. "He never saw me!"

The cad of St. Jim's stood irresolute, then a chance remark of Monty Lowther's came to his mind. He remembered he had heard him one day talking to Manners, and the phrase "walked in his sleep" had reached his ears.

This was the solution.

"Wonder what the dickens he's up to?"

Gore padded quickly down the passage in the direction taken by the sleepwalker. He soon sighted the white figure, and followed noiselessly. Not that it would have mattered, for nothing short of a sudden shock or noise would have wakened the swell of St. Jim's from his trance.

Without the slightest hesitation, the somnambulist took the stairs and turned the corner at the foot as if he were wide awake, and it was broad daylight.

"Where can he be going?"

Gore formed the words with his lips, but scarcely a sound came forth; but he nearly gave a shout of surprise when D'Arcy stopped at the door of the Head's study.

"My eye!"

He quickened his pace, and peered with eager curiosity into the study.

The swell of St. Jim's had crossed the room to the mantelpiece and the watcher held his breath when the dim figure turned, and a glitter of gold glimmered faintly in the gloom.

Gore drew his breath with a sharp hiss.

There was something more in the sibilant sound than the need for breath. What a fine tale he would have to tell in the morning!

He drew aside as the somnambulist came out of the study with the Head's gold plate tucked under his arm.

In the doorway the figure stopped, and for the fraction of a second the cad of St. Jim's was held in the grip of the uncanny!

D'Arcy stared straight into his shrinking eyes, and cold beads of sweat stood out on the cad's brow. Then the sleeper turned, closed the door, and walked with gliding step along the corridor.

The tension relaxed. Gore stood for what seemed to him minutes, and strove to recovery mastery over his shaking limbs. At last he succeeded, and the silent chase was resumed.

From corridor to stairs, and from stairs to dormitory! Without a pause the sleepwalker went straight to his own bed.

The cad of St. Jim's stood shrinking close to the wall, his eyes glittering with eager watchfulness.

For a moment the swell of St. Jim's stood by his bedside with the gold presentation-plate in his hands, then he placed it beneath his pillow, and without haste and without sound got between the sheets and laid down.

Gore stole across the room. He glanced along the row of trim little bedsteads.

No sound but the steady breathing of the sleepers. Mellish had resumed his broken slumber long since, and there were no eyes to watch the figure now standing by the side of D'Arcy's bed.

The swell of St. Jim's lay on his side, with the back of his head to Gore.

A plan had formed itself in the fertile mind of the cad. Here was a chance not to be missed. Revenge on the boy who had dared him, and disgrace, maybe, for the one who so openly showed his contempt.

Gore bent forward and tried to slip his hand beneath the pillow. His fingers touched the metal, but the filigree work round the edges prevented him from sliding it out.

He would have to raise the pillow!

Now his mind was made up he wasted no time; but grasping the pillow firmly with his right finger and thumb, he raised it slowly.

Inch by inch, and then the prize was withdrawn. With infinite caution the pillow was lowered, and the cad slipped back.

His throat contracted with excitement, and his lips curled till his teeth lay bare.

What a chance!

Gore did not wait to gloat over his success. There was still work to be done, and for the third time that eventful night he slunk down the corridor.

When the cad left the dormitory, the School House clock boomed the quarter-past ten. When its deep-toned bell struck the half hour, the last stroke still vibrated on the air, when Gore returned.

His hands were empty, but his heart was filled with glee, and a faint chuckle escaped his lips as he crept into his bed.

For some minutes Gore lay awake, and his mind pictured the completeness of his revenge. He had seized chance, and moulded it to his own evil purpose, and without a tremor of uneasiness at the possible consequences he presently closed his eyes and slept.

CHAPTER 7.

D'Arcy's Awakening!

"U-G-H!" Tom Merry opened one eye, and blinked at the morning sun.

"By jingo! What's the time?"

The junior sat up, wide awake in an instant, and looked at his watch.

"Ten minutes to six!" he cried.

A series of grunts and yawns greeted his announcement.

"Come on, wake up!"

As he leapt out of bed, a black smudge on D'Arcy's pillow caught Tom Merry's eye, but his mind was on something else so it made no particular impression. He pattered across the floor on his bare feet to the washstand.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The leader of the Shell turned and saw Manners sitting up in bed grinning.

"It's all right, Manners! This wasn't for you!" cried Tom Merry, as he drew the large sponge from the water-jug. "This is a patent alarm for Gussy!"

"Ha, ha—"

Swish!

"Gr-r-r-r! Br-r-r-r! Ow! Wow! Wottah! Wescue!"

Tom's aim had been true, and Arthur Augustus woke with a yell and a splutter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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NEXT

CHAPTER 8:

"What the dickens!"

The juniors all woke up, and howled with unholy glee when they discovered the state of D'Arcy.

"You—you wottah!" cried the swell of St. Jim's. "You howlid beast, I'm all wet."

"Go hon! You don't mean it!" said Monty Lowther. "Wake up, it's only a dream!"

"I shall wescue you to wescue you any longah as a friend, Tom Mewwy. I shall chastise you on the spot! You have woused my wage!"

"Look out, Tom!" yelled Jack Blake, with tears of merriment running down his cheeks. "Look out! You know what a terror, Gussy is when he's roused. I believe he'd push a 'bus over."

Fuming and spluttering, Arthur Augustus scrambled out of bed, and made a dart for Tom Merry.

The leader of the Shell was doubled up with laughter, and the sudden onslaught of the indignant junior sent him sprawling, and he sat down with a bump.

"Ow!"

Arthur Augustus displayed unusual activity, and he seized the water-jug.

"I demand an instant expression of wegwet!"

Tom Merry sat on the floor, and stared at the jug held over his head.

"Silly ass! Put that down!" he yelled. "You'll drop it or something!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

It was not often that Tom Merry found himself in such a position, and the juniors cackled with unfeeling laughter.

"I demand—"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"On the ball!"

"Make him swim!"

"Sock him!"

The din made it impossible to hear what Arthur Augustus was saying, but the position of the water-jug spoke louder than words.

The swell of St. Jim's appeared to be enjoying the position of affairs, and he meant to prolong the agony.

Tom Merry wriggled as the spout was slightly lowered, and a drop of water splashed on his nose.

"Ow! All right, I'll— Collar him, Monty!"

The junior stared fixedly beyond the back of his tormentor, and Arthur Augustus gave a start, then turned to meet his new antagonist.

There was no one there!

Tom Merry's little ruse had succeeded beyond his expectations, but he lost no time. Before the swell of St. Jim's had barely time to realise how he had been taken in, he felt a grip of iron on his wrist, and the water-jug was gently but very firmly taken from him.

"Ow!"

"I'll give you 'ow!'" commented Tom Merry. "Try those little funny tricks with me, would you!"

"My wist!"

"Oh, your wrist is all right. Now, d'you know what I'm going to do with you?"

"Wescue!" howled the swell of St. Jim's, wriggling manfully. "Wescue! Blake! Hewwies!"

"The call of duty!" shouted Blake. "Come on, our comrade is in danger! Charge!"

The chums of Study 6 hurled themselves to the rescue, and Manners and Monty Lowther, who had also rushed forward, were hurled to the floor.

Tom Merry realised the true position of affairs, and as the two, with Digby in the rear, came down upon him, he whirled Arthur Augustus round, and then—let go!

"Ow!"

"Ass!"

The swell of St. Jim's spun slap into Jack Blake's chest. The pair staggered wildly, and then collapsed.

Tom Merry fled.

"Hold on, you chaps!" he cried, from a safe distance.

"Hang off! I dare say I got what I didn't deserve. I mean what I did. Oh! Ha, ha, ha! Good for you, Monty! Collar him, Manners.

Manners and Monty Lowther had taken full advantage of the temporary disorder of the enemy, and had descended upon the foe from the rear.

Digby and Herries were pinned face down to the floor.

Tom Merry executed a war dance.

"Is it pax?" he shouted.

"Rats!" grunted Jack Blake from the floor. "We'll—"

ANSWERS

"A SON OF THE EMPIRE."

A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co  
By Martin Clifford.

Tom Merry was on the leader of Study 6 in a flash.

"Is it pax now?" he inquired blandly.

"Gerroff my — Yes, ass! Pax!"

"Pax it is, then! Comrades, brave comrades, release your prisoners!"

"What did you want to give in for, Blake?" shouted Digby, when he got to his feet. "Rotten, I call it! Why I should have got free in no time!"

"Yes, you looked like it," said Jack Blake. "Especially when you had your nose about half an inch from the floor, and Monty on your neck. Oh, yes, you'd do wonders, I don't think."

"But you—"

"Ring off!" interrupted Blake. "Do what your uncle tells you, and get dressed. We've got to get down to the station. We can't keep Cousin Ethel waiting! Look at Gussy, he's nearly dressed!"

The swell of St. Jim's had only got one sock on, but still it was near enough, and the juniors scrambled for their clothes.

"I shall postpone my chastisement of Tom Mewwy until —"

"This time next year!" cried Blake, with a laugh. "Buck up, image, or Figgins will get to the station first!"

This admonishment had its effect, for Arthur Augustus had actually got to his tie when the others were ready to depart.

"How much longer are you going to be, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry. "We're ready! Buck up, for goodness' sake! It's a ripping morning!"

"Bai Jove! Don't wowwy me! I shall only be a sec!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway assist me with this wotten collah stud!"

The swell of St. Jim's had quite forgotten his desire for revenge, and Tom Merry grinned cheerfully.

"Anything to oblige, old son. Is that better?"

"Thanks, deah boy! Don't go!"

It was a matter of real concern to Arthur Augustus, and he would have been in an abject state of misery all the morning if he had not got his tie and so forth exactly right, so the Co.'s waited for him, with only an occasional admonishment to "Buck up!"

At last he completed his toilet.

"How do I look, deah boys?"

"With your eyes, ass!" said Jack Blake. "Oh, come on! You're spiffing!"

"Don't wot!" replied the swell of St. Jim's severely.

"Is — Ow! Pway be careful!"

Jack Blake cut short all further inquiries by getting his chum by the coat sleeve, and in terror of having his attire disarranged, Arthur Augustus went out of the dormitory like a lamb.

The leader of Study 6 took the precaution of pushing his chair in front of him as they went down the stairs.

"I can keep an eye on you there!" he observed. "No giddy bunking back to change your tie at the last moment!"

During the scrimmage in the dormitory, Gore and Mellish had kept out of the way; indeed, they only crawled out of bed just as the Co.'s left the dormitory, and, as usual, the cad of the Fourth was in a bad temper.

Mellish knew the signs, and carefully avoided catching his partner's eye. He was fortunate enough to dress and get away without a word being spoken.

Gore was not only bad-tempered that morning, but he was thinking. His little trick of the night before did not seem so rosy in the light of day. His mind was very uneasy, and a cold shiver went down the middle of his back when the thought occurred to him that he might be found out.

"Bah!" he muttered, half aloud. "There's no fear of that. I'm too jolly cute for those duffers!"

## CHAPTER 8.

### Cousin Ethel's Arrival.

**F**IGGINS, Fatty Wynn—with a rosy and very polished face—and Kerr were waiting in the entrance hall when the School House Co.'s trooped in.

"Hallo, worms!" cried Tom Merry.

"What-ho, you bounders!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Don't you feel tired?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"My word, don't he look a don!" chipped in Manners.

The long-legged member of the New House shuffled his feet uneasily, and his homely face flushed under the scrutiny of seven pairs of eyes.

Clifton Dane and Glyn strolled up.

"What's the wheeze?" inquired the former.

The attention of the juniors was withdrawn from the self-conscious junior.

"What are you up to?" exclaimed Digby, answering one question with another. "Wonders will never cease! Coming to the picnic?"

"Rather! What do you think!"

"And you, Glyn?"

"No, I'm busy. I'm going to spend the day with Skimpole. He wants me to work out some of his diagrams. May see you this afternoon, though. It just depends how we get on."

"Oh!"

Digby's exclamation was expressive. How anyone could prefer messing about with a lot of chemicals or bits of machinery in preference to picnicking with Cousin Ethel he could not imagine, and he turned away with a shrug, polite but eloquent of his thoughts.

"I pwesume youah coming with us to the station?" inquired Arthur Augustus, carefully threading his way through the assembled juniors, and addressing the leader of the New House.

"That's the ticket, Gussy!" replied Figgins, now quite at his ease.

"Vewy kind of you. My cousin will be theah by the 6.45."

"And we shall be there to meet your cousin," replied Figgins, with a grin, and much emphasis on the "your."

"Your cousin will be there at 6.45, and so shall we be there to meet your cousin," said Fatty Wynn, beaming at his own smartness. "I'm sure we shall be delighted to meet your cousin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry had overheard this little dialogue, and he laughed heartily at the mingled expression of dignity and offence on the swell of St. Jim's face.

"It's your own fault, Gussy. If you will persist in ramming the fact that Miss Cleveland is your cousin down everybody's throats, you can't wonder at it if they are anxious to remind you that they are quite aware of the relationship. Besides, you can't expect to keep a ripping cousin like that all to yourself."

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear, hear!" cried Jack Blake. "Good for you, Tommy! Gussy's getting selfish in his old age. Miss Cleveland is the cousin of every decent member of St. Jim's, and Gussy ought to think himself lucky that he has the privilege of being her cousin at all."

"Bai Jove!"

"Isn't it time we were off?" cried Figgins.

Arthur Augustus lugged out his gold repeater.

"Bai Jove! We must wun!"

"Poor old Gussy!" chuckled Jack Blake, as he brought up the rear of the little procession with Tom Merry. "He does get his leg pulled. Serves him right, though, for trying to ride the high horse."

"I dare say you'd be a bit cocky yourself," said Tom Merry silyly, "if Miss Cleveland was your own cousin."

"M'yes, p'r'aps I should," admitted Jack Blake, as they turned into the lane. "She's a ripping chum for any chap to have."

It wanted two minutes to the time of the arrival of the train when the juniors invaded the platform.

It was a glorious morning, and it would have been difficult to have found anywhere a happier, healthier set of youngsters.

Fatty Wynn was in a state of decided moisture; and even Tom Merry, fit as he was with the season's cricket practice, mopped his brow.

The only one that had contrived to preserve an appearance of cool, unruffled calm was Arthur Augustus. His pale, aristocratic face betrayed no sign of the hurried walk, and he looked the picture of gentlemanly elegance.

It was as natural to the swell of St. Jim's to be immaculate in his personal attire as it was for his young brother Wally to go about in a state of constant untidiness; and if the younger D'Arcy plainly showed the possession of an unlimited spirit of mischief, Arthur Augustus himself concealed beneath his external appearance a spirit as plucky as it was proud, and as generous as it was kindly.

