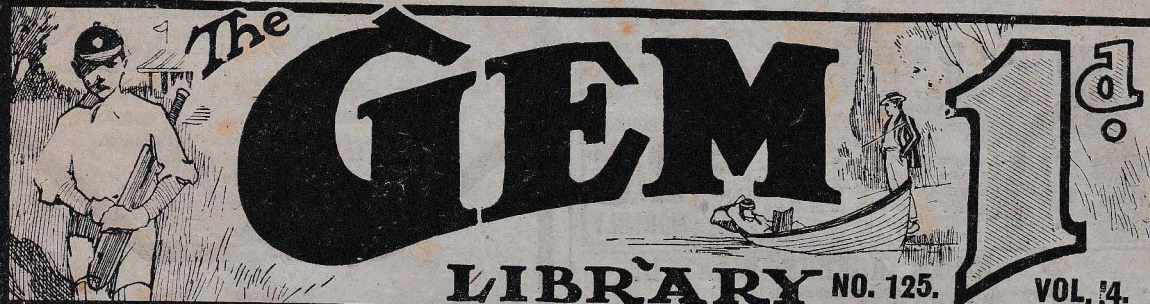


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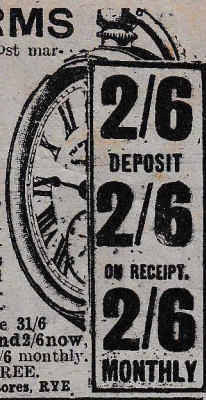
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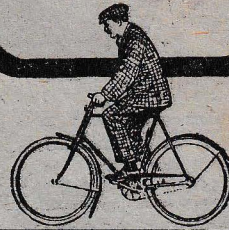
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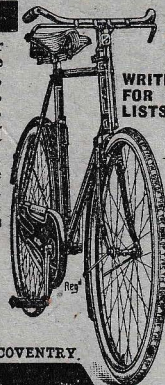


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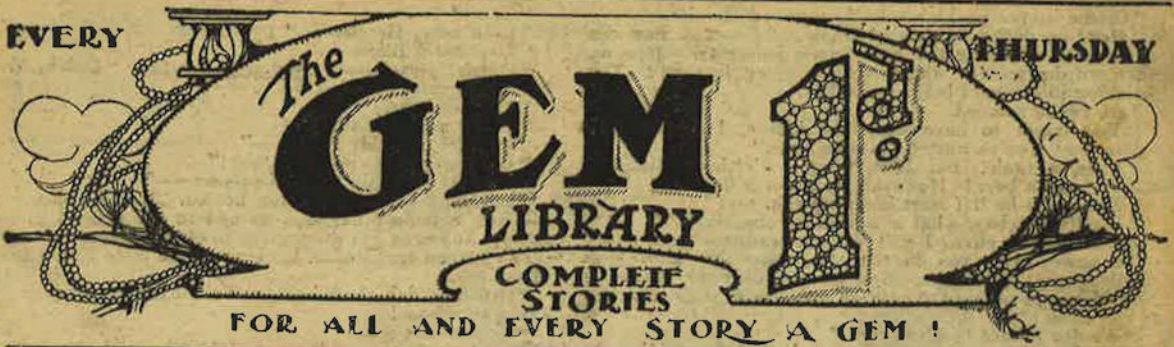
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AGAINST
ST. JIM'S



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CHAPTER 1.

The Arrival of the Letter.

"**F**IGGINS & CO. have something up their giddy sleeves, chaps—"
"Heah, heah!"
"There's no doubt about it," continued Jack Blake thoughtfully. "I know old Figgy, and when he commences to chuckle to himself at prep., it's because there's something up his sleeve."
"His arm, perhaps," said Herries absently.
Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Digby stared at him in silence. Herries hastily apologised.
"I've been with Lowther all the evening, kids," he explained hastily. "You know how Monty's jokes grow on one. I jolly well agree with you, Blakey, about Figgins & Co."
"Heah, heah!"
"Look how they were whispering to one another at tea—"
"Heah, heah!"
Jack Blake stopped speaking, and turned in his chair. He looked towards Arthur Augustus inquiringly.
"What's there, Gussy?"
"Weally, deah boy—"
"You said something was there, didn't you, kid?"
"Weally, deah boy, you misundahstood my meanin'!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, replacing his gold-rimmed monocle in his eye. "I was wefewwin' to—"
"Good!"
"Weally, Hewwies—"
"Excellent!"
"Bai Jove, Digbay, deah boy—"
"Splendid!" grinned Jack Blake. "Now Gussy has explained all about it, we'll get on with the washing. It's pretty well agreed, kids, that Figgins & Co. are on the warpath."

"Rather!"
"Not much doubt about that, Blakey."
"Then there isn't much doubt about it being up against us to take the wind out of their giddy sails," said Jack Blake decidedly. "We've got to jape them before they can jape us."
"Yaas, wathah!"
"How can we do that, kid?"
"My hat!"
Jack Blake looked at Digby in surprise. Arthur Augustus and Herries also turned round.
Digby went rather pink.
"I mean—"
"How can we? Bai Jove!"
"Don't be a frabjous ass, Gussy! I meant—"
"He's off his rocker!"
"Look here, Herries—"
"Brain fag!"
Herries shook his head.
"Fag, perhaps," he said, "but not brain fag. I'd go to bed for a time, if I were you, Dig."
"Yaas, wathah! Pway take a west, deah boy!"
"Or go and eat coke!"
"Asses!" shouted Digby. "I meant to say—"
"Oh, we heard what you said, old man!"
"Yaas, wathah; and we recognised that it was only the wavin's of a disordahed mind!"
"Shrieking duffers!" yelled Digby. "If you want a thick ear, Herries—"
"It's you who wants a brain, kid! How can we jape the Now House? My aunt, you must have been sitting in the sun, Dig!"
"Raving lunatic! I didn't mean—"
"Bai Jove!"
"I tell you I meant—"
"And he's just told us he didn't mean it!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Put a cold key down his neck, someone!"

"Or the inkpot up his sleeve," suggested Herries.
 "Howling duffers!" shouted Digby. "I meant, how can we be sure of japing the New House before they jape us, when we don't know when they are going to start? You shrieking idiots want boiling in oil!"

Jack Blake grinned.
 "You ought to have explained before, kid," he said severely. "You've wasted valuable time."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, what a w'etched misundah-standin', deah boys! Howevah, no harm is done!"

"There will be if I start bumping you, ass!"
 "Weally, Digbay, what a w'idiculous obsahvation! How-evah, undah the circs., I will let you washness pass, and I quite agwee with you in the othah mattah! Digbay is weally wight, deah boys. How can we discovah when the New House boundahs are goin' to play one of their w'etched twicks on us?"

"We don't want to discover it."
 "Weally, Blake, deah boy, pway don't be so w'idic. As Digby wemarked, how shall we know when to wag them unless we know when they are goin' to wag us? You nevah thought of that, did you, deah boy?"

"Didn't I? Is it likely Figgy can get a jape going before the dormitory bell goes, ass?"
 "No; wathah not—almost impos., I should say!"
 "They are fagging on top speed at an impot. Ratty gave them."

Jack Blake nodded.
 "And Rattiff's impots. have to be done properly. Figgins & Co. aren't likely to rag us until lights are out, any-way."

"No; wathah not!"
 "Then we rag them the moment lights are out ourselves."
 "Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"
 "Yes; that's the wheeze, of course!" remarked Digby pleasantly. "The thing now is to arrange the jape."

"Rather!"
 "Bai Jove, it will have to be somethin' weally wippin', deah boys!"
 "Oh, we can safely leave that to Blake!" declared Digby, smiling encouragingly. "Blake has a spanking idea."

"Good!"
 "Yaas, wathah! Pway let's get on with the washin', deah boy!"
 And they all looked towards Jack Blake expectantly. Jack Blake went rather red.

"Of course, I've got an idea!" he exclaimed, looking back warmly towards Digby. "I've got heaps of ideas!"
 "That's what I said, old chap."
 "Yaas, wathah! I wemembah heahin' Digbay make the wemark!"

"Did you, ass?"
 "Weally, Blake, I must request—"
 "Ring off, Gussy! Let Blakey get on with the washing!"
 "Something really good this time, kid!" said Digby, still more encouragingly. "No back numbers!"
 "Who's going to give you back numbers, ass?"
 "That's all right, then."

And silence reigned in Study No. 6 for a moment or two. Jack Blake was getting redder. Digby was grinning, but the other two Fourth-Formers were serious enough.
 "Pway don't hesitate, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus after a time. "You are among fwriends!"

"I'm among a set of cackling young asses, you mean!" growled the leader of the Fourth Form. "What about —"
 "Yes?"
 "What about—"

"Pway wemembah you are among fwriends, Blake, deah boy!"
 "Rotter! What about—about slipping into the New House to-night directly lights are out, and—and upsetting all the things in Figgy's room?"
 "Rotten, old chap!"
 "Look here, Digby—"

"Piffling!"
 Jack Blake jumped to his feet, a warlike expression in his eyes.
 "Look here, Herries—"

"We are looking, kid!"
 "Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Blake, deah boy, your ideah has wathah taken my bweath away!"
 "Yes; it is good, isn't it?"

"Bai Jove! On the contwawy, deah boy, I wewet to say that I must weward the ideah as wotten in the extweme!"
 "It's better than anything you can suggest, anyway, ass!"
 "Pway don't be w'idic., deah boy, not even in humah!"
 "And he calls himself chief of Study No. 6."
 "So I am!"

"So I am!"
 THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 125.

"Rats!"
 "Look here, Herries—"
 "Look here, Blake—"
 "Ordah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Ordah, deah boys! As chief of Study No. 6—"

"Chief of what?"
 "I jolly well like that!"
 "As chief of Study No. 6—"
 "Bai Jove, Hewwies, what wot!"
 "As chief of Study No. 6, I propose—"

The argument was becoming heated. Jack Blake was on his feet, a trifle pink, and, to add to the general uproar, Arthur Augustus was attempting to obtain order.
 His method consisted of banging on the table with a heavy ebony ruler.

"Ordah—ordah, deah boys, or I shall have to wemove you fwom my woom!"
 "Go and eat coke!"
 The door of the study opened hastily, and the form of Mellish stood framed in the doorway. There was a look of surprise in Mellish's little eyes.

"What's up, Blake?"
 "Jolly fine sort of study this would be with you chief, Herries!"
 "I am chief, ass!"