"There's nothing the matter with Gussy but his funny little ways," had observed Jack Blake.

The leader of Study 6 had hit the nail square on the head.

"Here she comes!" shouted Tom Merry.

The juniors crowded to the edge of the platform, and stood in perilous danger of toppling over. But there was no tragedy to mar the happiness of everyone that morning, and when the train panted in, they all made a rush for the door of a first-class carriage.

Somehow or other Figgins got to the handle of the door first, and it was he who had the pleasure of holding the little gloved hand of the radiant girl as she jumped out.

There was no "side" or simpering foolishness about Cousin Ethel, and she greeted the juniors with frank pleasure.

"This is jolly!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes. I'm so glad you sent me a wire, Arthur. What are we going to do?"

"Picnic!" roared every voice with one accord.

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NEXT  
THURSDAY:

"A SON OF THE EMPIRE."

Cousin Ethel put her hands to her ears.

"Gracious, I'm not deaf!"

"Sorry!"

"Awfully sorry!"

"Bai Jove," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's suddenly, "you don't seem a bit surprised."

"Surprised! Why?"

"Our unexpected holiday, I expect he means," put in Jack Blake.

"Oh, that! Why, I knew Dr. Holmes was to receive the presentation plate sent to him yesterday long ago. I heard uncle talking about it. Little boys don't know everything, you know."

Arthur Augustus raised his chin a little at this disparaging remark, but the smiling face of the girl tripping by his side drove all sense of dig. from his mind, and he let the matter pass.

Laughing and chatting, the troop reached the old college, and eager discussion was then held as to the best place to have the picnic.

Figgins proposed the old ruins, but there was some diversity of opinion.

"What do you think, Miss Cleveland?" inquired Jack Blake.

"Oh, I should say the ruins!" replied the girl, smiling at the leader of the New House.

Figgins blushed with pleasure.

"Right! Ruins it is!" exclaimed Blake. "Now for brekker, and all meet here at ten sharp. Will that suit you, Miss Cleveland?"

Cousin Ethel gave her assent, and disappeared through the Head's private garden.

### CHAPTER 9.

#### Wally's Diplomacy with the Picnic Party.

**A**LL eyes watched the pink frock until it vanished round a turn in the doctor's favourite rose-walk, and then the juniors looked at one another somewhat sheepishly.

"All hands on deck!" cried Jack Blake briskly. "It's all right, Figgy, you needn't jump so. Let's get to biz. What about the hamper?"

Fatty Wynn edged forward.

The swell of St. Jim's fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and drew out a crumpled piece of paper.

"Heah you are, deah boy!"

"What's that?" demanded Blake.

"A fivah."

"A whole blessed fiver!" gasped the leader of Study 6.

"Why—"

"I insist, deah boy. I appeal to these gentlemen."

The juniors grinned.

"All right, Blake!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If Gussy wishes, he can stand the whole whack, and we can square up to-morrow, or the end of the week. It's jolly good of you, Arthur. You're a silly ass sometimes, but, 'pon my word, you're quite a sensible sort of worm when the mood strikes you."

"Right-ho!" agreed Blake. "Give it to Fatty Wynn. He's the man for that sort of thing. I bet Fatty knows more about feeds than any chap living."

With a gesture as genuinely careless as if he was passing over a worthless piece of paper, the swell of St. Jim's handed over the much-creased banknote, and Fatty Wynn trotted off.

"Sha'n't be long, you chaps! I suppose I'd better lay in a good stock?" he shouted.

"Get just about enough for three like yourself," replied Jack Blake. "I should think that would just about go round the lot of us. Lemme see, we shall be a good dozen."

"Yes, and jolly hungry, too!" said Lowther. "It's a long walk to the ruins."

"The best thing is to get a good breakfast, then," said Tom Merry. "Come on! Hooray! We've got no work to do-o-o-oh!"

Breakfast that morning was prepared in the big hall, and the juniors clattered in noisily.

Mr. Railton presided, and his face wore an unusually grave expression.

This fact did not remain long without notice, and as Fatty Wynn came panting in and slid gently into a vacant seat, Jack Blake leaned over and whispered to Tom Merry:

"Looks as if Railton was sorry to lose us for a day."

The leader of the Shell nodded absent-mindedly.

"I bet something's up!" he muttered. "It's not like

Railton to be in the dumps. If it was Ratty, I could understand. Hallo! What's that?"

A sudden hush fell on the assembly.

The bell to hall was sounding.

"My eye!" muttered Jack Blake.

"Hope to goodness the Head hasn't made a mistake," whispered Monty Lowther, "and just found out he's only been here twenty-four instead of twenty-five years! If so, we shall have to put off our picnic till next ye—"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry.

"Boys!"

Mr. Railton rose to his feet, and surveyed the eager, curious faces with a strange air of gravity.

"You have all heard the bell, and you understand its meaning. The head-master wishes to speak to the whole school."

The Fourth Form and the Shell filed out with unusual quietness, and made their way to the hall that had been the scene of so much cheering the previous morning.

The Fifth, Sixth, and Third Forms were already present.

Dr. Holmes stood alone on the dais, and waited for the late arrivals to settle down.

"I believe you are all here!"

The Head cast a searching glance over the orderly ranks.

"I shall not detain you long, but I have a very unpleasant announcement to make. It is necessary, even imperative, for many reasons, that you should all know that the presentation piece of gold plate, left by me on my study mantelpiece last evening, has disappeared. Inquiries have been made, and conclusive proof has been discovered that the person who removed my property is an inmate of the college."

A horrified silence greeted this speech.

"There are no signs whatever of any entrance having been made or forced from without. I deeply regret having to cast any shadow over your holiday, but it is just possible that some of you may discover some slight clue that may result in the perpetrator of this foolish, or criminal, action—I cannot say which—being brought to his senses."

A murmur of anger and sympathy arose.

The head-master held up his hand.

"I leave the matter in your hands. Until to-morrow morning, I shall take no further steps in the matter. With the exception of one or two, I am sure the honour of St. Jim's is as dear to you as it is to me, and—"

The rest of the Head's speech was engulfed in a roar of assent.

At length order was restored.

For a moment, Dr. Holmes faced his boys in silence. His face wore a stern, yet sad, expression.

"I leave it in your hands!" he repeated. "Now you may go!" he added simply.

The various Forms filed out in silence.

"My aunt! My only hat!" exclaimed Jack Blake, as they gathered in the sunny quad. "Of all the rotten, downright, beastly rotten things this takes the biscuit! What the dickens are we going to do?"

The cad of St. Jim's swaggered past, but the juniors were too much engaged to note the grin of triumph on his face.

"Goodness alone knows!" said Tom Merry gloomily.

"Anyhow, we can't put off the picnic!" exclaimed Manners.

"Wathah not!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "The beastly wottah! We can't put off Cousin Ethel, you know! We might return early, and twack the villains!"

"That's it!" cried Figgins eagerly. "We'll get back about three."

"Yes, that's the best way!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "By jingo! I wish I could lay hands on the idiot. I don't believe it's stolen. Some silly fool is playing a rotten jape, or, p'r'aps, the Head put it away somewhere?"

"Ugh!" grunted Manners.

In gloomy silence the Fourth Formers wandered from the quad to the Head's private garden. They clustered aimlessly round the little gate.

"What's that?"

A faint hissing sound came from a bed of hollyhocks.

Tom Merry peered over the railing inquisitively.

"Taggy's left the hose on!" he cried, as he opened the gate, and marched into the forbidden ground.

"Come out of that!" shouted Monty Lowther. "You'll get gated and all the rest of it!"

Tom Merry only laughed, removed his coat, and picked up the hose.

"Taggy hasn't half done his work!" he exclaimed. "Just look at those—"

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As Cousin Ethel spoke, Tom Merry swung round suddenly. He whisked his hat from his head, and switched the nozzle under his arm. "Ow! Wow!"

"You're busy!" said a voice, that certainly did not belong to any of the juniors.

Tom Merry swung round suddenly. He whisked his hat from his head, and switched the nozzle under his arm.

"Are you ready, Miss Cleveland? I—"

"Ow! Wow!"

The spray of water shot straight into the faces of Arthur Augustus and Jack Blake.

They retreated in a panic.

"Oh! How careless of you!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, stifling a laugh. "Don't you think you'd better give up—watering my cousin? I don't think he likes it."

The juniors glared their indignation, but the presence of Cousin Ethel debarred all reprisals.

Tom Merry dropped the hose, and, picking up his coat, demurely walked to the gate by the side of the girl.

"Sorry if you chaps got wet," he said nonchalantly. "You should have remained in the quad."

This was adding insult to injury, but Jack Blake saw the humour of the situation—Tom Merry under the protection of Cousin Ethel—and burst into a roar of laughter that created a general feeling of merriment.

"What a good-tempered boy Jack Blake is," commented Cousin Ethel. "I should have been awfully angry if it had happened to me. Wouldn't you, Arthur? Oh, I forgot, of course, you did get a little bit wet didn't you? Never mind, you're all right now. Good morning, Wally!"

D'Arcy minor extended an unusually clean paw, and shook hands.

"Morning, Ethel!"

The swell of St. Jim's frowned, but failed to catch the speaker's eye.

Wally had got wind of the jaunt, and being determined to make one of the party, he knew better than to give his brother any opportunity to send him packing.

Arthur Augustus made a rear movement.

Wally promptly skipped in front and trotted along with an innocent look on his freckled face.

"Are you coming with us?" inquired Cousin Ethel.

D'Arcy minor leaped to the opening.

"You don't mind, Ethel, do you?" he said, with a quaint little grin at his brother.

"I? Why, of course not. I shall be very glad. What a stupid thing to say. Just 'as if I should object."

"But do you want me to come?" persisted Wally, keeping a wary eye all about him.

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, quite ignorant of the junior's ruse. "So will Arthur and the others."

D'Arcy minor nearly choked with glee.

"It's all right, Blake!" he answered loftily. "I'll help you carry some of the stuff. I'm coming!"

Jack Blake grinned.

"All right, you young rascal!" he muttered. "I'll see that you do your share of the carrying, too!"

Fatty Wynn was waiting at the big gates, jealously guarding a couple of hampers.

Tom Merry and Blake each seized the handles of one, and Manners and Figgins divided the burden of the other.

For once in a while, the rival Co.'s were working together with a will.

The start for the ruins began in real earnest.

Suddenly a shrill whistle rent the air, and an answering yap came from behind the School House, as a shaggy nondescript sort of mongrel tore across the quad.

"Pongo!" announced Wally calmly.

The swell of St. Jim's polished his eyeglass with a determined air.

Cousin Ethel stopped and patted the dog's head. Pongo seemed to like the attention, and wagged his tail in friendly spirit.

"You don't mind him coming, do you?" said D'Arcy minor.

"Of course not. What a dear little dog!"

The swell of St. Jim's gave a gulp, and glared at his scapegrace brother.

Wally strutted along with a great air of unconcern.

"Gwacious!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, after they had gone a few paces. "Here's Hewwies with that howwid beast Towsah!"

Cousin Ethel laughed musically.

"You don't seem to be fond of dogs, Arthur."

The swell of St. Jim's looked at his cousin with indignation.

"I'm surprised, Ethel. You fail to notice that these brutes are wuff mongwels!"

"I think they're dogs," said Cousin Ethel firmly, and Pon—Pongo's a dear. Oh!"

Gr-r-r-r!

Judging from the sound emitted by Herries' bulldog Towser he had a very different opinion, and it looked as if there was going to be trouble.

Wally's ear-splitting whistle, however, brought Pongo to heel, and a sort of armed truce was proclaimed.

The Fourth-Formers took it in turns to carry the baskets, and at the third change over they entered the precincts of the castle wood.

After the heat of the open lane, the cool shade was delightful, and their spirits rose as they went deeper into the wood.

All memory of the disagreeable incident of the gold plate was forgotten, and the band of Fourth Formers and their girl chum gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the hour.

"Neath shady wood and bosky tree I wandered o'er the lea," said Jack Blake, in the vein poetic.

"And got home late to tea!" shouted Monty Lowther.

There was a sudden silence, and Cousin Ethel looked round in surprise.

"What's a 'bosky tree,' Blake?" inquired Tom Merry, after a long pause.

"Blest if I know!" muttered the chief of Study 6. "Ask Monty!"

Monty Lowther growled, and entered into an eager conversation with Fatty Wynn.

"Here we are!" shouted Digby, who was scouting in front.

"Ha, ha! Behold the ruins of a once fair cusstellated mantle—I mean a castellated castle," cried Jack Blake.

"Is that the home of Sir Fathead and—and his 'fayre ladye'?" inquired Cousin Ethel.

The author of the famous serial, contributed weekly to the school journal, blushed crimson.

"Yes—er—yes; that is, it's something like it," he replied awkwardly. "It's not quite—"

"Not quite so mouldy, he means," interrupted Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake dropped his end of the luncheon basket, and diverted the conversation to something of more importance.

"Shall we camp here?"

"I consider this a most suitable site!" asserted the swell of St. Jim's, adjusting his eyeglass, and turning round and round.

"Well, of course, that ought to settle the matter in one go!" cried Tom Merry. "But—"

"I wefah the mattah to my cousin! Pway excuse my intewwuption, deah boy, but you did not allow me to conclude my remarks."

"Has Gussy started off again?" muttered Jack Blake. "Cos if so, we shall have to find some nice comfy little rabbit-hole for him."

"What was that you said about wabbits?" said the swell of St. Jim's, turning suddenly. "Did you wefah to me as a wabbit?"

"Rats!" grunted Jack Blake softly. "Miss Cleveland is speaking!"

Arthur Augustus was all attention in an instant. Rude—

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ness to a lady was not a thing he thought of for a moment.

"Yes, I think this will do beautifully, don't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I was speaking to Figgins, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel, with a roguish dimple in the corner of her mouth.

"I beg youah pardon, Ethel!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity. "I was not aware that you were addressing your remarks to that w—— to Figgins!"

Cousin Ethel smiled sweetly.

The juniors roared. Kerr, after a thoughtful two minutes of cogitating, burst in a cackle of laughter. The junior liked his humour laid on in broad slabs, but he possessed a dry sense of the comical that very often resulted in the bitter being bit. So, although the Scottish member of the New House was popularly supposed to take about six months to see the point of a joke, he was generally left severely alone when some would-be wit wanted to air his cleverness.

"Well, that's settled then!" said Tom Merry, as he dumped the baskets beneath some undergrowth. "It's much too early for our fee—I mean the picnic. Shall we explore?"

The proposal was eagerly agreed to, and the whole company trooped off.

Fatty Wynn lingered in the rear and cast a loving eye at the half-hidden baskets, but the strong arm of Blake interposed between him and his desires, and he was yanked off.