"Ordah—ordah, deah boys! Blake, as chief of Study No. 6, I must wewest you to wettiah! Your weally wotten ideah was the cause of this dispute, and as a weally wippin' ideah has just occuwved to me— Ordah—ordah, instantly!"

"Ass!"
 "Take his ruler away!"
 "Bump him!"
 Arthur Augustus also jumped to his feet now.
 "Weally, Hewwies, your humah is wotten! I should uttaly wefuse to be bumped—I should wefuse to be bumped, undah any circs.! Bai Jove!"

The heated argument stopped at once.
 A change had come over Arthur Augustus's aristocratic features. He was staring at the door.
 "Bai Jove, deah boys, we are in the pwesence of a guest!"
 Jack Blake sniffed. Mellish was known as the cad of the Fourth at St. Jim's.

"What do you want in this room, anyway, Mellish?"
 Mellish looked hurt. He rather specialised in looking hurt.

"That's a nice sort of way to thank a fellow for fagging all the way up the stairs just to oblige!" he said indignantly.
 "I've a good mind to clear out at once!"
 Arthur Augustus allowed his monocle to slip from his eye in alarm. He stepped forward hastily.

"Well, Mellish, I twust you will take no notice of Jack Blake's wathah wough-and-wendy gweetin'," he exclaimed.
 "These fellows are a twifle wuffed. I was twyin' to obtain ordah when you awived."

Mellish allowed his hurt expression to disappear.
 "Well, if you put it like that, D'Arcy, of course, it's all right," he said. "The post is just in, and so I brought up the only letter there was for this study."
 "Bai Jove, that's wathah wippin' of you, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, holding out his hand. "Pway hand ovah the lettah, Mellish!"

"But I don't know whether it's for you or not."
 "It's for me, of course?"
 "No; I don't know that it is, Blake."
 "For me?"
 "Don't be an ass! It's mine, of course!"

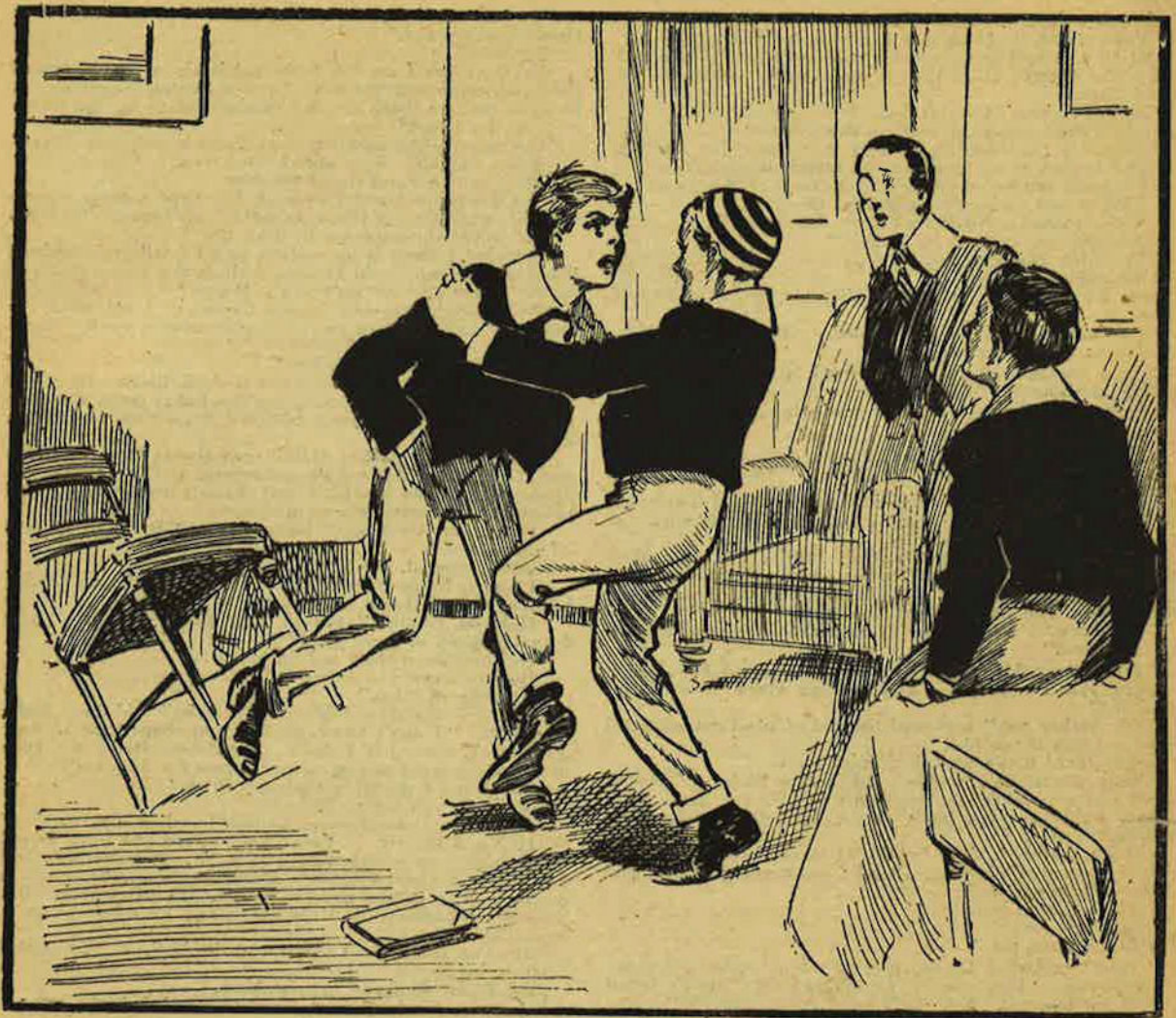
Mellish glanced from Digby to Herries, and shook his head.
 "I can't say that it's for any of you," he said.
 Jack Blake & Co. stared at him.
 "Not for any of us! Then what have you brought it here for, ass?"

"It's addressed to Study No. 6," said Mellish, glancing at a neat little blue envelope. "It's addressed to the 'Chief of Study No. 6, St. Jim's College,' in fact."
 Instantly Jack Blake & Co. were across the room. Two chairs were overturned, and the tablecloth swept from the table.

They crowded round the startled Mellish.
 "Then it's for me, of course!"
 "Rats!"
 "Who said 'rats'?"

"What uttah wot! If the lettah is addressed to the 'Chief of Study No. 6,' it is foah me! You wottah, Blake—you weckless young wottah! Bai Jove!"
 Jack Blake had snatched the letter from the rather frightened Mellish. Herries promptly made a grab for it, and there was the sound of tearing paper.

"You weckless boundahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, also making a grab for the letter. "Gweat Scott!"
 All the swell of St. Jim's obtained of the little blue envelope



Jack Blake commenced to waltz Herries round the study. As Herries had his hands in his pockets at the time, he became wrathful. "Ass! Leggo, leggo!" he yelled.

was the corner which contained the stamp. Arthur Augustus stared at his capture in surprise.

Then, in the excitement of the moment, Herries bumped into him. Arthur Augustus fell over a chair.

"You uttah wuffians!"

"Ass!"

"Leggo, leggo!"

The cries were becoming confused.

In attempting to retreat with the letter, Jack Blake fell over Arthur Augustus's legs. Obeying one of the first principles of Nature, the leader of the School House Fourth-Formers grabbed the nearest object.

The nearest object happened to be Digby's tie, and Digby was nearly choked in consequence.

"Idiot!"

"Duffers!"

"Bai Jove! You weckless wuffians. Gweat Scott!"

"On the ball!" chuckled Herries. "On the ball, kids!"

And he rolled on Jack Blake.

The Yorkshire junior was beneath the struggling heap now, gasping loudly.

"Asses! Raving maniacs! Shrieking duffers!"

"Hand over the letter, then."

"Yaas, wathah! Hand ovah the lettah, deah boy. Digbay, I must request you to wemove your wotten knee fwom my cheast instantly."

"Gerrup! Lemme gerrup!"

"Will you hand ovah the lettah, deah boy?"

"Yes!" gasped Jack Blake. "Yes, you shrieking asses!"

And the juniors began to scramble to their feet.

The dispute had been a short one, but none the less

vigorous, and the effects it had had on their attire was considerable.

Digby's tie was still trying to choke him, and Herries had lost his collar; but, with the exception of Arthur Augustus, none of them thought much about that.

"The letter, Blakey."

"Yaas, wathah! Hand ovah the lettah to me as awwanged."

"To you, Gussy?" exclaimed Herries, in surprise. "To you?"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

Jack Blake was holding up a small piece of pale blue paper, less than an inch square.

"There's the letter, you shrieking maniacs!"

And silence reigned in Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 2.

The Disappearance of the Letter.

"**B**AI JOVE!" The Fourth-Formers stood staring at the inch of blue envelope held between Jack Blake's thumb and finger in amazement. Jack Blake also looked at it.

"Pretty nice, if it contained a banknote, eh? Fine set of asses some people will look then, won't they?"

"Bai Jove, a banknote! Gweat Scott! I was wathah expectin' a fivah fwom the patah to-day."

"Then if it was in this lettah, you can go on expecting, kid."

"Bai Jove!"

"Where's the rest of the letter, kids?"

"Yaas, wathah! Heah is a twifle of it, deah boys."

And he also held up a corner of the envelope. There was nothing of greater value than a used penny stamp to be found there.

"My hat! where's the rest, kids?"

Digby looked round the room in amazement.

It certainly had been an exciting scrimmage, but scarcely exciting enough to cause a letter to utterly disappear.

An amazed expression crept into the faces of the juniors.

"Have a look under the tablecloth, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! No, it isn't heah, deah boys."

"Sure you haven't got it, Blake?"

"Of course, I'm sure, ass."

"Not ragging, I mean."

Jack Blake shook his head, looking as puzzled as any of them.

"No, honest injun!" he exclaimed. "Bother it all, kids, it must be somewhere about."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it must be somewhere about myself, deah boys. Pway make a thorough search, as I fully expect to find a fivah from the patah inside."

"What's that there, Dig?"

"Only Herries's collar."

No one laughed. The affair of the missing letter was too surprising for jokes.

It certainly had been a very small envelope, and they could account for two corners of it; but where the remainder was none of them could think.

They moved all the furniture in that part of the room, they examined their own clothing to see whether it had got into a pocket by any chance; but not a trace of it could be discovered. The juniors were astounded.

"Bai Jove! I wegard this as we-markable—we-markable in the extweme."

"Jolly funny, kids, and no mistake," muttered Jack Blake, looking round blankly. "Did you see where it went to, Mellish?"

"No, rather not," answered the cad of the Fourth. "I'll help you look if you like."

"Bai Jove! that's wathah wippin' of you."

"Only you needn't trouble," put in Jack Blake. "If four can't find a small letter, five won't be able to. Look here, chaps, we'll have the giddy carpet up before we lose the epistle."

"Yaas, wathah! As a fivah is at stake, I considah—"

"Do you mind clearing, Mellish; we're going to find that letter if it rains ink."

"Heah, heah, deah boy!"

"Got it, Gussy!"

"No, wathah not."

"Ass!" muttered Digby, peering about under the table.

"If you say 'Hear, hear!' again until that letter's found, you'll get bumped. You don't mind going, Mellish?"

"N-no."

"That's all right, then," said Herries, thoughtfully opening the door.

Hints, if they were for Mellish, had to be fairly obvious. These were only just obvious enough, for he moved towards the door hesitatingly.

"As a matter of fact, Blake—"

"Yes?"

"As a matter of fact, I came here to talk something over with you chaps."

"Bai Jove! I thought you said you had come to bring us the lettah, deah boy?"

"Yes, of course," added Mellish hastily. "But I wanted to talk something over with you as well, something jolly important."

"Bai Jove!"

"It'll have to do later, Mellish; we're out to find that giddy letter."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy. As a fivah is at stake—"

"Drop in just before the dorny bell goes, if it's really important," said Jack Blake, a trifle bluntly. "We shall be here."

"It's very important, Blake."

"What's it about, then?"

"About Figgins & Co.," said Mellish, still in the doorway.

"And I can't come back this evening because I've got some lines to do."

The Study No. 6 juniors looked inquiringly across the room.

They were fearfully keen on finding the strangely missing letter, but then they were also fearfully keen on keeping level with the New House juniors. They remembered their previous convictions that Figgins & Co. had a jape in hand against their rivals of the School House.

Mellish's little eyes twinkled.

"It's something you ought to know," he said. "Perhaps THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 125.

it'll be too late to-morrow, and the honour of the School House is concerned."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove! as I am the pwincipal losah in the mattah of the lettah containing the fivah," put in Arthur Augustus, "I wpropose that we listen to what Mellish has to say before we take up the carpet."

"Get on with the washing, then, Mellish, only look alive."

"Yaas, wathah! Fiah ahead, deah boy!"

Mellish grinned, and closed the door.

"Do you chaps know Figgins & Co. have a great wheeze on against the School House to-night," he began. "I—"

"Bai Jove! we suspected it, deah boy."

"Yes, but I know it for certain, and I'll tell you all about it for half a crown," said Mellish, without the least embarrassment. "Half a crown isn't much, Gussy."

"No, wathah not, and, undah the cires, I am weady to hand ovah half a crown pprovided your news is weally twue."

"Of course, it's true."

"Fiah ahead, then, deah boy."

Mellish glanced anxiously towards Jack Blake. He never felt quite sure of the junior from the broad acres, for Jack Blake was one of the hardest-headed Fourth-Formers in St. Jim's.

With Arthur Augustus, Mellish was always at his ease, because of Arthur Augustus's generosity. The swell of St. Jim's was generous to a fault, and absolute proof was required before even his suspicions were roused.

"Fiah ahead, deah boy," he repeated. "Pway let us have all the details."

Mellish coughed.

"I happen to know for a fact that Figgins & Co. are coming into the School House to-night to—"

"Hold on, Mellish," put in Jack Blake quietly. "How do you happen to know this?"

"I—I overheard them talking about it."

"Do you mean you listened?"

"I overheard them."

"Which is the same thing in your case," said Jack Blake scornfully. "I don't know whether you chaps want to hear the rotter's news, but I don't. The School House can keep its end up without paying eavesdroppers for information."

"Bai Jove! I should wathah fancy so."

"What do you mean, Blake?"

"Didn't you understand, Mellish?" asked the chief of Study No. 6 bluntly. "You come in here and want to sell us something we wouldn't have at a gift. If a chap can find out anything about the other House in the ordinary way, I mean, as long as the game's played, it's all right. But listening at keyholes isn't the game, and we aren't going to benefit by it."

"How do you know I listened at the keyhole?" demanded Mellish, going red. "I—"

Jack Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyway, we don't want your information, Mellish."

"No, wathah not."

"Take up your half-crown, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! yaas, wathah!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's picking up the coin he had just placed on the table. "I am weally wathah sowwy I offahed it. Howevah—"

"You're a set of rotters!" exclaimed Mellish, in exasperation. "You don't keep your words. D'Arcy promised me the half-crown."

Jack Blake opened the door.

"The window, or this way?" he asked pleasantly. "Take your choice."

"I shall jolly well go to Figgins."

"You can go to Taggles, the porter, if you like."

"I shall tell Figgins something I know about your plans," said Mellish wrathfully. "I know very well you've got some—"

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thing on 'gainst the New House, just the same as Figgins has something on 'gainst you."

"Bai Jove! then you must have been listenin' at the doah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"And now he's going to sell old Figgins's information."

"What a young sweep. Bump him, chaps!"

"Look here, Blake, if you touch me—"

"Bump him!" cried Jack Blake. "Bump him, kids!"

"Right-ho!"

"On the ball!"

And a general rush was made for the cad of the Fourth. Mellish did his best to retreat, but he was too late to escape.

Digby and Herries pounced upon him just as he attempted to round the corner in the corridor. The other two came rushing up.

CHAPTER 3.

The Bumping of Mellish.

"F all the young sweeps!"

"To go and think of selling his own House secrets to Figgins & Co.—"

"Bump him—bump him, deah boys, like anythin'!"

The juniors spoke with excitement. Mellish had no House loyalty, and though the Study No. 6 juniors usually treated this with the scorn it deserved, there were times when even Arthur Augustus became wrathful.

This was one of them.

Mellish had exceeded badly in trying to sell them news obtained by eavesdropping, and then he had exceeded still more in solemnly declaring he meant to go over to the New House on a similar errand.

There could be no two questions about it, Mellish ought to be bumped.

And bumped Mellish was.

"One, two, three, deah boys. Hooway!"

"Ow!" yelled Mellish. "O-ow! Yah!"

"Bump him—bump him, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't smash the floor-boards, Dig."

"What do you think of that for a bump, Mellish?"

The cad of the Fourth did not say what he thought of it, but the juniors could guess his opinion from the yells he gave vent to.

He was raising his voice with every bump, and Jack Blake, for one, knew his reason. Mellish wanted to attract the attention of a prefect, or someone who would put a stop to the affair.

That still further nettled the chief of Study No. 6.

"Never mind his yells—"

"No, wathah not; nevah mind his yells, deah boys."

"Rotters! All right, Jack Blake—O-ow!"

The four had Mellish in a very convenient attitude, and were bumping him vigorously. Mellish's shouts were becoming prodigious.

Suddenly Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's up, Gussy?"

"What's the giddy wheeze now?"

"Gweat Scott!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's, picking up a small square affair which looked as if it might have been a blue envelope. "My only toppah!"

The other three juniors stopped bumping Mellish, and stared at the envelope. It was the missing letter for which they had almost ransacked Study No. 6.

And it had been found in the passage, too, a good six yards from the study door.

How on earth could it have got there?

Arthur Augustus drew himself up to his full height, and jammed his monocle in his eye. He was as certain as he could be certain of anything, that the letter had dropped from Mellish's pocket.

For an instant Arthur Augustus met Mellish's eyes with a steady glance. The cad of the Fourth coloured deeply.

Jack Blake did not notice the glance.

"My hat! The giddy letter has turned up, chaps."

"Yaas, wathah; it's the lettah all wight, deah boys," answered Arthur Augustus quietly. "Mellish, I must wequest you to wemove yourself instantly, or I shall administrah a feahful thwashin'."

Jack Blake glanced up quickly.

There was something about Arthur Augustus's threat of a "feahful thwashin'" this time which was different from his usual threats. He looked as if he was going to keep his word to the letter.

"You'll be sorry for this, you set of bullies!" almost wept Mellish. "You see—"

"Are you goin' to wemove yourself, Mellish? I will give you three seconds—"

And Mellish went.

Jack Blake was still looking at Arthur Augustus in surprise.

"What's the rag, Gussy?"

"What did Mellish do?"

"Oh, it's nothin', deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus coolly. "I pwopose we wetiah to the studay and open my lettah."

Arthur Augustus could not be absolutely certain the letter had dropped from Mellish's pocket, because he had not actually seen it do so. He was certain, as far as his own mind went, but that was not enough for the swell of St. Jim's.

Without further remark he led the way back to the study. He did not mean to say a word about his suspicions.

Herries hurried into the comfortable little room.

"Shut the door, kids!"

"Rather! My hat! Jolly funny about my letter turning up in the passage—"

"Bai Jove! Your lettah, Digbay, deah boy?"

"Yes, my letter, dear ass," said Digby, holding out his hand.

"What wot—"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Jack Blake, also holding out his hand. "Don't try the funny merchant wheeze, Dig."

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see why you are holdin' out your hand. As the lettah is fwom my patah, and contains a fivah."

"Contains rats!"

"Pway, don't be so widic—"

"Is it your pater's handwriting, Gussy?" demanded Herries.

"Bai Jove, no! Now I come to look at it, I believe it's Cousin Ethel's, and as chief of Studay Numbah 6—"

"Don't rag, ass!"

"I am not in the habit of waggin', Howwies, deah boy. As chief of Studday Numbah 6—"

"Oh, let's get on with the washing!" grinned Jack Blake, suddenly snatching the letter from Arthur Augustus's hand.

"No good going all over the old row again. The letter is addressed to me, of course, and— My aunt!"

Before any of the others could stop him, Jack Blake had ripped open the dishevelled envelope. The contents consisted of a gilt-edged correspondence card. The leader of the School House Fourth Form stared at it without speaking.

Arthur Augustus allowed his monocle to fall from his eye.

"Gweat Scott, what uttah cheek! He has opened one of my lettahs! Jack Blake has opened one of my lettahs, bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

"Blake, I must wequest you as a fwient to hand ovah the lettah instantly. Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus had caught sight of the few words scribbled across the card in a graceful, girlish handwriting.

Digby and Herries pushed him out of the way.

"Look here, Blake, as chief of Study No. 6— My hat!"