"B-b-but I'm tired!" protested Fatty Wynn.

"All right, you can sit on top of the tower, somewhere where we can see you," said Jack Blake. "Come hon!"

Fatty went—he had to!

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Arrival of the Grammarians.

THE spot chosen for the picnic was ideal in every respect. A soft south wind stirred the leaves of the ring of trees surrounding the little clearing, and the sunlight filtered through in golden shafts. Patches of glowing colour flitted hither and thither over the mossy, rising bank, and all was quiet.

The sound of the juniors' laughing voices had died away in the distance; a speckled-chested thrush hopped across the open space with his head cocked on one side. He eyed the edge of a luncheon-basket inquiringly. He had never seen anything of the kind in the wood before, and his bright eye twinkled with a desire to investigate.

Two hops forward and a little run back, repeated several times, and he at last satisfied himself that the basket was nothing very terrible.

Then he decided on a bold move. A hop and a flutter of his wings and he alighted on the corner of the basket. Slim, and turning his head swiftly from side to side, he held himself ready for flight. But no danger appeared to threaten, and he tried to peep between the cracks.

A piece of white paper—it was the edge of a bag of tarts—attracted his attention, and he gave a tentative pull at it with his beak. It yielded a little, and the bird gave himself up to the delight of the tug of war. He became quite absorbed in his task, and, strange to say, his quick ears failed to catch the sound of someone approaching. The soft carpet of mossy grass muffled the tread not only of one pair of feet, but of two.

Frank Monk and Carboy were taking a walk that morning, and in the silent wood the queer noise made by the sharp pecks at the paper bag could be heard some distance away.

The captain of the Grammarians and Carboy—the sworn, but sportsmanlike foes of the collegians of St. Jim's—heard the rustling sound, and, with a cautionary motion of his hand to his chum, the former crept stealthily forward.

He peered round the edge of a tree. His astonished eyes watched the manoeuvres of the thrush for a couple of seconds. Then he saw the basket, and beckoned to Carboy.

The latter gave an involuntary whistle of surprise, and, with a quick succession of shrill notes of alarm, the thrush flew off.

"Queer!" -exclaimed Frank Monk. "What the dickens was he after? Ho, ho!"

"A luncheon-basket!" -cried Carboy, lugging the prized property of the Fourth-Formers out from the mass of undergrowth. "And—another!"

"Two!"

Frank Monk threw back his head and laughed long and loud.

"Don't you twig?" he said at last. "These belong to the St. Jim's kids! Look, there's their tuckshop mark on the giddy basket!"

"Spoils of war, eh?" inquired Carboy, with a grin. "What shall we do with it?"

"Serve them jolly well right if we carted the whole lot off!" observed Monk. "Greedy little pigs! Still, we won't be hard on them. Catch hold of that one, and we'll just hide

their precious grub somewhere that'll give them some trouble to find!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Carboy, as they disposed the two baskets beneath a bush some twenty yards away from their original position. "I should just like to see their faces!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Chuckling with glee, the Grammarians walked off, mightily pleased with their morning's work. It was a long time since they had had any opportunity to score off the St. Jim's crowd, but they little thought how their innocent little trick was to develop beyond their intentions.

Frank Monk and Carboy had scarcely gone beyond earshot of the clearing when Wally's shrill whistle echoed in the distance.

The picnic party were returning.

Fatty Wynn was the first to appear. He stopped as if frozen to a solid block. Then he rubbed his eyes.

"The baskets!" he gasped, going on his knees. "They—they're gone!"

Fatty Wynn was hard hit. He let forth a powerful yell. Tom Merry heard it, and started to run.

"That's Fatty's squeal!" he cried.

"What the policeman is the matter?" panted Jack Blake. "Hark at him!"

"Look at him!" gasped Tom Merry, as they came in sight of the chosen spot. "He's dancing like a beastly monkey on a hot plate!"

"What's the matter, Fatty?" cried Blake, as they came running up.

"It's gone!" howled Fatty Wynn.

"What?"

"The grub!"

"Can't be!" shouted Tom Merry.

"It has! Look for yourself!"

"You're not playing any giddy wheeze off, are you?" demanded Jack Blake.

Fatty Wynn snorted indignantly. The three stared at one another incredulously.

"I covered it up myself!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Some rotter's gone off with it!" cried Fatty Wynn miserably.

"Oh, goodness!" cried Blake. "Land me on a desert island! There come the others! There'll be a pretty shindy now!"

"Got the things there—" Monty Lowther stopped short. "Wha—what's the matter?"

"Some beast has gone off with our baskets!" cried Fatty Wynn.

"Careful how you go," said Blake. "Cousin Ethel's on the scene."

"Bai Jove, I'm famishin'! Pway—"

"Somebody's stolen the baskets!" cried Tom Merry.

The swell of St. Jim's gasped.

"Bai Jove! The—the wottahs!"

Cousin Ethel laughed. She was undoubtedly hungry and thirsty, but the dismay written on every face made her forget her own trouble, and she tried to make light of this misfortune.

"Never mind!" she cried merrily. "We shall have to get lunch in the village! I expect poor little Wally is dying with hunger!"

D'Arcy minor, followed by his pet, came up. He was not exactly pleased at the reference to his own diminutive stature, but the state of excitement soon held his attention.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"Grub's gone!" said Jack Blake laconically.

"What? Where?"

"How do I know? It's been stolen!"

"How d'you know?" snapped Wally. "P'r'aps it's only hidden away somewhere! Don't believe you've looked!"

No one could say they had, so the Third-Former openly scoffed.

"I'll show you!"

"May as well let him," said Tom Merry.

"Here, Pongo! Good boy! Seek it! Fetch it!" coaxed Wally.

Pongo sniffed round, and several of the juniors stood on one leg and trembled as his nose came perilously near their calves.

Herries also put his favourite on the go, and the pair scuttled back and fro with their noses to the ground.

Suddenly Pongo gave a shrill yelp, and darted off. With a wild whoop, his master plunged after him.

A second later Towser gave a savage snort, and also lumbered off in the same direction.

"I believe there may be something in that kid's idea after all!" cried Jack Blake. "You stay with your Cousin Ethel, Gussy. If there's any tramp at the end of this trail we'll send you a wire."

"Bai Jove, you know, Ethel!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "I wish that Austwalian chap were heah! I expect he would twack the gwub—the baskets—in no time!"

"If noise is anything to go by," exclaimed Cousin Ethel, "I should feel inclined to think that Pongo has got hold of something! Don't you think so?"

"Bai Jove, wathah!" cried Arthur Augustus. "But," he went on, "I hope those kids are not in any touble! I feel responsible for theah safety, you know!"

"Oh, I expect they are all right, Arthur! You can go and see if you like."

"What, and leave you unpwotected?"

"Why not?"

"Quite impos., Ethel! No girl can take caah of herself, you know!"

"Well, I never knew that before," said Cousin Ethel, with suspicious meekness.

"Weally, I—they're weturnin'!"

## CHAPTER 11.

### Splash!

"BRAVO!"

"Booooh! Hooray!"

"Good old Pongo!"

Bow-wow-wow!

A confused hubbub sounded through the trees, and every bird within half a mile flew off in alarm. The woods resounded with yells and shouts of triumph.

"Pongo found it!" howled Wally, bursting out of the thicket. "I knew he would! Good old boy!"

"Towser got the other one!" grunted Herries.

"Go on with you!" scoffed Wally scornfully. "He hung on to Pongo's tail, or he'd never have got within a mile of the baskets!"

"Perhaps if Pongo had not been here, Herries' dog might have tracked them," suggested Cousin Ethel, with a view to calming the spirit of the Fourth-Former. "I'm sure he's quite a clever dog!"

Herries cheered up wonderfully, and Wally proved himself to be a little gentleman by following his cousin's lead.

"Oh, I dare say old Towser would have got on all right!" he said, with a careless air that quite deceived the ingenuous Herries. "He's not a bad sort of a dog, when you get to know him!"

"That's it!" said Herries eagerly. "He's a knowing old rascal!"

Greatly to the relief of the Third-Former, Tom Merry and Jack Blake appeared with the recovered luncheon, and he was relieved of the strain on his good feeling.

Herries, once started on the subject of Towser, would talk on and on like the little brook. He couldn't stop till he was dry.

It was a jolly party that sat round the picnic that had been lost and found again, and if the mystery of the disappearance of the hamper did concern them, it was not until the end of the repast that the subject was given any real consideration.

Many and varied were the suggestions made as to a possible solution of the mystery, and Wally brought a storm of ridicule down upon his shock head by voicing the emphatic opinion that the Grammarians had something to do with it.

"Why, they would have wolfed the lot!" declared Manners.

"Don't care!" retorted D'Arcy minor doggedly. "I'm going to stick to my opinion!"

It was not so long after that the Fourth-Formers discovered the truth, and Wally did not forget to remind them all and individually that he, and he alone, had hit on the truth.

After the picnic was over, and Cousin Ethel's health had been toasted in ginger-beer, it was decided to conceal the empty baskets and ramble back to St. Jim's by a circuitous route through the woods.

Compared with the earlier part of the day the next couple of hours proved tame and uneventful. But the juniors contrived to enjoy themselves in rambling over fields, and there was no lack of good-humoured chaff.

The party topped the crest of a hill overlooking the valley, when Jack Blake gave an exclamation of surprise.

"My aunt!"

"What?"

"There's Skimmy, I believe!"

A small figure could be discerned in the distance.

"Why, I though he was going to spend the day with Glyn!" said Tom Merry. "I wonder what he's revolving in that mighty brain of his?"

"Godness alone knows!" muttered Manners. "I shouldn't be surprised if he'd solved the problem of perpetual motion, or how to feed Fatty Wynn on tuppence a week."

"He's more likely to succeed in doing the first than he is the last!" chuckled Blake. "Why, Fatty would simply be reduced to a shadow in a couple of days. Let's catch up with him."

Cousin Ethel was beginning to feel tired, but she kept up

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with the rest, and five minutes' sharp walk brought them within hailing distance of the amateur Socialist.

"S-k-i-m-m-y!"

Skimpole stopped, and looked round. He did not seem in any way surprised to see the juniors. It was a habit of his, when he was in an abstracted frame of mind, to take everything for granted.

"Hallo!" said Digby.

"Hallo!" replied the amateur Socialist vaguely. "I—I've been— Oh"—his face brightened, and he peered over his hat at Cousin Ethel—"Miss Cleveland, I've been thinking about you!"

"My eye!" gasped Jack Blake. "D'you hear that, Figgy?"

"Yes," went on the amateur Socialist; "I've been trying to solve the problem of votes for women. Are you—you'll excuse my question—but are you a—a suffragette?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Cousin Ethel being anything of the kind at all struck the juniors as very funny, and Skimpole blinked at them mildly.

"I trust you will excuse my question, Miss Cleveland; but, you see, I have so few opportunities of getting at the root of the great question of the amelioration of the lower classes that I thought you could be of some assistance to me."

"Jingo!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "He'll branch off—Ha, ha, ha!—on another tack in a minute, and—"

"I believe he's been in the sun too long," observed Tom Merry. "Let's get some tea. We don't want a demented Socialist on our hands."

Skimpole responded to the invitation with an air of patient martyrdom, and the party took a short cut across the fields and down into the valley, in the direction of a cottage they had visited before on their outings.

"We shall have to toss up for places!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Two will have to put up with having their tea in the garden. We can never crowd all of us into that little place."

The matter was quickly settled, and it fell to the swell of St. Jim's and the amateur Socialist to sacrifice themselves on the altar of friendship.

The latter had no great objection, but Arthur Augustus sat disconsolate on the seat in the garden, while the others, packed like sardines, but happy and noisy, sat round the tea-table presided over by the honoured guest.

"Wotten! Wats!" grumbled the swell of St. Jim's, as he sat moodily at one end of the garden bench and jabbed his cane into the gravel path. "Wats!"

The amateur Socialist was poor company, for he relapsed into a brown study. The sound of the laughing voices and the tinkle of tea-cups aroused in him no interest whatever, and at last Arthur Augustus got up and wandered about the garden until the tea was over, and the lucky ones came crowding out.

The swell of St. Jim's put on a disinterested air as the juniors came down the cottage path.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "How did you get on? Tired of waiting? You look as if you've had a rousing time!"

"It was wathah wippin'," said Arthur Augustus quietly.

"Yes," said Tom Merry; "I suppose you feel rather exhausted after the excitement of taking tea with Skimmy? By the way, where is he?"

"Here he comes!" exclaimed the irrepressible Wally. "Buck up, Skimpole!"

The Fourth-Formers were already out of the gate, so the junior's mode of address passed unnoticed. As for the amateur Socialist, he was too deeply interested in some mental problem to pay the slightest attention to D'Arcy minor. He sailed along in the rear of the laughing group.

"No mistake about it, Gussy, you're a sportsman," said Jack Blake, as they came to a little bridge spanning the Ryll. "It was jolly hard lines for you to have to stick out in the garden. But, my aunt, we were packed so tight that you couldn't open the door, and— Hallo, what's that?"

"Catch it!" howled Tom Merry.

Blake made a leap into the air, but missed, and the breeze carried Cousin Ethel's hat over the side of the bridge, and it landed in the stream.

The juniors rushed for the bank.

Skimpole came to life suddenly, and pelted after them. At the top of the bank he slipped, and rolled over on to his back into the water.

"Splash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The water was only about six inches deep, but the junior was drenched.

"What the dickens do you want to lay down there for?" demanded Manners. "I'm surprised at you! Catch it, Blake! There, Skimmy, up you come!"

Skimpole was hauled to dry land, and a little further down THE GEM LIBRARY—68.

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the stream the leader of Study 6 was successful in arresting the floating hat with a branch of elder.

A roar of applause greeted the double event, and the journey to St. Jim's was resumed at a quick trot.

Figgins and D'Arcy were left to escort Cousin Ethel, while the others went on ahead.

"You bunk off and change, Skimmy," said Tom Merry, when the familiar gateway came in sight. "Go on, bunk!"

The amateur Socialist, damp and shivering, trotted off obediently.

Then the juniors exchanged glances of inquiry. Clifton Dane was the first to speak.

"It's been a ripping day, and I wish we could lay our hands on that gold plate"

"No good wishing," grumbled Jack Blake. "Haven't you got some sensible suggestion to make? You've been quiet enough all day. So has Tom Merry."

"Chuck it now," muttered Digby, "here's Miss Cleveland!"

Walking on either side of the girl, Figgins and Arthur Augustus came up.

The swell of St. Jim's was carrying Cousin Ethel's be-draggled hat, and an involuntary grin went the round.

"Thank you so much, Arthur!" said the girl. "And thank you all for a—a—"

"Ripping?" suggested Tom Merry.