"I say, Blake, that giddy letter was for me. By Jove!"

And Digby and Herries also stared at the card just as the other two were doing.

Jack Blake suddenly gave vent to a cheer.

"Hooray, kids! Good old Cousin Ethel!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway wead it out, deah boy."

"Will all you Study No. 6 people please play cricket for my eleven on Saturday, the match to start at eleven-thirty, on the private ground at Cleveland Lodge?" Jack Blake read excitedly. "You are also to please promise not to say a word to anyone else about it. P.S.—The other side are rightfully good."

"Bai Jove, how wippin'—"

"Rather! It really is from Cousin Ethel, Blakey?"

"Of course it is, kid; there's her name!" exclaimed Jack Blake, with increased excitement. "An all-day match, chaps!"

"Hooray!"

"Any idea who the other side are, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, wathah not! I know they have a large house-party at Cleveland Lodge, deah boy, but I don't know who is there. Bai Jove, although I say it, I wathah fancy we shall have a wippin' time!"

"Rather!"

"A whole day match, remember, kids."

"Rather! With a luncheon interval—"

"And a tea interval—"

"And on the wippin' gwound they have laid out at the Lodge!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "A wegwah country-house cwicket match, and you jollay well can't beat country-house cwicket anywhere."

"I should say not."

"Ten times better than county cricket."

"Rather!"

The invitation card passed from hand to hand. Digby dashed across the room and tapped the barometer.

The barometer did not work, as it happened, having been damaged by a cricket-ball on a wet afternoon when study French cricket was being indulged in.

Digby did not think of that.

"It's going to keep fine, chaps; there isn't a giddy cloud."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah the warm weathah has set in pwopahly this-time."

"And we're not to tell any of the others, kids!" suddenly exclaimed Jack Blake, glancing at the card again. "Cousin Ethel has underlined that."

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Just like Cousin Ethel. She doesn't want to make Tom Merry and Figgins & Co. envious—"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! I considah it wippin' of her in the extweme. Fancay what we should feel, deah boys, if Tom Merry & Co. had been asked to play and we had been left out in the cold!"

Digby shuddered at the thought.

Jack Blake chuckled and commenced to waltz Herries round the study. As Herries had his hands in his pockets at the time, he became wrathful.

"Ass! Leggo—leggo—"

"Three cheers for Cousin Ethel, kids!"

"Leggo—leggo—"

"Hooway—hooway! Altogethah, deah boys—"

"Not a word to the Shell-fish, mind!"

"Wathah not! Bai Jove, poor old Tom Mewwy—"

"And poor old Figgay," said Digby. "My hat! Wouldn't he feel sick if he knew!"

"But he mustn't know, deah boys."

"Leggo—leggo, Blake!"

Jack Blake let go this time, and Herries tried to make up his mind whether to attack the chief of Study No. 6, or not.

Jack Blake grinned pleasantly.

"Of course, it's jolly hard on Tom Merry & Co."

"Rather!"

"And on Figgins & Co., but you can't blame Cousin Ethel."

"No, wathah not. I should considah it my dutay to administah a feahful thwashin' to any wotah who had the wretched cheek to blame Cousin Ethel for anythin', deah boy."

"She says the other side are frightfully good. Had to get the best fellows from St. Jim's, of course."

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, Tom Merry isn't a weally bad bat, but—"

"And although Figgins knows a bit about fielding, still—"

"Many chaps think Wynn pretty useful with the ball, but in a really classy match—"

"Of course," chuckled Jack Blake. "What could Cousin Ethel do? She had to get the best men—"

"Yaas, wathah, and she has got them, bai Jove! Although I make the remark myself, you can't weally beat Studay Numbah 6 fellows foah all-wound bwiliance in the cwicket field. There may be othahs who can keep their ends up—"

"Hear, hear!"

"But keepin' one's end up isn't everythin'," went on Arthur Augustus warmly. "You want some one who can wise to the occasion—"

"Bravo!"

"Someone who can stop a wot if it occuws—"

"That's it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"A fellow who can play steadily when required, and, on the othah hand, open his shouldahs when time is wunnin' out."

"Good!"

"Yaas, wathah! So I considah Cousin Ethel has acted remarkably wisely in askin' me to play, deah boys, although I make the obsahvation myself—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Gussy! Ten to one he gets a pair of spectacles!"

"Pway don't be so widienulous, Howwies. I wathah fancay I am not in the habit of gettin' a pair of spectacles—"

"Saturday is the day, kids," chuckled Jack Blake. "Thank goodness it's a whole holiday, so we sha'n't have to ask to get off!"

"Bai Jove, yaas wathah! We shall have to be remarkably careful not to let Tom Mewwy or Figgay heah a word about it."

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"Rather!"

"Not a giddy word, chaps! Ahem!"

Jack Blake stopped speaking abruptly.

The door was being opened, and Tom Merry's curly-haired, good-looking head appeared round the door.

His face was a trifle flushed, and he looked excited.

"Pax, kids!" he grinned pleasantly. "Holding a mothers' meeting, or is Gussy reciting?"

The Fourth-Formers did not answer.

They were glancing at one another warningly.

Tom Merry, the hero of the Shell, was the last fellow in St. Jim's who must hear anything about Cousin Ethel's invitation.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry's Visit to Study No. 6.

"HALLO, Tom Merry!"

And Jack Blake carelessly picked up the latest number of the "Weekly."

"Hallo, Jack Blake!" answered the Shell junior, sauntering into the room, followed by Manners and Lowther. "I say, we—we arranged something for Saturday, didn't we, kid?"

Jack Blake started. He had forgotten about that for the moment. They would have to get out of that, somehow.

Arthur Augustus and Digby exchanged glances.

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah, deah boy! But—"

"A walk in the country, wasn't it, as there is no cricket on."

"Yaas, wathah, only—"

"Well—" said Tom Merry.

"Well—" said Manners.

"Well—" began Lowther. "You see—"

"Yaas, wathah, only undah the circs—"

"Ring off, ass!"

"Weally, Digby, I must wefuse to allow you to address me in that wough and weady mannah. It is quite twue that we awanged to go for a countwy walk with Tom Mewwy, and undah any othah circs, it would have given me great pleasure. Howevah—"

"The fact of the matter is," exclaimed Tom Merry, "we three won't be able to come. Got something else on."

"Bai Jove—"

"Yes, I know it's rather rotten to cry off when everything has been arranged," said Tom Merry apologetically.

"We wouldn't do it if we could help it; but—"

"Bai Jove, how wemarkably funny, deah boy! As a mattah of fact—"

"Ring off, ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ring off, ass!" muttered Jack Blake quickly. "We're—we're sorry you have to cry off, Tom Merry—"

"Gweat Scott—"

"I mean, it will disappoint Figgay. Still, if you can't help it, you can't."

"That's awfully decent of you, kid."

Jack Blake went rather red.

"Don't mention it; not at all."

"No, wathah not. As a mattah of fact, we are weally weliieved."

"Cry off, Gussy!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Ass! That's all right, Tom Merry. We'll—we'll arrange the walk for another day."

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed the hero of the Shell, hastily.

"Delighted. Almost any time, kids. Come on, chaps!"

And the Terrible Three hurried from the study.

Jack Blake dropped back in his chair with a sigh of relief.

"What luck, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah, I considah it wippin' luck myself—"

"And what a cackling young ass you can be, Gussy, when you like!"

"Bai Jove, Blake! I twust you do not want me to administah a feahful thwashin', as the weathah is vewy warm. Howevah, unless you withdwaw your extwemely wotten obsahvation—"

"I mean, what a burbling young duffer you are. Sorry, kid! The first remark slipped out."

"Bai Jove—"

"Oh, do ring off! Another two minutes and you would have given the show away, ass!"

"Wats, Digby! Utthah wats!"

"So you would. If Tom Merry found out we were jolly glad they couldn't have come for a walk, he'd have wanted to know why."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that, deah boy! Yaas, wathah, undah the circs, I am wathah glad I didn't explain—"



"Give me my lettah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, making a grab at the little blue envelope. The next instant he was staring at the corner containing the stamp, which was all of the letter he had been able to obtain.

Jack Blake laughed.

"Yes, kid, you handled the matter very nicely."

"Yaas, wathah! It always requires a fellow of tact and judgment to handle these delicate mattahs, deah boy. I considah it vewy luckay I happened to be in the studay when Tom Mewwy came in. I dwend to think of the feahful bungle you othahs might have made of the affair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Woally, Hewwies, I fail to see any weason foah wibald laughter. But foah me—"

"Hear, hear!"

"But foah me—"

"Rather!"

"But foah me—"

"Hooray!"

"You uttah wottahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "If it weren't foah the weathah bein' so feahfully warm, I should have no othah wesource but to administah feahful thwashin's all wound—"

"My hat, see what the warm weather has done for us, kids!" chuckled Herries. "If it doesn't keep Towser off his feed I jolly well hope it continues."

"Anyway, it keeps Gussy off brutally assaulting us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye and viewed the grinning juniors loftily.

"I wegard you as waggin' wottahs—I wegard you as waggin' wottahs in the extweme! Bai Jove!"

"Hallo!"

"What's up now, Gussy?"

"What about Figgay, deah boys?"

Jack Blake whistled.

"Yes, we mustn't forget we've got the New House to

jape, kids!" he exclaimed thoughtfully. "We've got to do that whatever happens, after what Mellish said."

"Yaas, wathah, only there's plenty of time for me to think out a wattlin' ideah before the dormay bell goes, deah boys. If you will all wettah fwom the studay and leave me to considah the mattah—"

"We shall find you still considering it when you've got a long grey beard—eh, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"Gweat Scott, you don't think foah a moment that I shall evah weah a long gwey beard, deah boy? I twust—"

"Never mind about Gussy's grey beard, kids," grinned Herries. "Let's get on with the bizney."

"Howevah, I twust—"

"Rats! We've got to think of something, Blakey."

"Oh, I'll do that all right. My hat, we've got something else to do first, though."

"What's that, deah boy?"

"Explain to Figgay we aren't going for that country walk."

"Bai Jove, I was neahly forgetting that! We shall have to huwwy like anythin'!"

"Yes, we shall have to look alive—"

"Yaas, wathah! But as I successfullly awwanged the mattah with Tom Mewwy, I considah you othahs had bettah remain in the backgwound while—"

"You make an ass of yourself, exactly!"

"Pway don't wag, Digbaw."

"Like you did before, kid."