"Yes, that's it! For such a ripping day! It's been lovely! But I am tired. I shall go and rest in the house-keeper's-room. Good-bye! I hope you will succeed!"

The juniors gasped.

"Ah! I bet Cousin Ethel knows all about it!" said Blake. "Trust a girl for that!"

Then they proceeded in silence across the quad. True it was still early. But the unearthing of the stolen property seemed as far off as ever.

"Tell you what!" said Tom Merry, as they reached the entrance-hall. "Let's have a meeting and decide on something. We must do our best."

The proposal was agreed to, and they all trooped upstairs.

"Can't you do something, Dane, with your giddy 'fluence?" inquired Monty Lowther. "What's the good of—"

"S-s-s-h!"

"Who's that?"

"Only Gore!"

The cad of St. Jim's would have passed on, but the scorn in the tone the words were uttered aroused his temper. He struck out savagely, unexpectedly. Herries sat down with a bump.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Clifton Dane Tries his Hand.

"YOU coward!" cried Tom Merry, springing forward. Gore made a dive for liberty, but he might as well have tried to escape a horde of ants. The juniors swarmed round him on every side. He stood with his back to the wall, at bay. He seemed to be in a state of panic, and his eyes glared from one face to another.

"Lemme pass!" he grunted.

Gore was suffering from an evil conscience, and although the juniors had no suspicion as yet as to his expedition of the previous night, his attitude of fear and defiance caused them a feeling of wonder. It was nothing unusual for them to run against the cad, but there seemed to be more terror in Gore's voice than was warranted.

"I believe he's been up to some dirty trick!" muttered Jack Blake.

"Yes, I know he has, for one!" exclaimed Herries scornfully. "What d'you mean by dotting me on the nose like that? Come on!"

The junior squared up.

"Shut up, Herry!" whispered Tom Merry. "Leave it alone for a while. I want to have a say in this."

The leader of the Shell stepped in front of the indignant member of Study 6, and looked straight at the cad.

Gore shifted his glance.

"Look here, Gore," said Tom Merry, "we're going to hold an inquiry into the theft, or whatever it is, of the missing plate. You had better attend. Herries' little business can wait."

A curious change had come over the cad's face, but he mastered his evident state of discomposure.

"I'm not coming to any beastly confab!" he muttered. "You think yourselves a mighty clever lot, but you won't do any good if you gas till next year. Lemme go!"

"You seem to be mighty certain about it!" cried Tom Merry. "All the same, you'd better come. You know what the Head said this morning."

"Sha'n't! Don't care!"

"All right, we won't argue the point," said Tom Merry,

calmly taking Gore by the elbow. "That's right, Figgy, you take his right, and we shall be quite comfy."

It was useless to struggle, so the cad allowed himself to be escorted to Study I. Sullen and silent he planked into a chair by the window.

The door was shut, and the juniors fell to discussing the important matter.

Proposal after proposal was made—and rejected. Wally was not there, or he would have suggested putting Pongo on the trail; but Herries made up for his absence by repeatedly suggesting the wonderful tracking capacities of Towser.

"You're off your chump!" said Digby. "Absolutely dotty on that bandy-legged tyke! Give it a rest."

"I'm about sick of this!" growled Gore, standing up. "I wonder you don't propose that Dane should send someone into a trance, and track the beastly plate in that way. Rats!"

"Sit down!" cried Jack Blake.

The cad sat rather quickly, for the words were accompanied by a vigorous push.

"By Jove, though!" shouted Monty Lowther. "There may be something in the idea. Couldn't you, by a sort of what d'you call it wheeze? You know what I mean."

"I'm afraid I don't," said Clifton Dane, with a smile.

"Oh, a thing where you send someone to sleep, and they see things!"

"Hum! That's very clear!" said Jack Blake.

"I know what he means," shouted Manners—"a clair—"

What's the beastly name?"

"Clairvoyant?" suggested Dane.

"That's it!"

"What d'you think?"

"Try it."

"It can't do any harm."

"Well, we must do something," said Tom Merry. "Why not?"

Clifton Dane shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like," he said. "I don't mind having a shot, but I don't think I can possibly do anything."

"Never mind about that. Try!" shouted the juniors.

"Who shall I mesmerise?"

The juniors looked at one another in silence.

"Suppose we draw lots?" suggested Figgins. "That's the fairest way."

"Good idea!"

Gore refused point-blank to have anything to do with it, so Jack Blake drew a slip of paper for the cad when the hat was passed round.

The folded slip marked with a cross fell to Fatty Wynn.

"I feel jolly hungry!" he muttered. "Can't I have something to eat first?"

"No, you greedy little bounder, you can't!" cried Tom Merry. "Look here, I'll stand you a tuck-in when you've found the giddy plate!"

Fatty Wynn looked doubtful.

"But—"

"All right; you shall have it in any case directly Dane's finished with his 'fluence. Eh?"

The fat junior eagerly agreed. He would have gone through half a dozen trances for a good blow-out.

"Right-ho! Turn on the tap, Dane!" said Jack Blake.

Clifton Dane stood facing the fat junior, and the rest crowded round in a ring.

It was not often that the amateur hypnotist displayed his power, and the uncanniness of it never failed to attract them.

Gore peered over the shoulders of Digby and Monty Lowther. His face was a study.

The sombre eyes of the Indian—half-Indian, half-English he was—gazed straight into Fatty's own pale-blue eyes.

Gore, who had never had direct evidence of Clifton Dane's power, shivered slightly as he saw Fatty's eyes gradually take on a glazed expression.

"That's fixed him!" said Dane quietly. "Now for the other part. I'm very doubtful, though, as it's only in very exceptional cases that the medium can do anything that can be relied upon."

"Let it rip, anyhow!" muttered Jack Blake.

For a few seconds Fatty Wynn stood like a wax effigy of Daniel Lambert; then his lips moved, and a curious muttering commenced.

Words unintelligible, and without sequence, tumbled out of his mouth.

At last a clear sentence came forth.

"I'll have a pound of sausages, and—"

Then the voice trailed off into—

A suppressed chuckle rippled round the circle.

Clifton Dane frowned slightly.

"It's not a bit of good trying with Fatty," he said. "His

mind is absolutely filled with visions of grub and ginger-beer!"

Bang!

The hypnotist clapped his hands, and Fatty Wynn returned to his usual state.

The first words he uttered sent the assembly into a howl of laughter.

"Can I have the tin, Merry?"

Tom Merry handed the junior a coin.

"Get off!" he said. "You won't be any good here, so you may as well bunk."

The fat junior promptly went.

"This is rather—" grunted Figgins. "Can't you try somebody else?"

"Undah the circs, I think it would be worth twyin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"Right-ho!" cried Tom Merry. "You have a shot!"

The swell of St. Jim's drew back.

A look of uneasiness came into Gore's face.

"Bah!" he cried. "When you've finished with this monkey business I'll clear off. I'm sick of it!"

"You'll be sicker in a minute!" said Jack Blake. "Shut up! Now then, Gussy, be a little man, and show the courage of your opinions. It's for a good cause, you know."

"I know I wouldn't!" muttered Gore, for very good reasons, best known to himself and the reader. "I wouldn't allow myself to—"

"Ring off!" cried Tom Merry.

Gore's remark did more to injure his cause, and decide the wavering mind of the swell of St. Jim's, than a hatful of persuasive arguments.

"Undah the circs," he said, "I will agwee—with the pwoviso, of course, that no twicks ah played."

"Good!"

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Of course, Dane won't play any rotten tricks. You needn't fear that; it's too serious a matter for that."

Remembering the previous occasion, the swell of St. Jim's removed his eyeglass, and took up his position.

"Good luck to you, Gussy!" cried Jack Blake. "You're a trump!"

The hypnotist's gaze fixed upon his subject, and all chatter ceased.

Gore showed signs of making trouble, but Jack Blake held up a suggestive fist, and, with a grunt of disgust, the cad sat down and relapsed into a moody silence.

Almost immediately he was under the strange influence the swell of St. Jim's started talking in a low, regular monotone.

"I must look aftah the pwesentation-plate—"

The juniors listened eagerly, and the look of intensity grew stronger in Dane's eyes.

"I will descend to the woom and wemove the plate—the mattah is pwessing—"

"My aunt!" gasped Jack Blake.

Gore's face went deadly white; but no one was looking at him, they were all too intent on the medium, and they listened for the next words with beating hearts. The cad buried his face in his hands. What was coming next?

"I will place the tweasah undah—my—pill—"

A strangled cry came from Gore. Tom Merry sprang to the door.

"That'll do!" he shouted excitedly. "Wake him up! I—oh, don't ask me to explain now! Wake him! Stay here! Keep that—that—" He pointed to Gore. "Keep him here!"

The study was filled with a hubbub of voices.

"My aunt," whispered Jack Blake, "Gussy's been walking in his sleep again! I wonder what Merry's after? Surely the plate can't be there still? What?"

Arthur Augustus, his accustomed self again, stared at his chums severely.

"I wequest an explanation," he said. "What was the wusult of the expewiment? All these wottahs wefuse to give me the wequiahed infoahmation! Where is Tom Mewwy?"

"I—I— He rushed off suddenly after you woke up, Gussy," replied Jack Blake, in a fluster—for he did not want his chum to become aware of his nocturnal wanderings. "He'll be back in a minute."

"But— Here, you stay where you are, Gore!"

The cad of St. Jim's struggled fiercely, but he was soon plumped back into his chair again. Arthur Augustus viewed the proceedings with a bewildered air, then he tackled Clifton Dane.

"Oh, you only gassed a bit—that's all!" exclaimed the amateur hypnotist. "I think Tom Merry hit on some idea and bunked off. He won't be— Here he is!"

The study door was flung open, and Tom Merry rushed in.

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He was followed by Skimpole, who carried a magnifying-glass.

Tom Merry closed the door carefully, and the juniors eyed his set face with eager interest.

"I've been to the dormitory!"

"Yes?"

"Did you find it?" exclaimed Manners.

Tom Merry frowned. He had a difficult task before him, and he went on hurriedly.

"I had to go," he said, "and I found some rotter had tumbled Gussy's box of ties all over the shop!"

"Bai Jove—the wottah!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! Did you gathah them up, Mewwy?"

"No, I didn't," replied the leader of the Shell; "they're scattered all over the place!"

Arthur Augustus gave a wail of anguish, and bolted for the door.

"Wottah!" he cried, as he skipped out of the room.

"That's better!" cried Tom Merry, taking a strip of linen from his pocket. "I had to upset the box myself!"

"Why?" inquired Jack Blake.

"Why!" retorted Tom Merry. "Why, because we don't want Gussy to find out he's been walking in his sleep, do we?"

"Of course not!" agreed the others.

"That was a jolly good wheeze to get him out of it!" said Blake heartily. "What the dickens have you got there?"

"A thumb-print of the thief!"

This announcement caused a murmur of excitement to arise.

"You see," went on the junior rapidly, "when Gussy mentioned his pillow, I remembered seeing a black mark on it when I got up this morning. I imagine Gussy got up in his sleep, took the gold plate, stuck it under his pillow, and then someone else took it. How they knew it was there I don't know, but here's the mark of a thumb clear enough. I looked at it through Skinny's glass, and it's got an awfully funny smell—like vinegar."

The juniors examined the piece of linen cut off from the pillow-case with intense curiosity.

"It's blacking!" shouted Blake.

Gore went a sickly green, and at the word "blacking" the scene in Binks's room flashed across his mind. Without thinking what he was doing, he looked at his hand.

A pair of keen eyes saw the action, and Tom Merry gave a shout. The juniors jumped, and the cad of St. Jim's shrank back before the light of triumph in Tom Merry's eyes.

The cad stared round him stupidly. Things were moving a bit too quick for him, and the net was closing round him so swiftly that he was dazed with the shock.

"Collar him!" cried Tom Merry. "It's a rotten job to touch him with a pair of tongs even, but we've got to compare his thumb with the mark! Sharp, or Gussy'll come back!"

Gore gave fierce resistance, and in his struggles did all but bite; but an inkpad was dabbed on his thumb, and an impression forced on to a piece of paper.

With the aid of Skimpole's magnifying-glass, comparison was made.

"Exactly the same!" said Tom Merry quietly.

Shocked with this new phase of the cad's character, the juniors stared at one another in silence. The thing was almost beyond belief.

Jack Blake was the first to break the silence, and he spoke to Gore. The cad sat in a huddled heap in the chair, and he was trembling with fear.

"Where is it?"

Gore raised his haggard face.

"What have you done with it?"

Jack Blake rapped out his questions one after another.

"I—I—"

Bang! The study door flew open before anyone could stir or answer. Wally rushed in.

"It's found!" he shouted breathlessly.

## CHAPTER 13.

### A Plant.

DR. HOLMES looked up from his desk.

"Come in, Railton! What is it?"

The House-master laid a much crumpled letter before the doctor.

"I picked that up in the passage this morning," he said. "I think that under the circumstances you should see it."

The Head read the letter through, and looked at Mr. Railton.

"Dear me!" he said. "Poor boy! His mother is in straitened circumstances. We must see into this. Binks ought to have come to me at once. Would you mind send-

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ing him to me, and—I suppose you have not heard anything about the missing plate? I can do nothing so far as the boys are concerned until to-morrow morning, but if nothing is discovered, I shall have the whole place searched. Perhaps you would—"

The Head broke off.

"I know what you were about to say," said Mr. Railton.

"You want me to put the matter to Binks."

"Yes, that is so," replied the doctor. "It would be so much better if you would. The boy is very sensitive, and you could explain better than a detective."

Mr. Railton looked startled.

"A detective!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it will have to be," said the Head sternly. "Such a thing cannot be allowed to pass, and the culprit, whoever he is—if it is Tom Merry himself—will have to take the consequences. The matter will pass entirely out of my hands."

The House-master smiled a little at the mention of the junior's name. The Head might just as well have suggested himself as the thief.

"I will certainly do as you wish," he said. "I only hope that something will happen before to-morrow morning. I quite agree with your intentions, but it would be very terrible."

"Very!"

The Head-master sighed as Mr. Railton left. There seemed to be very little likelihood of the plate turning up of its own accord.

Mr. Railton tapped at the door of Binks's room. It was custom among most of the juniors to enter the boot-boy's own particular little sanctum without any warning; but the genial School House-master observed the same amount of kindly courtesy in dealing with those in a humble position as he would have shown the Head himself.

The boot-boy was seated at his little table. He sprang in! The master entered in reply to a muffled "Come to his feet.

"All right, Binks," said Mr. Railton, "I have brought you this letter. I believe it is yours."

The boot-boy's eyes brightened, and he held out his hands eagerly.

"Yes, I missed it this morning," he said. "It's from my mother."