"Wats! Uttah wats!"

Jack Blake jumped to his feet.

"Ring off, kids!" he exclaimed thoughtfully. "This'll want some handling, I can tell you, because Figgins & Co. were jolly keen on the walk."

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE MYSTERY OF THE MOAT HOUSE."

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Yaas, wathah, and the soonah I get it ovah the bettah! Weally, Blake—"
 "What's the mattah now, ass?"
 "Are you comin' with me, deah boys?"
 Jack Blake grinned.
 "Looks like it, doesn't it, Gussy," he said pleasantly.
 "Come on, chaps!"
 And the four filed hurriedly from the room.

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus is Kidnapped.

TAP!
 Figgins & Co., of the New House, took no notice. They had not heard the knock at their study door.

Tap!
 "Pway open the doah, deah boys."
 Figgins started, and Kerr jumped to his feet.
 "What do you want, Gussy?"
 "What are you young asses doing in the New House?"
 "They've come to be bumped."
 "Weally, Kerr, pway don't be so widic— Howevah, open the doah, and I will explain."
 Figgins & Co. exchanged glances, then the sound of a desk-lid being slammed down came to the School House juniors. The next moment Kerr had turned the key of the door.

The Study No. 6 juniors came in suspiciously. Figgins sat down in the easy chair and crossed his long legs.

"Brought the prefects with you as well, Blake?" he asked pleasantly. "Half the School House, isn't it?"
 "You haven't come to borrow grub, have you?" asked Fatty Wynn anxiously.

Jack Blake glanced round the study without answering. As far as he could see, Figgins & Co. had been doing nothing. There was a very innocent expression on Kerr's face, too.

Jack Blake thought of the expected jape and exchanged glances with Digby. Digby had also been looking about the room.

"I twust we are not disturbin' you, deah boys—"
 "You are, though, kid."
 "Weally, Figgay," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, somewhat agahst, "I twust you will wemembah I am a guest in your studay—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "A burbling young ass who has drifted in with the tide, you mean," grinned Kerr. "What's the giddy wheeze?"
 Arthur Augustus replaced his monocle and viewed the Scots junior through it loftily.

"Weally, Kerr, I must wequest you not to address me as—"

Jack Blake sat down on the edge of the table.
 "The fact is, Figgay, we want to see you about something."
 "Yaas, wathah, only pway don't intewwupt, deah boy. As I was about to explain to Figgay—"
 "What is it, Blakey?"

"About—about the walk we arranged for Saturday."
 Figgins started and looked at Kerr. Fatty Wynn was looking at Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys—about the walk we awanged for Saturday. We find now—"

"To put it bluntly," said Jack Blake carelessly, "we've got another engagement."
 "You uttah duffah, deah boy—"

"So, if you want to take a country walk, you'll have to take it with Taggles or Mrs Mimms's tabby cat. Sorry, and all that, but it can't be helped."
 "You weckless ass, deah boy—"

Arthur Augustus was gasping.
 A grin had spread over Figgins's face.
 "Oh, it doesn't matter!"

"Good, kid!"
 "And after all, a country walk isn't wildly exciting."
 "Not unless you take Gussy with you."

"Weally, Kerr, I wegwet I cannot allow that remark to pass. Jack Blake, I considah that you have made a wotten middle—"

"Oh, Gussy's all right if you keep him in leash," grinned Blake. "Hope you have a decent time at the nets, kids."

"Yaas, wathah! But under the circa—"
 "And I shall want to have a chat with you, Gussy, some time to-morrow."
 "Certainly, deah boy! If any difficulty has awisen—"

Figgins went rather red.
 "Oh, it's nothing, but—but I've run to a new panama hat
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for cricket, you know, and I want to get something decent in the way of a hatband."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with absorbing interest. "You have wead my latest article in 'Tom Mewwy's Weekly' on the subject of hatbands, of course?"

"N-no; haven't had time yet."
 "Gweat Scott, what a pittay! Howevah, I shall be willin' to offah you my advice. I twust you are contemp-latin' having a necktie to match the hatband, deah boy?"

"Hadh't thought of it, but—but if it's the thing—"
 "Bai Jove, wathah! And socks to match the necktie, deah boy. Quite impewative, weally!"

"I—I see."
 "Yaas, wathah! And, weally, I do not think you can do bettah than a wippin' pink—"

"By Jove, I don't think I could stand pink socks, Gussy!" muttered Figgins doubtfully.
 "They might bark at him, mightn't they, kid?"

"Pway don't be fwivolous on a sewious mattah, Kerr. It all depends on whethah you get the wight pink. There are pinks and pinks—"

"Not to mention carnations."
 "Weally, Blake! Howevah, a cwushed stwawbewwy—or, wathah, a mixture of cwushed stwawbewwy and wose-pink—would look simply wippin'!"

Jack Blake jumped down from the table.
 "Coming, chaps?"

"Right-ho! It's all right about Saturday, then, Figgay?"
 "Yes, rather! A crushed strawberry, you say, Gussy?"

"Yaas; only, of course, a salmon is wathah daintay."
 "Yes; but—but couldn't I go in for something a little less startling? A dark blue—"

"Gweat Scott! Much too sombah, deah boy. This is the age of light colahs. Look at me—"

"I protest!" exclaimed Kerr hastily. "I'm not having anyone looking like you in the New House, Gussy. Figgay, if ever you descend to looking like Gussy, you'll spend the rest of your days being bumped!"

Figgins frowned.
 "Don't goat, Kerr! What about green, Gussy?"

Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries looked at the long-limbed leader of the New House juniors in amazement. Of all of them, Figgins was the least inclined to think of clothes as a rule.

For a moment Jack Blake thought there must be some joke on, but a second glance told him that was not the case. Figgins was in dead earnest.

And, what was even stranger, Kerr and Fatty Wynn were listening to Arthur Augustus's words with intense interest.

"A gween, if it is the wight gween, is certainly in wippin' taste," the swell of St. Jim's was saying enthusiastically, "especially in the mattah of socks, pwovided there is a pink clock. Nothing at all loud, of course, Wynn, but vewy neat."

"My hat! Something of the shade of—of those ripping leed cakes they have just got in at the tuckshop?" asked Fatty, smiling reminiscantly; "almost a greengage jam green."

"Gweat Scott! Nothin' of the sort, deah boy!"
 "More of an acid drop tint, perhaps?"

"Bai Jove—"
 "No, I have it! The colour of citron—you know the shade. You find it in those ripping scones you can get at that little place in Rylcombe."

Digby stared at the plump, excited face of the Falstaff of St. Jim's in amazement.

"My hat! They're all off their young rockers!"
 "Completely dotty!"

"Y-yes," agreed Jack Blake thoughtfully. "I—Hallo!"

The door was being pushed open.
 The next moment Tom Merry looked into the room.
 "Pax, kids!" he said. "Someone told me I should find you here, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! But I am bizzay just now, deah boy. I am havin' a vewy important convahsation with Figgay—"

"Oh, I'm not goin' to interrupt, only—"
 "Only what, deah boy?"

"Oh, nothing! Only—"
 And Tom Merry went rather red. Arthur Augustus waited impatiently.

"If it's about the walk on Saturday—"
 "No—no; nothing about that!" exclaimed the Shell fellow. "It's really nothing, only when you've got time I'd be jolly well obliged if you would drop into our study and—and give me your advice."

Arthur Augustus jumped to his feet.

"Certainly, deah boy. I should wegard it as a pleasuah. Pway what is the difficulty?"

"Oh, there's no actual difficulty. I bought a new pair of cricket bags this week, and the crease doesn't seem to be down the centre of the leg."

"Good gwacious!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I will come to your woom instantly, deah boy."

"What's that, Gussy?"

"I'm just goin' to wan into Tom Mewwy's woom, as he is in a feahful way about his crwicket twousahs, Figgay."

"Oh, I don't know about being in a fearful way, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! The cwease not in the centah of the leg—"

"Don't be an ass! Sit down, Gussy!"

"Weally, Figgay, as Tom Mewwy is in a feahful way—"

"You aren't going yet, kid."

"Yaas, Figgay, but—"

"You are going to stay here, Gussy."

Jack Blake grinned pleasantly.

"Wrong again, Figgy! The one and only is coming back with us to Study No. 6.—"

"Weally—"

"No, he isn't."

"He's coming to see about my giddy cricket bags—aren't you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about the—the choice of a hatband for my new panama, ass?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wathah fancy I ought to settle that mattah even befoah I attend to the cwease in your twousahs, Tom Mewwy. Howevah— Pway welease my arm, Digbay."

"You are comin' back to the study, Gussy."

"No; weally imposs., deah boy."

"Imposs. or not, you're coming," said Digby. "We've had enough of being in here listening to Figgins rave about togs. Come on, kid!"

"No, weally, it is uttably imposs. Tom Mewwy is in a feahful way, and Figgay is neahly worn out with twyin' to settle the vowy important mattah of selectin' a hatband. Pway welease my arm instantly, Hewwies!"

"Yes, there's no need to take Gussy with you."

"Isn't there, Kerr?" asked Jack Blake pleasantly. "You don't know Gussy as we know him. Quick march!"

"I wefuse to quick march! I wefuse— Weally, Digbay, I shall administah a feahful thwashin' in a minute in spite of the weathah bein' feahfully warm. Digbay, deah boy, did you heah my obsahvation? You uttah wottahs—"

"I say, you oughtn't to drag the kid away if he wants to stay here, you know."

"Oughtn't we, Figgy?" said Jack Blake sweetly.

"No, you jolly well oughtn't. Don't you go, Gussy!"

"No, wathah not! I have already wefused to go. Welease me—wefuse me instantly!"

But in spite of Arthur Augustus's refusal, he was being dragged to the door. Figgins & Co. were following up.

"Don't you go, Gussy! Blessed if I would be yauked about like a sack of flour!"

"Gweat Scott! What an uttably wotten ideah, Kerr, deah boy! Welease me!"

Tom Merry was barring the way.

"What's the ideah, Blakey?"

"Gussy's coming home—"

"No, he isn't! He's coming into our room—aren't you, old chap?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You mean you're going to stay here, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Figgay! Welease me—wefuse me instantly!"

"Rot, Figgins—"

"Piffle, Tom Merry—"

"I tell you—"

Fatty Wynn suddenly rushed across the study and caught Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"Stay to tea, Gussy! We've got buns—iced buns—"

"Ring off, ass! Gussy has given his word to come with us into our study—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And he's given his word to stay here."

"Yaas, wathah, Figgay! Gweat Scott! You, uttah wuffians!"

Tom Merry had caught hold of Arthur Augustus by the coat. Figgins & Co. promptly seized one of his legs and he had to hop about on the other.

Digby and Herries obtained a firmer grip, glancing at Jack Blake.

Jack Blake nodded.

It would never do to leave Arthur Augustus alone in the New House study or let him go to Tom Merry's room. He

would be almost certain to let out something of the secret of Cousin Ethel's letter.

Jack Blake & Co. considered they were in honour bound to prevent that.

"Altogether, kids!"

"Shell—Shell!"

"New House! Collar him, Kerr!"

Manners and Lowther dashed up and caught Arthur Augustus round the waist; Kerr seized his other leg.

"You wottahs! You uttah wottahs!"

The rival juniors tugged vigorously in opposite directions. Arthur Augustus gave vent to a despairing shout.

His coat was giving an ominous tearing sound.

The next instant the portion of coat Tom Merry was clinging to, gave way, and Tom Merry went to the floor with a bump.

Kerr promptly fell over his legs, and tried to save himself by clasping Herries round the neck.

"Ass! Duffer!"

"You wottahs! You uttah wottahs!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

And Jack Blake and Figgins felt themselves being dragged down.

They happened to bump their heads together just before they reached the floor, but that made no difference to them. They were clinging to Arthur Augustus as firmly as ever.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus's Gratitude.

"YOU wottahs! You uttah wottahs!"

"Yauk him along, School House!"

"Altogether, Shell! Looking for a thick ear, Kerr?"

The noise was becoming prodigious.

By a great effort, Jack Blake & Co. had got Arthur Augustus on his feet again, and, hauling with a will, were gradually dragging him from the study.

Tom Merry and Figgins & Co. were trying to drag him other ways, but for his own sake the swell of the School House was aiding his chums now.

He was trying to wrench himself free of the others.

"That's the style, Gussy—"

"He wanted to come with us all the time—"

"You wottah, Digbay!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You weckless fibbah! I shall administah foahful thwashin's all woud—"

"One last wrench—"

"Altogether! Hurrah!"

And with a violent tug, Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries dragged their chum from the study.

"Ow!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "O-ow!"

"That's all right, kid! Now for it!"

"I wefuse to move. I wefuse to go with you, as I no longah wegard you as fwends."

"That's all right, kid!"

"I wefuse to considah it all wight. As a mattah of fact, I look upon it as all w'ong. Gweat Scott!"

"Tom Merry's coming—"

"Slam the door in their young faces. Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries had acted upon the advice instantly. He slammed the door with a will.

A shout greeted the action, and the School House juniors could guess what had happened.

"Ha, ha, ha! They've run into the door, chaps!"

"My hat—"

"Hurry up!" gasped Herries, who was clinging to the door knob. "Hurry up, asses! I can't keep them in much longer."

"Right-ho, kid!"

"Ready, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to be weady. I wefuse—"

"His other arm, Dig."

"Right-ho!"

"Welease me! Welease me, Digbay, you uttah wuffian!"

"Help push him along, Herries, when I give the word. Now!"

"Hurrah!"

And releasing the door knob, Herries spun round. The next moment he had lowered his head and was pushing Arthur Augustus along with all his might.

"On the ball!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Get on with the washing, kids!"

"Hewwies, you wuffian—Digbay, you wottah—Blake, you uttably weckless beast—"

"Hooray!"

"That's the style! My only Aunt Jane!"

Jack Blake thudded against the wall and gasped. But there was no time to stop. Figgins & Co. and the Terrible Three were racing after them.

It would be a near thing whether they would gain the School House before Arthur Augustus was recaptured.

"Put a spurt on!" gasped Jack Blake, glancing back.

"Tom Merry's coming like a giddy tornado!"

"And old Figgy—"

"My hat! They'll snatch you baldheaded, Gussy, if you don't sprint up!"

"I wufuse to spwint up! I wufuse to be snatched baldheaded, or any othah wotten way!" panted the swell of St. Jim's, who was becoming more flustered every minute. "I intend to administah a feahful thwashin' to Tom Mewwy for wumplin' my attiah!"

"Look out, there!"

"My hat!"

"And I intend to administah a feahful thwashin' to Figgy for the same reason! Gweat Scott!"

Jack Blake & Co. had rounded the corner in the corridor. They had done so at top speed, dragging Arthur Augustus with them.

"Ass—"

"Look out! My only Aunt Jane!"

Binks, the boot-boy, was cleaning the passage window. In order to do this successfully, he had to mount a tall pair of steps which completely blocked the way.

"Bai Jove—"

"Look out, Binks!"

It was too late. Binks' thoughts were far from such an everyday subject as window-cleaning. In his mind, he was hundreds of miles across the great plains, holding a narrow pass against hordes of Indians.

He was even quoting aloud:

"While I live, yonder rocks shall never be passed! As long as one drop of blood courses through my veins—"

"You raving ass! My only Aunt Jane!"

And the Study No. 6 juniors brought up against the steps with a bump.

Binks gasped. He even forgot the wonderful situations which he had read of in his favourite works of literature, cheap American fiction; even Deadshot David the Daring ceased to exist for him for the moment.

He gave vent to a wild yell, and made a despairing grasp at the window-ledge.

He missed the window-ledge and caught the small basin of water he had placed there himself, then the steps gracefully over-balanced themselves.

Binks shrieked again. He realised that he was falling, and a moment later he knew that he had fallen.

He came down on the top of Digby with a thud, and accidentally hit Herries on the head with the metal basin of water.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

The water was streaming down Arthur Augustus's face; the wet window-leather was clinging round his neck. For a moment the swell of St. Jim's did not realise what had happened.

Neither did Jack Blake until the steps fell on him.

"You raving lunatic, Binks—"

"Gweat Scott! Bai Jove!"

Herries let Arthur Augustus go, and clasped his own head.

"Oh!" he gasped. "O-oh!"

The sound of thudding feet behind them told Jack Blake the rival juniors were on their track. There was no time to be lost.

Jack Blake sprang to his feet.

"Sorry, Binks!" he panted. "Scud for it, chaps!"

"I wufuse—"

"Come on, Herries!"

"Oh!" groaned Herries. "O-oh!"

"Come on, ass! Wake up, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to wake up! I mean— Bai Jove!"

Jack Blake and Digby were dragging Arthur Augustus over the fallen steps. Herries followed, still holding his head.

Binks was sitting on the passage floor, trying to understand what had happened.

"There they are!"

"Now we have them!"

Tom Merry's voice rang out loudly. The rivals were almost up to the bend in the corridor.

"Come on!" gasped Jack Blake.

"Oh!" groaned Herries. "O-oh!"

"Another few yards! Ha, ha, ha!"

A crash had sounded behind them. Without having to turn round, the School House Fourth-Formers knew what had happened.

Tom Merry & Co. had fallen over the steps.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!"

"Gerrup! Lemme gerrup!"

"Ass!"

The cries behind them were becoming confused. Fatty

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Wynn's distressed pant could be heard distinctly enough, though.

"I'll roll on you, Tom Merry! If you don't let me get up, I'll roll on you!"

The Study No. 6 juniors began to chuckle.

"As hard as you can, kids! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just listen to them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ring off, Gussy!" chuckled Jack Blake. "We've had enough trouble with you already! The least you can do is to stop cackling!"

"Gweat—gweat Scott!"

"Yes, rather, Gussy! You owe that much to us for all we've done for you, any way!"

"You uttah duffah, Hewwies—"

"Gussy, you haven't any gratitude!" exclaimed Digby sadly. "You've got a heart like a beastly flint!"

"I wufuse—I uttally wufuse!"

Jack Blake sighed loudly.

"Gussy—oh, Gussy!"

"You w'etched waggin' wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "You weckless wuffians!"

"Good!" grinned Digby, as they gained the Fourth Form corridor. "Here we are, kids."

"Open the door, Dig."

"Come in, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to come in—I wufuse—"

"Didn't Fatty Wynn say something about wanting to roll on Gussy?" murmured Digby. "Just for the fun of the thing— Who is that coming along there?"

Arthur Augustus glanced hastily over his shoulder.

"Bai Jove, someone is comin'! On second considahation, I wathah think I will change my mind and entah the studay attiah all. Howevah, I shall uttally wufuse to address you wottahs. I wufuse to wegard any of you as fwinds in future."

Jack Blake did not answer.

He locked the door as quickly as he could, then dropped into the easy-chair wearily.

"My only hat! What a time it has been, kids!"

"Rather! I feel—"

"Bai Jove!" suddenly shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Gweat Scott!"

Jack Blake started, then understood.

Arthur Augustus had just caught a glimpse of himself in his own full-length mirror.

"Gweat Scott! Bai Jove!"

Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries began chatting coolly about the cricket invitation they had received from Cousin Ethel. Not one of them even glanced towards the swell of the School House.

CHAPTER 7.

Bernard Glyn's Invention.

"**B**AI JOVE! Look at me—look at me, you wuffians!" Jack Blake did not answer. He did not even turn in his chair.

"Of course, Dig, we've jolly well got to arrange about getting over to Cleveland Lodge on Saturday."

"Blake—Blake, you uttah wottah, look at me!"

"We could cycle."

"What about the bats and things?"

"My hat, yes! Cycling wouldn't be up to much."

"Jack Blake!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Jack Blake, you weckless boundah, just look at my attiah! I ordah you to look at my attiah!"

Jack Blake glanced up coolly.

"Did you speak, Gussy?"

"Yes, Gussy, did you say anything?"

"I thought I heard a remark myself," remarked Herries. "It couldn't have come from Gussy, though, because he has decided to cut us."

"You w'etched waggahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Look at me! Look at my attiah!"

Jack Blake looked.

"Well, there isn't much to rave over, Gussy," he said.

"I've seen you look a lot neater."