"So I noticed," replied the House-master, eyeing the homely face with a keen glance. "I had to read it to discover whose property it was."

"Thank 'e, sir," said Binks.

"There is another little matter," went on Mr. Railton quietly. Then he paused, and a strange expression of embarrassment came over his face, as his eyes encountered the honest gaze of Binks. "You are doubtless aware of the Head's loss, and I have rather a difficult task to perform." Again Mr. Railton stopped.

"Yes, sir," inquired Binks.

"Well, it has been decided by the Head-master himself, that a thorough search must be made for the missing plate."

Binks was not by any means unintelligent, and a hot flush mounted to his face.

"I ain't got it!" he blurted out.

"No; I don't suppose for a moment you have," exclaimed Mr. Railton heartily; "but you see the position is just this; that until the guilty one is discovered none can, with certainty, be called innocent of complicity either direct or indirect in the mysterious disappearance. I want you to consent to my having a look round your room. It may be that someone has been playing a stupid practical joke."

Binks could not rid himself from the idea that he was under suspicion, and the resentment he felt showed in the way he replied to the master's really kind and considerate way of putting a very unpleasant request.

"Search me, if yer like. I ain't got it."

Crimson with anger and shame the boot-boy started to turn out his pocket.

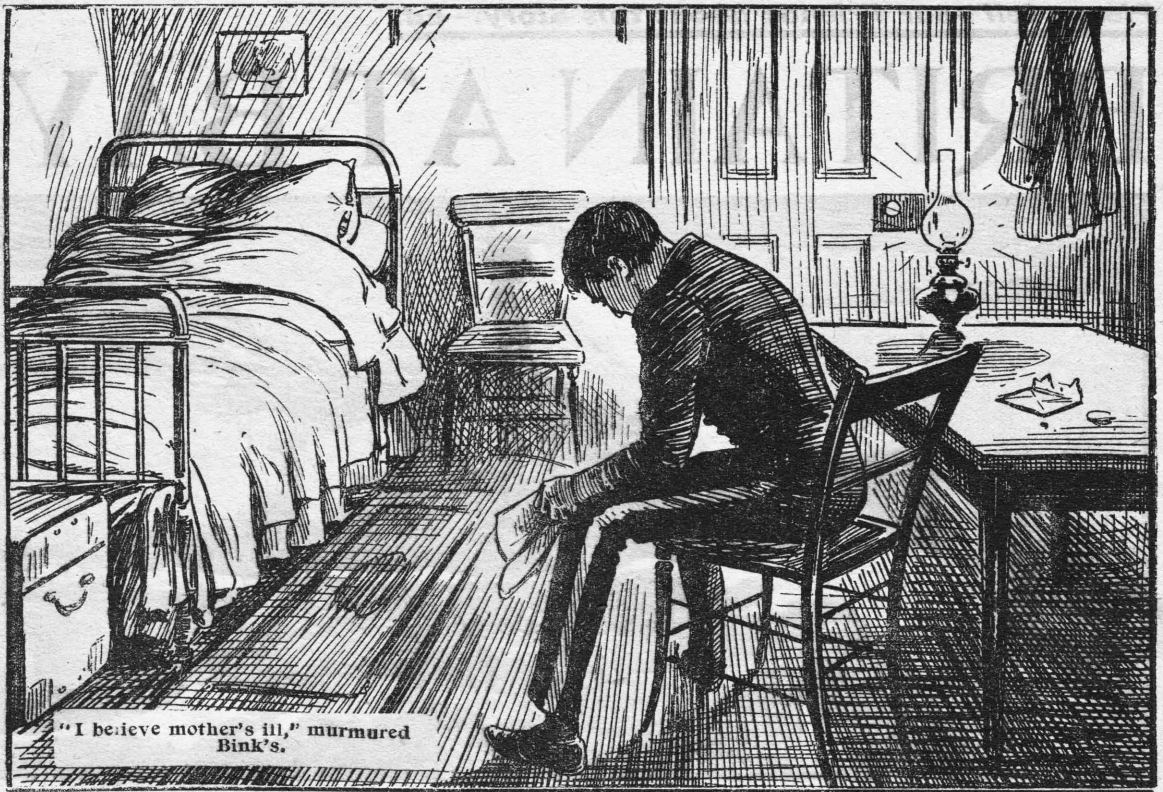
"No, no!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "There is no need for that, Binks. In any case the missing property is such as you could not possibly conceal it about your person. Now, try and believe that I am compelled to do this, and it is from no feeling of suspicion cast upon you personally."

Binks mumbled some unintelligible reply, and sat down on the edge of his bed. Not without cause he felt himself to be a much-injured person. And what with this new trouble and his worry over his mother, he scarcely knew what he said or did.

The House-master went about his unthankful task methodically. The room was searched from end to end. He even went so far as to request the boot-boy to turn over his mattress; but there was no sign of the missing plate.

"I told yer so!" muttered Binks. "I ain't got it."

Mr. Railton smiled a trifle wearily, then he walked to the door and entered the room where the boot-boy did his work.



The search was fruitless, and the master was about to retire, when he caught sight of a small wooden box beneath the table. "I haven't looked in there," he said. "Just pull it out, will you?"

Binks went redder than ever, and did not move. The House-master looked at him in surprise.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes," replied the boot-boy, "I 'eard, right enough; but there's nuffing in there, only what belongs ter me."

"I'm afraid, all the same, that I must complete my search," said Mr. Railton patiently. "Kindly do as I bid you!"

Binks hesitated for a moment, and then in obedience to the command in the quiet, even tones of the master, he stooped and dragged out the box.

"I tell yer you won't find it there, sir," he repeated; "it's only books. And," he went on in a curious tone of resentment, "I've given up a-readin' of 'em now."

An involuntary smile came over Mr. Railton's face when the lid of the box was raised, and piles of paper-covered books, with highly-coloured covers were revealed.

"Yes," he murmured, as he stooped over the collection of doubtful literature and turned them over, "I should say that it is a very good job that you have forsaken this kind of rubbish. The best thing you can do is to throw this—Heavens!"

Mr. Railton started to his feet with the gold plate in his hand!

Binks's eyes goggled out of his head.

"You must come with me to the Head-master at once," said Mr. Railton, in a voice trembling with excitement. "No, don't say anything now. Wait. I am sure this can be explained."

The boot-boy threw up his head and followed the master out of the room.

"It's a plant," he muttered. "That's what it is."

## CHAPTER 14.

### Gore Goes to the Head.

WALLY'S abrupt announcement threw the juniors in Study No. 1 into a state of bewildered surprise.

"I saw Railton with it in his hand as I came along the passage," explained the Third-Former. "Binks was with him, too."

"Then Gore put it there!" shouted Tom Merry, going straight to the point. "There's no shielding him now!"

"I say," he cried, "what's the—"

"You be quiet for a tick, Wally," said Jack Blake;

"this is going a bit too fast to stop and explain things to you. Shut up, now, or you'll get kicked out!"

The cad of St. Jim's, the centre of all eyes, rose to his feet and licked his dry lips.

"What—what am I to do?" he muttered.

"Go straight to the Head!" snapped Tom Merry. "Quick! Tell the truth, or you'll be expelled over this."

Without a word Gore passed through the crowd of boys and made his way with faltering step to the Head's study.

When he had gone the juniors dispersed to their studies.

Arthur Augustus came along just as Blake & Co. were preparing to leave, and he promptly tackled one after another with questions. The information that Mr. Railton had found the gold plate took his mind off more dangerous topics for a time, but he returned again and again to the mystery of his hypnotic trance, and the outrage to his box of ties.

"Look here, Gussy," exclaimed Jack Blake at last, "give us a rest! One of these days I'll write a book about it, and you shall figure as the hero. How will that do?"

"Wats!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "I'm going to find Tom Merry."

The leader of the Shell, however, was not to be found, and by bedtime Arthur Augustus had talked himself dry.

When the door closed behind Gore after he had left Study No. 1, it closed on a scene that was never entirely revealed. Soon after the cad's entry Binks came out, looking very happy but quite uncommunicative, and the curious ones had very little to satisfy their appetite, for the Co.'s had agreed to silence, and the mere assertion that the missing plate had been found had to content all inquirers.

It was not until the juniors had assembled in their dormitory that Gore made his appearance among them again, and no attempt was made to break his evident desire for silence. The cad went to his bed, and he got no more than he deserved in the fact that his presence in the room was altogether ignored.

"My aunt, what a day it's been!" muttered Jack Blake as he sat on his bed preparing to retire.

"It hasn't been a night, that's very certain," replied Digby. "But it's been a let-off for poor old Binks."

"Hip, hip, hooray!" said Clifton Dane softly, as he dropped his boots on the floor with a bang. "Good-night, chaps!"

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Tom Merry & Co., "A Son of the Empire," in next Thursday's "GEM" LIBRARY. Please order your copy in advance. Price One Penny.)

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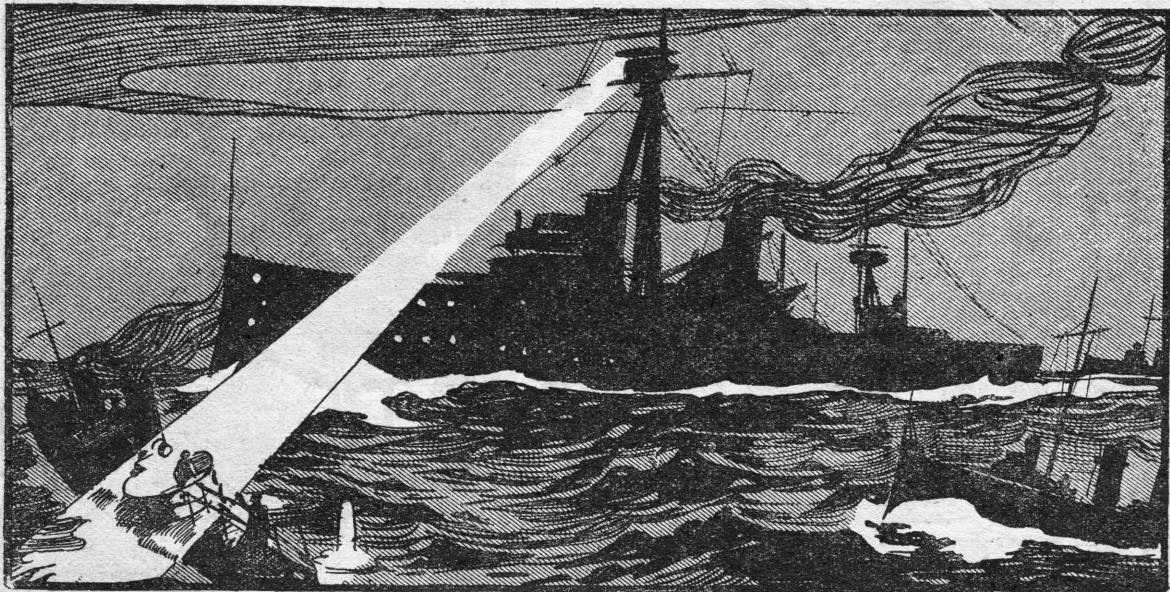
A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
By Martin Clifford.

NEXT  
THURSDAY:

"A SON OF THE EMPIRE."

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

# BRITAIN AT BAY.



## A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

### THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander.

At the time when this account opens, the two boys are with Colonel Blake's force, which is besieged at Shorland House, Sheppey Island. They are discussing, with Lieutenant Spencer, Colonel Blake's position, cut off as he is from all help except perhaps from the warship Orion, which is signalling from somewhere out at sea.

*(Now go on with the Story.)*

### The Orion to the Rescue.

"I wouldn't mind a square meal in the Orion's ward-room just now, same as I had last time," said Sam, with a sigh, tightening his belt. "These patent emergency pellet foods leave one's inside as hollow as a drum. However, cheer up, Spencer! I won't desert you for the sake of my tummy," he added, grinning.

"Very noble of you—especially as you could no more get to her than to the moon," said Spencer.

"Couldn't I? Well, there's no call for me to do it, I suppose; but if I were put to it I'd back Steve an' myself to be aboard that ship inside two hours, or less."

Spencer started.

"I know you two kids are pretty hefty," he said; "but I'm blessed if I see how you'd bring that off. However, as you say, there's no reason for it. How beastly thick it's gettin' out north. Regular sea-fog coming up."

"It's blotting out the signalling," said Stephen. "Here comes the colonel's orderly," he added, as a messenger hastened towards them.

"Colonel Blake wishes to see you at once, please sir," said the man; and Spencer vanished. Nobody dawdled under that command.

"I suppose the colonel knows what the Orion can do for him, but I'm blowed if I do," said Stephen, as soon as they were alone. "Wonder she has the nerve to be there flashin' signals, anyhow. You'd think it'd bring a torpedo attack down on her."

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NEXT  
THURSDAY:

"A SON OF THE EMPIRE."

A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
By Martin Clifford.

"The German fleet's too busy, an' I should say those flashes wouldn't be seen as far as Sheerness this weather," replied Sam. "Look, you can hardly see 'em from here now, it's coming up so thick. She can't be there for nothing. To communicate messages, maybe."

The boys stood and watched the dot-and-dash flashes on the sky for some time; but they gradually became dimmer and dimmer, and finally were blotted out altogether by the wet mist.

"The colonel wishes to see Lieutenant and Sergeant Villiers, of Greyfriars, please!"

It was the orderly, suddenly returning, who spoke; and the boys went back with him at once. They were taken before Colonel Blake, who was in the upper part of the tower, whence he could command a view of the district as far as the darkness and a pair of night-glasses allowed. The brothers had seen him in both the engagements, and admired his cool courage and generalship. He was a man of forty, with a strong face and iron-grey hair, and at the moment he looked unusually grave. He greeted the boys, however, with as much courtesy as if they had been staff-officers.

"I have heard of your record, young gentlemen," he said. "I shall be glad to have your report, as brief as you can make it, of what you have seen during your scouting on the island. You have been at the Sheerness forts, I hear."

As quickly as he could, Sam told the colonel how they had landed on Sheppey, and of the events at the mine-station and at Sheerness, ending with their escape to the Rutland trenches.

"Ha!" said the colonel thoughtfully, tugging his moustache—"I wonder how many of our Service pups fresh from Sandhurst would have had the sense to make use of that mine-station which these youngsters did? Good performance—doosed good performance! And so that German transport's at the bottom?"

"Yes, sir," said Sam. "You'll just be able to see her masts above water from the tower's top by daylight."

"You seem to bring uncommon good luck with you wherever you go," said the commanding officer. "I hope you'll have done the same for us here. Most of the Sheerness guns are destroyed, then, by the bombardment of the cruisers? The Orion has signalled news of the wrecking of



the forts; but she does not, of course, know just what damage is done."