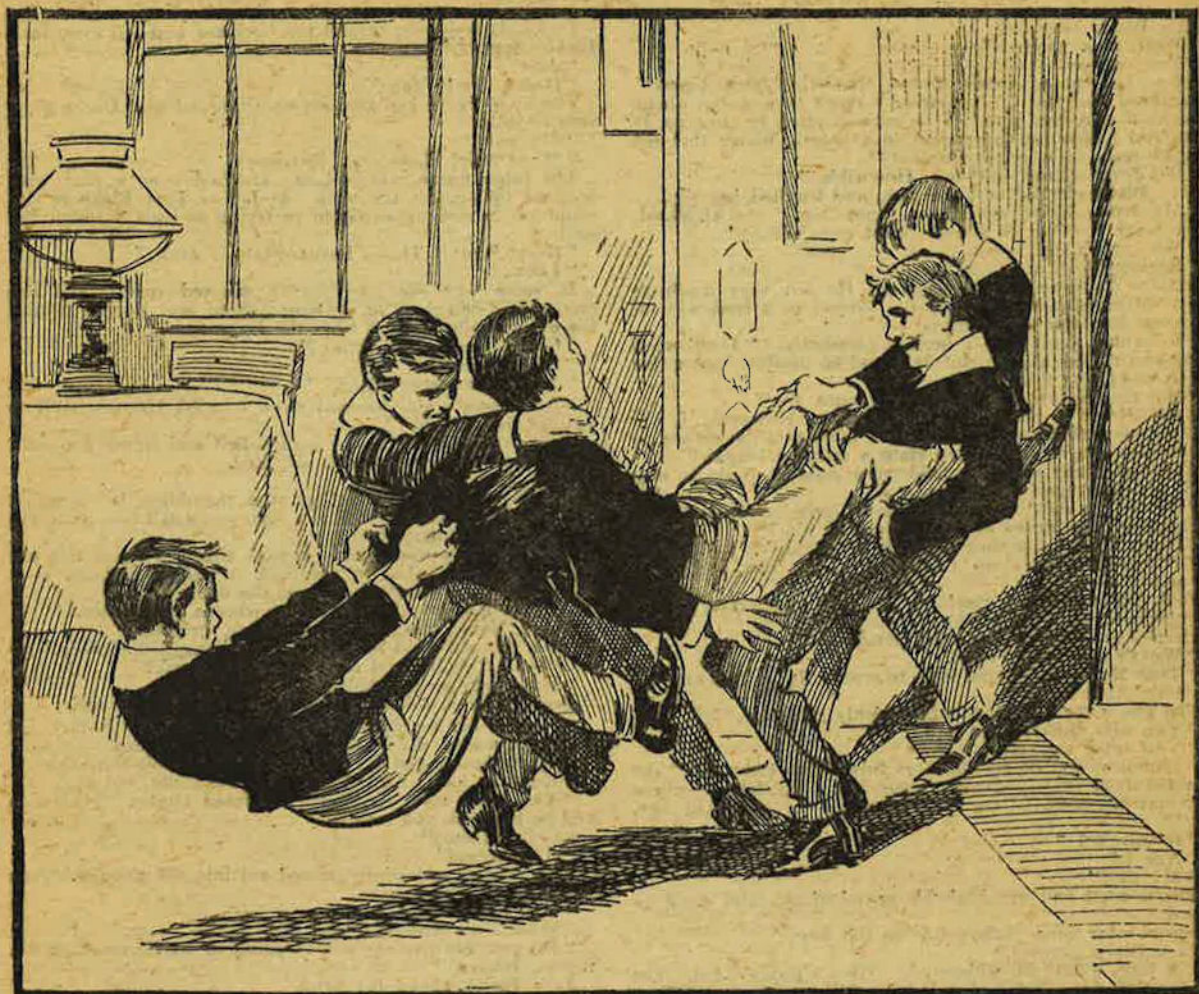
"Yes, Gussy, I am surprised at you! Your—your collar has come undone!"

"My collah has uttally disappeahed, you wuffian!"

"Humph! So it has," said Digby thoughtfully. "Going to give up wearing collars now the warm weather has set in, kid?"

"My hat, I rather like that idea of yours, Gussy, of not having any buttons on your waistcoat," observed Herries.

"Eton chaps always leave the last button of their waistcoats undone, but not having any buttons at all beats that wheeze hollow."



The rival juniors tugged vigorously in opposite directions. "You uttah wottahs!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's as the portion of his coat Tom Merry was clinging to gave way with a tearing sound.

"Rather!"
 "And it must be jolly nice and gool with a two-foot split down the back of your coat, kid!"
 "You wottah, Jack Blake!" gasped Arthur Augustus, screwing round in order to see the tear in his coat. "Bai Jove, I am dweessed like a twamp!"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Arthur Augustus wheeled round and directed a withering glare at the chuckling Herries.
 "I wegwet to say, Hewwies, that your extremely wotten behaviour has left me no othah wesource but to administah a feahful thwashin'! Pway put your hands up, Howwies!"
 "Wait until I've finished these grapes, kid."
 "Howwies, I ordah you to put your hands up!"
 "Sorry, kid, but I'm busy with this apple just now."
 "Weally, Hewwies—"
 "My hat, Gussy, you can't expect decently dressed fellows, like Herries and Dig, to start putting their hands up to a blessed tramp, can you?"
 "Gweat Scott, what uttah cheek! Howevah, I shall return befoah long, and I shall thwash you all thoroughly! Foah the pwesent, I must wetiah and change my clothes!"
 Jack Blake started.
 "Oh, don't go, Gussy!"
 "Yaas, weally, deah boy, it is uttably imposs. foah me to remain in this wig-out!"
 "You're all right, old chap."
 "Weally, Blake, I twust you believe you are speakin' the twuth. As a mattah of fact, I wegwet to say I am vevy far frowm bein' all wight. I shall not wemain away long."
 "Yes, but—"
 Arthur Augustus waited obligingly. He was a wonderfully good-natured fellow.

"Yes, deah boy?"
 "Oh, it's nothing, only—only I wanted to speak to you about something."
 "Speak away, deah boy! Fish ahead!"
 "Yes, rather—only I was going to ask Digby and Herries to clear out for a moment or two!"
 "My hat!"
 "What giddy cheek!"
 Digby and Herries spoke together. Digby put down his bunch of grapes.
 "That's jolly funny, Blakey, because I was going to ask you two to do the same!"
 Herries started.
 "You don't say so!"
 "Yes, I jolly well do. I was going to ask you and Jack Blake to clear out while I had a chat with Gussy."
 "My hat! I was going to do the same, as it happens! It was on the tip of my tongue!"
 "Bai Jove! How wemarkable, deah boys!"
 The dear boys looked at one another suspiciously. Jack Blake got up and opened the door.
 "Anyway, I asked you two to clear first."
 "But I was just going to—"
 "It was on the tip of my tongue."
 "Bai Jove! I wegard this as funnny in the extreme!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Is it poss. that you are all in the same difficulty, deah boys?"
 The other three started.
 It certainly was possible.
 "As a matter of fact—"
 "As a matter of fact—"
 "As a—"
 "Bai Jove! Has it anythin' to do with personal attiah, deah boys?"

Jack Blake went red.

"Well, in a way—"

"You see—"

"I'm not quite certain about that—that new blazer," stammered Herries. "Of course, I don't care a rap about togs, as a rule, but it would be rather rotten to turn up at Cleveland Lodge for the cricket in a beastly blazer that set people's teeth on edge, wouldn't it?"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah! Howwible!"

Jack Blake glanced at his chums, and laughed heartily.

"My hat! We're all in the same boat!" he chuckled.

"We want your advice about cricket togs, Gussy."

"Yes, that's it."

"Rather!"

Arthur Augustus smiled happily. He felt very much as Fatty Wynn always felt when the subject of a feed was introduced into the conversation.

"Delighted, deah boys!" he said pleasantly. "I will wash away and change my attiah. It would be uttably impos. for me to wemain in this state."

"But the bell will be going in a minute, ass!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that. Howevah, I will wash away and change my coat. I must uttably wufuse to wemain in this weally wotten state a moment longah!"

And before any of them could get across the study to stop him, Arthur Augustus had vanished.

"Of all the cackling young asses!" growled Jack Blake.

"Suppose Tom Merry or Figgins collars him?"

"Gussy'll take care they don't do that, kid."

"Humph! There's no telling with the one and only.

Blessed if—"

Jack Blake stopped speaking. A very deliberate, steady tramp could be heard outside in the passage.

Herries and Digby exchanged glances.

"What's the wheeze now?"

"Tom Merry or Figgins come to snatch Gussy bald-headed!

My only Aunt Jane!"

The gas in Study No. 6 had suddenly gone out.

"You silly duffer, Dig!"

"You utter ass, Herries!"

"Which of you young burlblers turned the light out?" demanded Jack Blake, groping towards the mantelshelf where the matches were. "Getting humorous in your old age, Dig?"

"It wasn't I!"

"Nor I."

"My hat!"

The distinct and unmistakable sound of chuckles could be heard.

There were some juniors outside the door.

Jack Blake grinned.

"A jape, kids!" he whispered. "Not a giddy word. Ten to one they haven't heard us."

"I say! The young rotters must have turned the gas off in the passage!"

"Yes, that's it."

"Ring off, kids! They've come to rag us!"

And Jack Blake slipped under the table.

Herries and Digby grinned and disappeared behind the bookcase. They all listened intently.

Subdued voices could be heard through the door.

"I don't believe they're there, Kangaroo."

"Saw 'em go in, kid."

"Yes. But— Ha, ha, ha!"

The chuckles were renewed, and the heavy tramp was to be heard again.

The next moment the door of Study No. 6 was pushed open.

CHAPTER 8.

To Jape the New House.

THE three Fourth-Formers watched expectantly from their respective places of concealment. The dim light from the passage scarcely gave any light at all into the study.

Nothing could be heard but the steady tramp.

The chuckles had ceased.

"My—my hat!"

Herries suddenly gasped. A tremendous shadow could be seen on the passage wall.

Almost at the same moment there was a scraping noise, then the cause of the shadow appeared in the doorway.

To Herries and Digby it looked like a man well over seven feet in height and broad in proportion.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Great Caesar!"

The huge thing was coming into the room, walking with a jerky, heavy stride. Jack Blake tried to scramble from beneath the table.

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Digby dashed from behind the bookcase and fell over Jack Blake's legs.

"Ass!"

"O-oh! Ow! Yah!"

The huge figure had trodden on Digby's foot. Digby gave vent to yells.

"My hat!"

"What is it? Look out, Herries!"

The huge figure marched on, knocked over a chair and brought up against the wall. As far as Jack Blake & Co. could see, it now appeared to be trying to walk through the wall.

"Great Scott! This is Bernard Glyn's work!"

"Look!"

In some way the huge figure screwed round, and the moment he had done so, its eyes lighted up. For an instant there was quite a glare from the huge eyes.

"Glyn, Glyn! You rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's Kangaroo's laugh."