"All the big guns in the forts are dismantled, sir, as far as we could tell," said Sam. "I don't think they can bring any of them against you; but they have, at least, two field batteries. We saw them on our way here."

"Humph!" said the colonel. "Well, it seems you owe your lucky escape to the Orion. You know the ship, I believe. Of course, you were merely talking nonsense when you told Lieutenant Spencer that you could get aboard her?"

He turned his sharp gaze suddenly on Sam, and looked at him rather sternly. The young scout flushed.

"No, sir, I think not," he returned. "There's no such thing as certainty in war; but if we had to, my young brother and I could be on board her, with any luck, within a couple of hours."

Colonel Blake took a couple of strides up and down the narrow room and back.

"If I did not know the sort of stuff you have shown yourselves made of, I should think you were talking rubbish," he said. "Now, listen to me!"

"Our position here is precarious, as you have seen for yourself. We are short of food, ammunition, and guns. If we can hold out another twenty-four hours help may arrive; but I am unable to make my position and wants known."

"A signalling apparatus is being improvised, but the night is so thick that it is likely we cannot use it. I have had news from the Orion, but can get none out to her. If I could, she would be able to telegraph my needs at once to the right quarters by wireless telegraphy. You understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

"She might even be able to run a store of food and ammunition ashore, so that I could send out a sortie-party, and try to get it. But it is on her transmission of the message that I depend above all, and there is no time to lose; for the German squadron may return. Now, you say there is a chance of your reaching her. Are you ready to attempt it at once, whatever the risk?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Sam eagerly. "It's now or never, while the tide is up. In half an hour it may be too late."

"Then I entrust the mission to you! I will waste no time in asking you how it is to be done. You will do your best. Take this despatch, and if you have the luck to reach the Orion, you will deliver it to Captain Fane, and also make your own report to him."

He handed Sam a sealed package, which the cadet stowed securely in his inner jacket-pocket.

"We'll get these through, sir, if there's any way to do it."

"Good luck go with you," said Colonel Blake warmly. "It is a chance I scarcely hoped for; but if you succeed, remember it will be the salvation of our little force, and, perhaps, of England! For more than you dream of hangs on the winning back of Sheppey."

The boys saluted, and went without another word. Spencer overtook them at the bottom of the stairs.

"I'll see you past the sentries," he said. "The password for the outer pickets is 'Faversham.' Don't forget. You youngsters have got a grand job in hand; everybody complains you always get the pick of the fun, an' I believe it. The colonel hardly expects you to get through; but there's nothing he wouldn't do for you if you pull it off."

"He is harder pushed than he lets on," said Stephen pithily.

"Rather!" said the subaltern. "It's the guns that worry him, between you an' me. Even if you succeed, we can't get away in time for to-morrow's scrap, and it's on the cards Von Weisshaus' artillery may settle our hash before the afternoon, between you an' me. But we've got to take our chance. Well, so long, young 'uns, and don't forget what a heap depends on you!"

The sentries were passed, and as the boys hurried on down the northward slope in the darkness, Stephen put the question that had been puzzling him for a long time.

"How are you going to do it, Sam? You're not just goin' out on spec, I suppose? An' you don't expect us to swim about off the Thames mouth on a winter's night lookin' for a strayed cruiser?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Sam. "Of course we've got a chance, or we shouldn't be startin', and as for swimming, we couldn't swim half a mile. We're going by boat!"

"What boat?"

"Our own! The one we pinched from Grain after the Blaine Castle went down—the one that brought us here. You know we shoved her off and abandoned her? Well, when we were scootin' from Sheerness this mornin' I saw her lyin' high and dry up the beach near Warden Point."

"Did you? By gum! But how'd you know she's there now?"

"The tide will only just have reached her. Even if she's

afloat, the breeze has been on-shore all day, an' she's bound to be somewhere along the beach. She'd drift about there for a week with the wind as it is now, an' it's all soft ground—she can't get hurt. There's no sea on. I spotted her this mornin', just one glimpse, an', you bet, I kept the fact in my head."

"Good biz! I wondered how you could talk so blessed confidently about gettin' to the Orion! This mist's in our favour, too, for gettin' away. What a night we'll have of it!"

"I'd like to see us safe aboard," said Sam. "Don't talk any more—we've got to do a crawl now. Sure to be some German patrols between us an' the sea."

They went cautiously, but as quickly as possible, for time was precious. Twice they lay flat to the ground while the dark, silent form of a Prussian rifleman went by, and there was a single German picket near the cliff, which they had not much trouble to pass in the mist.

At last they found themselves on the beach, and made their way along swiftly and silently, following the sea towards the eastward.

"Well out of that!" said Stephen. "I wonder that gully leadin' down to the shore wasn't better guarded."

"It's the one place they can't guard much," replied Sam, "the machine-guns at Shorlands command the upper part of it, and no such great distance away. The little guns are quite enough to prevent the enemy from showing themselves much there. That's rather a pull for Blake, because, you see, he commands the way up from the beach, though not the beach itself."

"That might chance to be useful later on," said Stephen thoughtfully; "but, for the present, let's hurry on an' see about the boat. I don't feel quite so jolly confident about her as you do. An' what if somebody's bagged the oars out of her?"

It was a rather long journey along the beach, and once they had to wait some time while a couple of Germans who seemed to be doing coastguard duty passed by. This made Sam rather apprehensive that his brother might be right; and, moreover, the mist made it all the more difficult to find the longed-for craft. They reached Warden Point, and Sam went to the spot where he thought she lay. Nothing was to be seen of her.

They searched up and down for some time, more and more anxiously. The tide was well up and might possibly have floated her away; but, as Sam pointed out, the light breeze which brought the mist was blowing right on shore.

They separated, and presently Stephen's soft whistle brought his brother to rejoin him, and to Sam's huge delight he saw the black shape of the boat looming through the fog, with Stephen in her, poling her towards him over the shallow water with an oar.

"Right as rain!" said Stephen. "Hasn't been touched! No reason why she should have been, I s'pose—they've been too busy to worry about salving stray boats. Some water in her, but we can bale that out while on the way."

"Thank Heaven we've got her!" said Sam fervently, climbing in. "Muffle the rowlocks, will you, while I take a bearing or two?"

The little pocket-compass, which never left him, was taken out quickly. It had a mother-of-pearl dial, which could be seen at night, and he took a bearing of Warden Point and the cliff, so as to set his course.

"Now for it!" said Stephen. "Though how we're to find a cruisin' man-o'-war in this sort of weather, beats me!"

"She won't be cruisin'; she'll be at anchor," said Sam, "with her torpedo-nets down. She couldn't possibly cruise along in this fog among such a network of shoals—she'd be ashore in no time. If we take a straight course out for the Four Fathom Channel we're pretty safe to find her there, unless it thickens too much."

Sam put the little compass on the thwart before him, so that he could see it, and took the stroke oar. Both boys thought they heard a voice hailing from the beach, which was now out of sight, and they pulled out briskly.

Away they went into a grey world of fog, over a gently-heaving sea. How long they rowed, Stephen could not tell, and when he spoke Sam sharply bade him keep silence, for he needed to keep every jot of attention on the compass, allowing also for the cross-set of the tide.

Presently a big object suddenly showed up just abreast them, rolling on the swell. It was the big chequered can-buoy that marks one end of the Spaniard Bank.

"Good!" said Sam, with a sigh of relief. "We're over the bank, then, and in the Four Fathom. If the ship's here at all, she ought to be just to the nor'-west of us. Keep your ears cocked!"

Paddling gently up against the ebb, the brothers listened intently. Presently they heard unmistakably the tramp of feet along a steel deck. Then a muffled voice was heard; and then, with surprising suddenness, something like an

enormous steel tennis-net loomed up before them, and some way behind it was a great dark bulk. At the same moment a clear voice cried sharply:

"What boat's that? Loose off with the quickfirers, there!"

"Orion ahoy!" shouted Sam. "Don't shoot! We're from Shorlands!"

"Hold up, there!" exclaimed the voice; and both the boys, for a moment, had expected to be blown out of the water. "Who are you?"

"Despatches from Colonel Blake! Sam an' Stephen Villiers!"

"Holy pokers!" said a voice the boys knew well. "It's the Greyfriars pilots!"

Further orders were heard, a part of the torpedo-netting was triced up, and the boys were directed to bring their boat under it and come alongside.

Half a minute later they were ascending a Jacob's-ladder up the tall steel side of the Orion.

"Can we see Captain Fane at once?" said Sam eagerly, as the cruiser's first-lieutenant received them when they boarded.

"Instantly!" replied the officer. "He has gone below for a moment. I will send you straight to him, for any news from the shore will be welcome. Can't leave the deck myself. Mr. Cavendish, please take these gentlemen to the captain's cabin."

"Come along, my two giddy lobsters!" said Cavendish, with a delighted grin—for it was the late commander of torpedo-boat C77, and no other. "Didn't I tell you we'd run across each other again soon? The way you chaps bob up unexpectedly is marvellous!"

"Great guns! Is it you, Cavendish?" exclaimed both the boys, and they exchanged a hand-grip with him as they hurried along, for they had by no means forgotten all that the three had passed through together. "I thought you were on a destroyer," added Sam.

"So I was; but I'm second lieutenant there for the time being. I'll tell you about that later. There's the captain's cabin; he and I are thick as thieves," he whispered, with a wink.

He made the entrance first himself, and immediately afterwards Captain Fane admitted the boys.

"From Colonel Blake, sir, at Shorlands," said Sam, handing him the despatches.

"From Shorlands! How did you get here?" exclaimed the cruiser's captain, rapidly opening the despatch. "You are the two Greyfriars scouts, are you not?"

"Yes, sir! Came off in a boat from the beach!" returned Sam.

"Uncommonly smart of you in this fog! You're used to this sort of thing, I believe?" said the captain, beginning to read the despatch. "Stay, Mr. Cavendish, if you please. I may want you immediately."

Captain Fane read Colonel Blake's missive through quickly, and his face grew grave. He stood for some moments thinking; and then rapidly wrote out a message of some length at his writing-desk.

"Mr. Cavendish, please take this with your own hands to Mr. Vance, who is operating the Marconi installation, and desire him to get these messages through as quickly as he possibly can to the stations I have indicated. Return and tell me how soon he can work it."

Cavendish departed, and Captain Fane sat silent at his desk for a minute or more, tapping the blotting-paper impatiently.

"If ever wireless telegraphy was a blessing, it is at this moment," he said to himself; "and yet, even so, I fear the call for help will be answered too late to save Blake."

He turned to Sam.

"How were the Rutlands holding out when you left?"

"Splendidly, sir! But it's in the mornin' that they'll be put to the test, when the German batteries begin on them."

"You will be glad to know, for your friends' sake, that I have sent wireless messages stating the urgent needs of the force at Shorlands, to a point where they will reach the nearest British troops ashore. Those troops, however, are very likely on their way to the relief already," said Captain Fane. "Whether Colonel Blake can hold out till they force the passage of the Swale is another matter, and a grave one."

"Mr. Vane reports he can get the messages through immediately, sir," said Cavendish, returning.

The captain nodded.

"Colonel Blake's most urgent need at present is food for his troops," said Captain Fane to Sam, "to enable them to hold out?"

"They are short of food, sir," said Sam; "but their chief need, I think, is guns. What they have to fear is the German batteries. But with even two good guns at Shorlands they could wipe out the attacking batteries,

because they command the whole place. But the Rutlands have no guns."

"Nor is it possible for any to reach them before next night at the very earliest," murmured the captain, half aloud.

"By that time, sir," said Sam quietly, "the Germans may have wiped out Colonel Blake's forces, and probably will. The lack of guns is fatal."

"Couldn't we let 'em have a pair of our 4.7's, sir?" said Cavendish diffidently.

Captain Fane looked at him irritably.

"I never took you for a fool before, Mr. Cavendish! Do you propose to carry them to Shorlands, one under each arm?"

"No, sir; they're rather too heavy. But my old engineer-room artificer, Graeme, who was in the gunboat *Throstle* with me on the West Coast, is in your engine-room. He and I once made a gun-carriage to take a quick-firer ashore an' talk to the King of Akka, who was makin' things hot for the British residents there. We made it in two hours by ourselves; and I'd back him, with a full staff an' the help of the engine-room, to turn out two carriages that'd hold a pair of 4.7 guns in less than eight. Quickest man at the forge an' rivets in the Service, sir."

"Two 4.7's!" exclaimed Sam, forgetting himself. "And ashore by six o'clock. Why, if they got to Shorlands, Colonel Blake could knock blue blazes out of the Germans. I beg your pardon, sir!"

"Send that artificer to me at once," said Captain Fane sharply; "and also Engineer-Commander Jerrold!"

In less than a minute they were both there, and the boys retired while a quick consultation took place in Captain Fane's cabin. Presently Cavendish came out in high glee.

"They're goin' to try it!" he exclaimed.

The activity that reigned in the ship was amazing. Graeme and the engineer-commander rapidly designed a carriage that could be turned out as speedily as possible, and would take the 4.7 gun. Forthwith the engine-room forges roared, the hammers clanged, the steam-lathes buzzed and shrieked, while on deck a couple of crews were busily dismantling two of the 4.7's, of which the Orion had eight. And outside the milky fog covered everything like a blanket.

All night the work went on, with such speed and handiness as only the Navy can show. Towards the end of it Captain Fane summoned the brothers and Cavendish.

"The carriages and guns will be ready at the appointed time," he said. "I am taking a great responsibility in depriving my ship of them at such a time as this. But I am ordered to support Colonel Blake, and if they can be got to him he shall have them. You have reported me that once the beach is left behind and the gully from the shore passed through, you will be under cover of Colonel Blake's machine-guns, and will probably be able to reach Shorlands?"

"Yes, sir, with luck," said Sam.

"Very good. I can only spare you twenty bluejackets—ten to each gun, two of them being gunners. It is little enough for such heavy work, but you must do your best. Lieutenant Cavendish will go with you. They are already preparing the gear on deck, I hear."

It was already dawn, and the fog was thinning before the land wind. The two big "cutters"—the largest row-boats the Orion had carried—had been lowered, and stagings were fitted into them, on to which the long 4.7 guns on their improvised carriages were lowered, the ammunition being stored with the carriages. Steel-girded boards were taken to get the guns ashore. The sea was calm, luckily, for in heavy weather the operation would have been impossible. Twenty minutes later the two boats glided away into the mist. Cavendish and Stephen in charge of one, and Sam commanding the other. Besides the boat's crews, there were ten sturdy bluejackets in each, all beside themselves with delight at having been picked for the job.

Sam took the lead, as he alone knew the exact course for the gully, since the shore was not visible yet. They pulled swiftly in, praying that the fog would hold. But while they were still fifty yards from the beach, the freshening wind shredded the mist and drove it away like a veil, showing the calm sea glittering in the morning sun, the Orion lying out in the Channel, and the shore of Sheppey just ahead.

"Confound it!" said Sam. "Pull now, men! Give way there—every moment counts!"

A German sentry on the cliffs squibbed off his rifle, and another a long way down the sands did the same. The bluejackets' oars made the water fly, the boats grounded in the shallows, and, like lightning, the crews were overside and rigging the girded gangways. In a few minutes the big guns were run down them without mishap, and the

crews jumped to their places at the ropes to haul them up the beach.

As they did so, a drumming of many hoofs was heard, and round the point swept a full troop of Prussian hussars, sabres in hand, their horses lathered with foam, and rowelled red along their flanks. Straight down upon the guns they came, as hard as they could gallop, nor were they three hundred yards away.

"Haul away!" cried Sam, springing to help at the ropes. "Unless we get up the gully and under Blake's guns before they reach us it's all up!"

The score of bluejackets raised a cheer, and away went the big guns trundling through the shallow water and up the sands. But even when Sam gave the order he knew it was hopeless. That one troop of cavalry was enough to ruin the whole enterprise, nor was it possible to get far could the big guns themselves be brought into action so soon. It was a matter of seconds.

"They've got us!" muttered Stephen despairingly. "Sam can't we take cover an' make a stand against 'em?"

"Pull! Pull, I tell you! We can't abandon the guns to the Germans!" said his brother.

Yet the forty sabres came swooping down upon them like bars of light flashing in the sun. They were not eighty yards away.

Suddenly there was a deep, rattling boom away to seaward, and the troop of Prussians received a shock as if some unseen hand had struck them. A dozen horses and men went down like ninepins, and were left dying on the reddened sand.

"The Orion's at 'em!" cried Stephen, with a yell. "By gum, she's got their range!"

It was the Orion, sure enough. White puffs spurted from her steel sides, and a rattling roar echoed across the waters. She was firing shrapnel from her rifled guns.

#### How the Big Guns Came to Shorlands.

"**V**ORWAERTS!" yelled the leader of the Hussars, in his own tongue, as the troop tried to rally. "Ride round, and cut them down—they must not get through!"

Desperately as the German cavalry tried to reach the little group of British bluejackets, the deadly hail from that steel monster out at sea kept them back. Had they reached the sailors it would have been a mere butchery, for on the bare beach so small a force would have been at the mercy of those long sabres and swift horses.

But amid the scream of the shrapnel and the drumming of the Orion's guns, the Hussars went down like ninepins. They were literally shot to pieces while yet sixty yards away from their prey. Those remaining scattered, and tried to gallop on and ride through the two crews, for it was no worse to go forward than back. But the stream of case-shot that swept the beach and sputtered on the face of the cliffs completed their destruction, and within twenty seconds of the first shot the converging fire from the Orion wiped them out. Dead and dying horses and men strewed the wet sand, and but four riders out of the troop escaped, and dashed down upon the guns.

"Out cutlasses! Back behind the gun-carriages!" shouted Cavendish.

Stephen's carbine was unslung, and he accounted for one of the four troopers. The whole affair was over in less than a minute. The German attack had failed; but still, to lose any of their crew might well have ruined the chances of the landing-party's success, so short-handed were they. One of the German swordsmen, on a huge bay horse, ran right into the rear gun-carriage with a crash, cutting down a blue-jacket before he came to the ground. The other two, swerving at the last moment, galloped onward along the beach as fast as they could travel.

"Tail on to the guns! Get way on 'em!" cried Cavendish. "Are you hurt, Stannard?"

"Not much, sir. Sabre broke my guard, an' sliced me on the arm," said the bluejacket who had fallen, scrambling up. The blood was streaming down under his sleeve, but he took his place with the rest, and with a heave and an "All together!" away went the guns again.

"We've got our chance now, by glory!" cried Sam, as the brothers and Cavendish all added their weight to the hauling. "Thanks to the Orion. Put your backs into it, men! If we can only get through the gully now, it's our win!"

The two 4.7 guns trundled swiftly over the sand and entered the ravine between the cliffs, leaving the corpse-strewn beach behind them, while the Orion's two cutters hastened back to their ship.

As soon as the sides of the gully shut out the view, they heard the cruiser's guns opening fire again; but what she was shooting at they did not know, nor was there time to give the matter a thought. Sam's one anxiety was to avoid

getting caught in the gully by a hostile force—for he knew what an easy prey the handful of men would fall if the Germans came upon them before they were out of it.

"Think they can bring any men to the top to pot us from up above?" panted Stephen.

"Reckon not. It's bein' taken in the rear we have to fear most," said Sam. "Don't talk—pull!"

Bumping and rattling on the uneven ground, the two great, jolting guns rolled along. It was bitterly hard work, for the carriages, put together so hurriedly, could not be expected to go smoothly. Strength and lightness were what was most needed, and the engineers of the Orion had done marvellously well; but it had to be kept in mind that the carriages must not only carry the big guns but allow them to be handled and fired when mounted. So, except for plenty of grease on the axles, it had not been possible to make much allowance for speed.

Half-way through, and still the enemy, save for a couple of mounted scouts who suddenly appeared on the edge of the slope to the right, put in no appearance. The gully was a long way from the German positions, and any troops reaching it, except by the beach, would have to pass under the fire of Colonel Blake's force. Yet the Germans would be sure to take any risk in order to capture those guns.

"If by any chance we shouldn't get through," said Sam quickly in Cavendish's ear as they strained along, "we must shove a shell in each gun without lockin' 'em, an' blow the breech-blocks out!"

Cavendish nodded. He had made up his mind to do that with his own hand, should it become certain that the guns must be captured—even though it meant blowing himself to pieces as well as the breech-block. There would have to be no doubt about destroying the guns—it would be too terrible to have brought them ashore not to save Colonel Blake's force, but to annihilate it.

A hundred paces further, and with a shout of joy the landing-party cleared the inland end of the ravine and came out into the open. There was a dip in the ground, and then Shorlands came into view, at the crest of the high ground in front, not three-quarters of a mile away. At last they were under cover of the guns of the Rutlands.

"Stick the pace on, you cripples!" shouted Cavendish. "A long run an' a strong run, an' there we are! Left wheel!"

"Those beggars to the westward are sent to stop us!" said Sam. "Now may Colonel Blake's guns shoot straight, or he'll never get his 4.7's!"

Away to the right, a good distance off, a scattered body of German infantry were racing down as hard as they could to try and cut off the new-comers. At the same moment the machine-guns of Shorlands, blazed away with a vicious rattle, directing all their fire full upon the advancing Germans, who were urged forward by their commanders at all risks.

It was soon plain to anybody used to warfare that the Germans had no chance to reach the bluejackets with the bayonet in face of that fire. The German officer had to halt his men and make them take what cover they could, trusting to rifle-fire to stop the little party.

Stephen realised then how well the plan had been laid for bringing in the guns. They were exposed to the German fire now, it is true, but once out of that fatal gully they were at least free from traps, and the guns of Shorlands made all the difference. When the German riflemen began their fire, however, and the bullets began to whistle round, it was easy to see they were not out of the wood yet.

"You know the ground best," said Cavendish quickly to Sam. "Which way?"

"Further to the left. Round the shoulder of the slope!" cried Sam, and the guns swerved sharply. They were partially hidden now from the worst of the German fire, but still a galling long-range musketry-fire reached them, and first one and then another of the bluejackets went down.

Every nerve and sinew was strained to reach the height in time. All the Maxims and rifles at Shorlands were concentrated on the enemy, giving them plenty to do; but still the peril of the gun-haulers was great.

The slope of ground became steeper, it was more and more arduous work pulling the heavy pieces up hill, and the men; stout and strong as they were, felt the strain terribly. A fourth sailor bit the dust, and had to be left where he lay—there was no time to save dead or wounded.

With every loss the work became harder and the guns moved more slowly.

Sam's anxiety increased more and more. Unless something were done they would never reach the British position. A company of light German infantry, making a long detour round by the back to avoid the Rutlands' fire, were rapidly reaching a point from which they could make a quick charge in and attack the sailors from the rear, when

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A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
By Martin Clifford.

those at Shorlands would be unable to shoot for fear of doing more damage to friends than to foes.

"They'll get us unless we hurry out of this!" panted Stephen thickly. "See behind!"

The Orion's men were gasping and steaming, the sweat pouring down their bronzed faces; and the guns behind seemed to weigh as much as the battleship. They felt now as gun-horses would feel if they were human—unable to fight, with nothing to do but pull, and death close behind them.

Suddenly the gates of Shorlands outer enclosure flew open, and with a shout of encouragement a couple of companies of the Rutlands poured out, and came racing down the slope as if their necks depended on it.

"Hurrah!" cried Stephen and Sam. "At last! Now for the final lap!"

It put new heart into the exhausted little party to see those bronzed riflemen rush down to the rescue, and late though it seemed, Sam knew they could not have made the sortie before. He saw Spencer leading the second company, subaltern though he was. The sharp word of command rang out, the companies split into two, and the foremost reached the guns.

A score of men tailed on to the ropes of each gun at once, and away they bore again uphill, at double the pace, while the others formed round as guard. The bluejackets, tired though they were, would not abandon their own place of honour at the ropes; but there was plenty of room for pullers, and with each crew doubled in strength, they made short work of the rest of the journey.

Meanwhile, the other company under Spencer formed up sharply, front rank kneeling, and poured such a rifle-fire at the advancing German infantry, who were hurrying up the hillside, that their front fairly wilted and broke. The Rutlands were famous for their shooting, and it did not take three minutes to convince the German company that they had no chance of reaching their enemy with the bayonet up that slope. They turned and retreated as fast as they could put their toes to the ground, and finally, having lost fully half their number, bolted into the gully and were seen no more.

Meanwhile, the guns went trundling up the slope, their long barrels waving as they covered the rough ground, Sam, Stephen, and Cavendish still in the van. Then, to the welcome of a mighty cheer from the whole of the beleaguered force, they swept on through the gates of Shorlands and brought up in the main enclosure.

#### How the Handymen Saved the Rutlands.

"Well done, Greyfriars!" cried Colonel Blake, hurrying forward. "By Jove, sir, you ought to have a knighthood! Up with those guns, men! Into place with 'em! Action first, and thanks later!"

If the Navy and cadets had been smart in bringing up the guns, the Army had done their share, and proper emplacements were ready for the two big pieces of artillery even before they arrived. The company-gunners of the Rutlands and a dozen sappers at once gave all possible help, and the carriages were swiftly brought into place. Rope breechings were fixed to help the recoil arrangements, and everybody worked at feverish haste to get the guns ready for action. It takes more than a minute or two to emplace Navy guns for artillery work on shore, and even now the handymen of the Orion showed themselves most capable in making such an arrangement.

"Through at last!" panted Sam, wiping his forehead; for the last half-hour had been the heaviest strain he had experienced in all the campaign. "Now we'll see how the Dutchies like our latest!"

"We're not any too soon, I should think," returned Stephen, getting his breath back, as a shell burst away behind against the tower, and brought a trapload of masonry down.

The brothers saw, for the first time, how hot a corner Shorlands had been during their absence. The German batteries had been hammering away since dawn, and though the range for their field-guns was long, they had done a lot of damage.

All round the enclosures the brick and stonework was knocked about, and here and there it was wrecked altogether. The outer walls, backed with earth, had stood, and the cover for the riflemen was good, yet the sheds at the back were filling fast with dead and wounded.

There were no attempts at storming Shorlands now; it was all long, pitiless bombardment, and though not one shell in ten did much damage, thanks to the fine position of the place, the ones that did come home were very destructive.

Colonel Blake, as soon as the work was well under way, came across to the boys.

"This is more than I dreamed of hoping for," he said

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"A SON OF THE EMPIRE."

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quickly and earnestly. "It is a splendid piece of work! I could barely believe my eyes when I saw those guns coming out of the gully. Gentlemen, you little know how much the Rutlands owe you!"

"Give the credit to Lieutenant Cavendish, sir," said Sam, "who's with the guns yonder. It was his idea. We only told the captain you were hard up for guns, an' they did the rest."

"He shall have the credit, indeed, and you, too. I have seen him, and he tells me I owe as much to you as to him. But we will keep compliments till there's time for them; we have stern work before us first."

Lieutenant Spencer, who had brought his men in, and set them in the firing-line at the ramparts, where they were badly needed, overheard what Colonel Blake said, and winked at the boys as they took their places beside him when the colonel strode away.

"The old boy don't say much, but he looked about ten years younger when he saw those guns of yours in the distance," said the subaltern. "By Jove, but it's a holy wonder! We never dreamt of getting any guns. How was it done?"

Sam told him briefly of the night's work aboard the Orion, and the landing.

"Those Navy chaps are deuced smart, and no mistake!" said Spencer admiringly. "For quick-time work it's a record. I wish I'd seen those Hussars mopped up. We finished off the infantry company, anyhow. Well, I can tell you, you're just in the nick of time—as usual. It's a knack you seem to have."

"Cavendish did it," said Stephen; "but we reckoned you'd be glad to get the guns."

"Glad! My Christian aunt! We could never have held out till any relief came by land. The German guns would have spificated us in a few more hours. They're doin' more damage than we reckoned on. Why, we've lost close on a hundred men, dead an' wounded, since daybreak."

"Phew!" said Sam, aghast. "I didn't know—"

A shell, that burst just over the wall not eighty feet to the left, came as if to back Spencer's words, sending six men of the Rutlands to their last account in the fraction of a second. Other men came from the sides to fill the gaps in the thinning fighting-line, and another shell smashed in the roof of one of the sheds just behind.

"Oh, it's been hot stuff here since there's been light enough to shoot by!" said the subaltern. "And our ammunition's running short, too, as you can suppose. Luckily, the German guns can only chuck in dropping shells at the highest elevation; but that's been quite bad enough! You see, as we hadn't any rangeable guns, Von Weisshaus's batteries have been able to plug away at us like target practice, without any shells to bother 'em. But if your Navy chaps can shoot—"

"Captain Fane sent three of his best gunners," said Stephen, "though one of 'em was killed down the hill. Look! They've got the first of the 4.7's fixed. The gunner's got it to his liking. In goes the shell!"

"Then, by jingo, you'll see a change in a minute!" said Spencer warmly. "You'll see the blessed tables turned!"

The Germans got in a perfect shower of shells just then, and some severe damage was done. It was easy to see how perilous was the case of the Rutlands had they remained without guns. But now the long, tapered barrel of the first 4.7 was laid; the big bare-armed gunner coolly gripped the lever and the rack and pinion-wheel as his eye glinted along the sights, and the first shot was fired.

There was a loud, ringing boom as the gun spoke, and the great shell went humming across the valley. The eager watchers saw a big blot of yellow smoke spring up right among the white puffs that showed where the German battery was firing. It was the bursting of the Lyddite shell.

"Holy pokers, how that chap can shoot!" cried Spencer, in amazement, his glasses to his eyes. "Got 'em first go!"

"Any damage done?" exclaimed Sam eagerly. "They don't need much range-findin' in Frankie's squadron!"

"Damage? Blown one of their field-guns to smithereens—gunners and all. If the chaps can keep that up—"

Boom! roared the second gun. Again the wild song of the shell, and a second mushroom of yellow smoke blossomed right under the noses of the westernmost German battery. Then the 4.7s, warming to their work, fairly settled down to it.

The boys drew near to the guns they had helped to bring, and positively licked their lips as they watched the practice the Fleet men made. The spirits of the whole beleaguered force rose like mercury in sunshine. Shot after shot was placed with deadly accuracy right among the German guns, and already the German shell-fire diminished rapidly.

It was a splendid thing to see. The neatly-clad crews worked as coolly as if at target practice off the Nore in times of peace. The whistling bullets and banging shells

troubled their nerves no more than bees humming. At the first 4.7 the big seaman-gunner laid his sights each time with perfect precision, his strong, bronzed face glancing grimly down the long barrel, and the blue tattooed anchors showing on his great, hairy arms as he gripped the wheel and cord. Gun after gun became silent in the German lines.

"We've got 'em—got 'em by the short hairs!" said Spencer exultingly; and the colonel, standing exposed on the ramparts with his glasses to his eyes, showed grim delight in every line of his face.

The speed with which the Navy guns were served was as surprising as the shooting they made. Within twenty minutes two German batteries had been annihilated, with all their men. The tremendous power of the Lyddite shells, made for piercing the armour of warships and devastating their citadels, was irresistible.

The Germans had thought to butcher the gunless British force at long range. Now they found themselves faced with artillery as superior to their own as their field-guns had been to Colonel Blake's pom-poms, and the change was wonderful and deadly. The high position of Shorlands gave all the advantage to the big guns, which could thus shoot downwards at the enemy instead of upwards.

"They're moving! They're getting it in the neck!" cried Stephen, beside himself with joy. "There comes one out already!"

One of the German batteries shifted ground hurriedly, horsing its guns, and heading further to the westward at full gallop. It could be seen plainly. The first 4.7 held its fire, and as the battery swung over a rise of ground at high speed, a shell from the naval gun crashed right into it, and bowled two of the German fieldpieces over.

"Gee-whizz! Is there anything you can't hit?" said one of the Rutlands, lying with his rifle close by.

"That's how we knock out thirty-knot destroyers at sea, matey," said the gunner, as the sister weapon also caught out one of the German guns. "It wouldn't be much to Frankie's credit if I couldn't smack it into a gallopin' Prussian popgun."

The shell was sent home, the breechblock shut with a snick, and he swung the gun to bear on the third battery.

"Well done, gunner!" said the colonel fervently. "Fine shooting, indeed! How are you off for ammunition?"

"Got several rounds yet, sir, besides shrapnel."

"Good! If you can finish those batteries before they can get clear, do it at any cost. You won't need more rounds than will do that."

"By gum!" murmured Sam. "He's right. Those four are the only batteries on the island."

"An' two from four leaves two," rejoined Cavendish cheerfully. "Ah, there goes half No. 3!"

"Stop the machine-guns there!" ordered the colonel. "All but B Company cease firing!"

Rifles and pom-poms alike became silent, all save the picked shots of Spencer's company. The ammunition might well be needed later, and the range was long. The two 4.7s had it all their own way. Shell after shell went roaring across to the Germans, and nearly every one reached its mark. The two remaining batteries of the enemy were well concealed, but that was of no avail. The gunners of the Orion sought them out, and dropped shells into their very emplacements.

Desperate efforts were made by the Germans to pick off the two 4.7s, but owing to the high elevation the enemy were unable to shoot accurately enough for this. With the terrible naval projectiles crashing among them every few seconds, they could do little effective work, and it was not long before the German bombardment had almost ceased, and only the musketry-fire reached Shorlands from the enemy's trenches.

"What's that row away to the northward?" said Stephen suddenly, putting his hand on his brother's arm.

Between the reports of the guns, when everything seemed almost silent in contrast to the ear-splitting noise they made at each shot, a dull mutter like distant thunder could be heard far away across the marshland, in the direction of the Swale. Sam pricked his ears as he heard it, and hurried to the left side of the enclosure to see if he could make out anything, nearly getting blown to shreds for his pains by one of the last of the German shells, which luckily crashed through the roof of a shed beside him before it burst. The shed was wrecked.

It was impossible to see far to the southward, for the low hills between shut out the view of the Swale. Sam was only able to make a guess as to what the distant noise was, but all the attention of the Rutlands was taken up by the enemy in front.

So sure of success had the Germans been, knowing at first that the British were without guns, that their own batteries were not at all easy to withdraw, without exposing them badly.

Their only hope now was to fight it out; but when the third battery was fairly wrecked, the fourth made a desperate attempt to clear out and save itself, with half a mile of open ground to cover before it could get out of range of the terrible naval guns.

"Let 'em have it!" cried Colonel Blake. "Now show us what you can do at sea! I'll give £50 premium for each gun you get!"

### How Sam Found Himself Up a Tree.

Boom! said the first 4.7. The shell fell just short of the galloping battery. Those who had field-glasses could see the Prussian artillerymen lashing their horses to a frantic gallop.

Boom! The second of the Orion's weapons scored a fair hit, and the rearmost German piece, was laid out in full career, men, horses and all. Such shooting had never been seen by the Rutlands throughout the whole campaign.

"Even money on the 4.7's!" cried a sporting subaltern, amid laughter, for the marks were now harder than ever to hit. The first of the naval pair sent its shell whizzing in pursuit, and another Prussian gun stopped and spread out like a tin toy that has been stepped on. The remaining two vanished over the crest of the hill just in the nick of time, and were seen no more.

"Well done!" exclaimed the colonel. "They've saved but two guns out of the lot—they have only two left in the whole island! Men, you and your 4.7's will never be forgotten in the British Army. Now let 'em have it in the trenches, and Von Weissshaus shall wish himself back in Berlin!"

The storm of rifle-bullets from the German troops redoubled now that the guns were gone, for the enemy still hoped to thin out the British force by musketry fire, with the chance of making it impossible to work the big guns. But the 4.7's were too well protected in their well-made emplacements. The next move of the game was already in progress.

"Gee-whizz!" exclaimed Stephen, as he saw the Orion's men thrusting the charges into the breach. "Shrapnel! I wouldn't be in the German trenches for something when that comes about their ears from up here."

He was right. The first few rounds told with terrific effect upon the enemy, for the downward direction of the aim gave the shrapnel charges every chance. Instead of the ordinary shells, these now exploded over the German trenches and rained death all round them as the masses of bullets burst their cases. At the colonel's orders, both guns concentrated their fire on the centre trenches, where the Prussian riflemen lay, for from those the Rutlands had suffered most.

If ever a commander of men rued his lack of foresight, it must have been Von Weissshaus, capable leader though he was. Knowing the forlorn little British force had no guns when they came, he had not even made his trenches as they should have been made to guard against shrapnel. He had made them for speed, and to protect his men from rifle-fire. Now the fatal hail of lead—hatfuls of it at each shot—devastated his firing-lines and swept the trenches. In six or eight minutes the Prussians in the centre trenches had to bolt out of them and fly over the hill for cover beyond, leaving a third of their number behind in the muddy ditch. If they had stayed, they would have been killed to the last man.

"Only twenty rounds left each, sir!" said the gunner of the first 4.7.

Colonel Blake watched keenly through his glasses. "Give it 'em hot an' strong to the last round!" he said. "They don't know how much we've got. They're wavering now!"

A cheer arose from every living throat in Shorlands as two full battalions of the enemy were seen to follow the example of the Prussians, and fly for better shelter. The British guns shot so hard and swiftly that the besieging force could not face them any longer. The losses were terrific.

"They're giving way," said the colonel, under his breath, his face lighting with fierce joy. "It's only the battalions in the lower trenches that can stick it out! The rest—By Jove, they're falling back on Sheerness! What's that I hear to the southward?"

The low booming and the rattle of musketry in the direction of the Swale could be heard by everybody now. It was Stephen who first gave voice to the news.

"It's from Hartz Ferry, sir!" he cried.

"By Jove, then it must be Vincent and the relief force!" said the colonel eagerly, under his breath; and at the same time a call was heard from the lieutenant on watch at the top of the tower.

"Battle in progress to the southward, sir. Can't quite see how it's going from here, but I believe our relief force is getting across the Swale."

"Gloriana!" murmured Cavendish. "An' we've wiped out Von Weissshaus's guns. He can't stop 'em!"

"He has his machine guns yet," said Sam, his eyes gleaming with excitement as he tried to get a view of the battle from the ramparts, disregarding the bullets that were still pouring in; "but with luck and pluck, our fellows'll do it in spite of 'em. Vincent's a first-class man, if it's he."

"That must be his guns we can hear, then," said Stephen, "commanding the landing from the Kentish side. My eye! I wouldn't swop places with Von Weissshaus now. He must have got all his reserve troops up to try an' stop Vincent. Gosh! I wish we could see from here."

Colonel Blake's bronzed face was flushed with unwonted excitement as he listened to the sullen drumming of the distant guns that reached him in the lulls of his own fight. Then, suddenly, he called to Sam:

"Lieutenant Villiers! You are the best scout we have, and you know the island thoroughly. Can you get through from here to the Swale, and find a way of reaching Colonel Vincent the moment he lands on Sheppey?"

"I'll do my best, sir," said Sam eagerly. "Shall I start at once?"

"At once. You will have to dodge the German scouts and Uhlan; they will be thick between here and the Swale."

"I think I can manage that, sir."

"And you must go alone. Let Colonel Vincent know how we are disposed here. Inform him that the force before me has lost its guns, and that if he drives back those who are opposing him, and advances upon the flank of my besiegers here, I will make a sortie with all the men I have left. Between us we will drive the Germans back into Sheerness, storm the town, and win back Sheppey and the command of the Thames to the British flag."

Sam's eyes sparkled as he saluted.

"Make all speed, my lad, and take care you are not caught. On you depends the success of the day, for unless the thing is done swiftly, the chance will be lost."

The young scout departed at once, and the good wishes of everyone in Shorlands went with him. Nobody doubted he would succeed. After the bringing of the guns, they would have believed anything of the two brothers and Cavendish. The latter, with Stephen, wished him a hurried farewell at the gates.

"Good luck to you, old chap! It's a rare sportin' chance you've got, an' good news to give at the end of it. Don't get stuck by a lancer."

"See you later, if all's well," said Sam, though he knew better than either of them how risky a passage it would be to the Swale—far more so than the journey from Sheerness.

He left Shorlands by the east side, and had to crawl for the best part of a mile among gorse-bushes and any other cover he could find, for it was important that he should not be seen leaving the place. At last he was able to rise to his feet and run for it, covering another mile of ground at a sharp pace.

Soon, however, he found there was no doubt about the German scouts; they almost amounted to a patrol, and it seemed to Sam that they were there expressly to prevent any communication between Shorlands and the Swale, for there was always at least one of them in sight. However, he was a far better scout than any of them, and after a little trouble contrived to get past unseen. On the lower ground there were no more of them, and Sam hoped he had shaken them off. All the time the sounds of battle grew louder as he approached.

"Somebody's getting it hot," said Sam to himself. "Blake's been takin' it for granted that our chaps would be able to get across, but it seems to me it's a dickens of a big order. I've got to find out if they are over the Swale before I can lay a course to reach 'em. Otherwise I shall find

myself back in Von Weissshaus's hands again, which won't be healthy. That tree on the risin' ground yonder ought to give a view that'll solve the question."

Sam made his way as quickly as he could to a tree that stood on the last of the hills before the marshes were entered. He had an eye for a point of vantage, and knew he would get from there the view of the fight that had as yet been hidden from him. He reached the tree, and after a cautious look round, mouated into the lower branches. He did not need to climb high, but stood on a bough some six or seven feet from the ground. Shading his eyes, he looked away towards the Swale.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed aloud, dancing on the bough with delight. "Blake was right—they're gettin' across, in face of the German fire!"

Like dots upon the water the tugs and barges holding Colonel Vincent's relief force could be seen steadily forging across the Swale, under cover of the three British batteries on the Kentish side, which were playing havoc with the German force drawn up to oppose the landing of Vincent's troops.

"They'll pull it off!" said Sam ecstatically. "We've got Von Weissshaus by the short hairs! In half an hour—"

He turned sharply, for the drumming of hoofs smote upon his ear; and stout as his nerves were, what he saw made him start.

A big Uhlman was riding at him full gallop, his long lance couched at Sam, whose helpless position in the tree made him an easy mark for it. And the man, not thirty yards away, cried aloud harshly in his own tongue as Sam turned and showed his face.

"Potztausend! Weissshaus's prisoner, who helped bring in those guns, or I'm an Englander!"

There was no time to swing aside or dodge. As Sam saw the glittering lancehead coming full tilt at him, he jumped straight down, and trusted to luck.

He was only just in time. The lance passed just over him, and he fell right on top of the Uhlman, landing astride the horse. The German gave a gasping howl, and dropped his lance, while Sam flung both arms round him and embraced him desperately. The shock nearly threw both of them out of the saddle, and they rocked to and fro while the horse cantered on wildly.

"Donnerwetter! Verdammtes Englander!" panted the German frantically. "Lassen los!"


He made a desperate effort to draw a weapon, but Sam put forth all his strength, and, the horse giving a plunge just then, the Uhlman lost one stirrup, and Sam bore him forcibly back. For a moment it looked as if they were both coming off together; but Sam clutched the saddle-bow with one hand, and managed to free himself as the heavy German toppled over backwards and fell on the ground, where he lay motionless.

Sam thought he was pretty sure to follow his enemy's example, for the horse was galloping excitedly, and the cadet was facing the wrong way, lying along the saddle, and holding on as best he could, with the stirrup-irons swinging in all directions. It struck him that he must look a fairly comical figure if there were anyone to see—which he devoutly hoped there was not, for his safety's sake. Sticking on took up all his attention, nor had he any idea where he was going.

However, he managed to swing himself round and across the saddle as soon as he got a good grip, and after that it was an easy matter to get astride and win command of the horse, which apparently thought it was taking a holiday. Then Sam looked round him, and found he was galloping along the foot of the hills, and that the Uhlman was left behind, out of sight.

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