"And there's old Bernard Glyn!" cried Herries. "Who has got the matches?"

Digby raced across to the mantelshelf and struck a match. An instant later the gas was relighted.

"My aunt!"

And the three stood staring at a shambling being which vaguely resembled the form of a man just small enough to get through an ordinary doorway.

In the light it was obvious enough that the figure was put together roughly, but in the dark it had been quite awe-inspiring. Jack Blake dashed to the door.

"Hallo, Kangy! Up to the old wheeze again, then!"

Harry Noble, the Australian junior, grinned.

"We thought we'd let you see how it worked, Blakey," he chuckled. "Jolly good idea, don't you think?"

"Has Figgy seen it, kids?"

Bernard Glyn, the amateur inventor, shook his head.

"No one but we six have seen it," he said. "In fact, it's only just made. Kangaroo was keen on the idea."

Jack Blake banged his hand on Harry Noble's shoulder.

"Ripping, kid! A! Come into the study, old ass!"

"Yes, come into the study!" shouted Digby. "Come in and be bumped, you rotters!"

"Collar them!"

"Altogether!"

And Herries and Digby dashed out into the passage. Jack Blake barred the way.

"Dry up, kids!"

"What's the wheeze?"

"Do you mean to say you're going to let Cornstalk & Co. rag us, Blakey?"

Jack Blake waved his hand.

"We can talk about that in a minute, Dig," he exclaimed. "Come on in, chaps!"

Cornstalk & Co. looked doubtful.

"What's the idea?" asked Clifton Dane suspiciously.

"You'll find out in a minute, old chap. It's pax, kids."

"Oh, all right, then!" remarked Bernard Glyn. "Whatever you do, don't hurt that figure, though."

"Not much. My hat! How on earth did you make it, kid?"

"Oh, that was easy enough!" laughed the young inventor. "I'd got all the motors—just clockwork things, you know; but jolly strong ones, and there are a lot of them. As soon as one motor is running down it starts the second going, and so on. That thing will walk about for nearly twenty minutes."

"My hat!"

"How's the body made?"

"Only a framework of cane to keep it light, and the togs sewn on," grinned Bernard Glyn. "I wanted to try my idea of a lot of clockwork motors hitched up so that they work in succession, and Kangaroo was keen on this idea. It's only a big walking doll. Nothing to get excited about."

Jack Blake chuckled loudly.

"It's the very thing we've been looking for, anyway," he grinned.

The others stared at him. Digby was astounded.

"Bother it all, Blakey."

"Just the one thing that will do," went on Jack Blake. "Have you kids forgotten that it's up against us to jape the New House asses to-night?"

"My hat!"

"You don't mean—"

"But that's what I jolly well do mean," exclaimed Jack Blake enthusiastically. "Bernard Glyn has been rather quiet lately, and Figgins & Co. won't be expecting anything like this."

"No. Rather not."

"How can it be worked, kid?"

"Do you mean letting it loose in the New House?" exclaimed Bernard Glyn. "I'm not agreeing to that idea, Jack Blake. I know old Figgy, and I don't want the motors inside that figure hurt."

"Oh, that'll be all right! Figgins won't hurt the motors." Bernard Glyn looked doubtful.

"I don't like it, Blake."

"Neither will Figgins," chuckled the chief of Study No. 6. "Look here! All we've got to do is, to push the thing into their dormitory the moment lights are out. It'll drive all the young asses out like smoking a hive!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will, if the eyes light up like they did just now, and no mistake."

"The eyes will light up all right," said Bernard Glyn, still doubtfully. "The eyes are electric glow lamps, and they are switched on every twenty seconds, automatically."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ripping!"

"Suppose one of the prefects sees it?"

Jack Blake grinned.

"We'll take jolly good care they don't, Kangaroo," he said. "I propose we slip along to the box-room near their dormitory at once, and hide the thing there until the bell goes."

"Yes. But about the motors?"

"Oh, the old motors will be right enough!"

"Yes, that's all very well. But suppose—"

"What's the good of supposing?" grinned Jack Blake.

"Don't grouse, Glyn. Hallo!"

Someone else was approaching the study now.

Jack Blake was on his feet in a flash.

"It's Gussy, chaps. Turn the gas down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Digby and Herries understood. The gas was turned down instantly.

Bernard Glyn hastily pulled over a lever in the side of his automaton and started it going.

"Shift the chairs, Herries," he whispered. "I'll walk round and round the table if you do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at its giddy eyes."

"My hat!"

The juniors laughed softly. Arthur Augustus was coming rapidly nearer; they could hear him humming gently to himself.

Another moment and he would gain the study. The juniors waited breathlessly.

The door was flung open at last.

"Hallo, deah boys! Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

And Arthur Augustus uttered a wild shriek, flinging up his hands. The next instant Bernard Glyn also shrieked.

Something both heavy and hard had hurtled through the air. It concluded its flight by striking the amateur inventor of St. Jim's on the bridge of the nose.

"Duffer—raving maniac—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gweat Scott! Help! Bai Jove—"

"Ring off, ass!" gasped Jack Blake, turning the light up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glanced at the figure, and dropped into a chair.

"You uttah wottahs—you uttah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's for Figgins & Co.—"

"And we're jolly well trying it on the dog!" chuckled Harry Noble.

"Bai Jove, I am all in a fluttah! I considah this as wotten in the extweme— Bai Jove, what an awful lookin' contwaption."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am all in a wotten fluttah!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Bai Jove—"

Bernard Glyn groaned loudly.

"You ought to be in a home! Of all the frabjous young asses—"

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Look at my nose," shouted the inventor—"look at it!"

Arthur Augustus looked.

"Bai Jove! It's bleedin', deah boy! Are you all in a fluttah as well—"

"Ass! You threw something at me! I've a jolly good mind to—"

"Bai Jove! Now I come to think of it, I wemembah I had something in my hand—a book of patterns, deah boy."

"A chunk of lead more likely."

"Pway don't be widic., deah boy! It was not vewy heavy, as a matiah of fact. I twust none of the patterns have fallen out, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Digbay, I fail to see any cause foah wibald laughtah! Bai Jove, I am still in a fluttah!"

"Blessed if I don't feel as if I'd got about three noses, all bigger than each other!" growled Bernard Glyn. "Look here, Jack Blake, I'm not coming into this room again unless you chain the one and only up!"

"Weally, Glyn— Howevah, I will ovahlook your wude-ness undah the circs. I might wemind you, though, that it is always weckless to put me in a fluttah; and, pway, why didn't you get out of the way when you saw the book of patterns comin', deah boy?"

"Ass—"

"Weally—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" laughed Jack Blake. "Stop cackling for once in your young life, and we'll give you particulars of the wheeze against the New House."

"Yaas, wathah! Fiah ahead, deah boy!"

And just as Jack Blake commenced to explain a junior crept passed the closed door of Study No. 6.

It was Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, and it was anything but a pleasant glance he directed towards the closed door.

CHAPTER 9.

Mellish's Second Bumping.

"I SAY, Reilly, have you seen Tom Merry?"

Reilly, the junior from Belfast, stopped.

"Who is it?" he asked, peering through the gloom of the corridor. "Oh, Mellish!"

"Yes, have you seen Tom Merry anywhere?"

"Shure, an' he's in his room, me boy!" answered the Irish junior, wondering what the cad of the Fourth could want with Tom Merry. "Is it that you want to keep out of his way, me boy?"

"Why should I want to keep out of Tom Merry's way, Reilly?"

Reilly shrugged his shoulders, with a grin.

"Oh, funnier things have happened than that! Anyway, have you seen Jack Blake & Co.?"

"No!" snapped Mellish. And he hurried on.

Reilly chuckled as he watched the cad of the Fourth disappear round the bend in the passage. Mellish's manner had changed at mention of Jack Blake's name.

He was a mean-spirited youngster, and he could not forget some things. Jack Blake & Co. had bumped him pretty severely—Mellish could not forget that.

But he had managed to forget their reason for bumping. In the same way he had forgotten his attempt to bring away Cousin Ethel's letter from Study No. 6.

He walked along, a scowl on his never very pleasant face.

Right along the Fourth-Form corridor he went, not stopping until Tom Merry's study was reached. Here he hesitated for a moment or two, then opened the door.

He stood blinking in the more powerful light of the neat little room, still hesitating.

"Are—are you busy, Tom Merry?"

"Rather!"

"Working our fingers to the bone—"

"Burning the midnight oil in gallons, kid!"

The Terrible-Three spoke together.

Mellish looked at them. All three were lying back in chairs before the open window, chatting, with their hands behind their heads.

"Don't—don't rot, Tom Merry—"

"No chance of that!"

"Rather not—"

"When fellows work like we do there isn't much chance of rotting," said Lowther. "Do you know, chaps, I've half a mind to make an all-night sitting of it and get it finished."

"Get—get what finished, Lowther?"

"The work, Mellish!" said the humourist of the Shell, putting his hands in his pockets. "Wait until you get into the Shell, kid; you won't have time for meals even then! Pass me the biscuits, Mannars."

"Too busy, old man!"

"You, Tommy!"

"Haven't a moment to spare!" said Tom Merry, getting his feet into a more comfortable position on the window-ledge.

"Don't forget to shut the door, Mellish!"

"Oh, I'll go if you like!"

"Good!"

"He'll go if we like, chaps!"

"And we do like!" said Mannars anxiously. "Rather!"

"Yes; I'll slip along and see Jack Blake instead," said Mellish. "He'll jump at the chance!"

The Terrible-Three looked up at that, just as Mellish had expected them to.

The cad of the Fourth was not without a certain type of cunning, which passed with a few at St. Jim's for intelligence. He was relying upon the friendly rivalry all the Lower School

knew existed between Tom Merry & Co. and the Study No. 6 juniors.

Mellish even walked towards the door. Tom Merry turned in his chair. "What's it all about then, ass?" "Oh, if you're too busy—"

"Humph! I dare say we could find time to bump you if it came to that, kid. If you've got anything to say, jolly well say it!"

"And if not, go and eat coke!" added Monty Lowther. Mellish came back into the room. The Terrible Three waited in silence. "Well, you see, Tom Merry, it's come to my knowledge that Figgins & Co. have a jape on against our House, and as a School House fellow I want to see us keep our end up," he began. "It's only natural—"

Tom Merry's lip curled. He knew Mellish almost as well as Jack Blake did.

"How did it come to your knowledge, Mellish?" The cad of the Fourth started. He remembered that Jack Blake had asked the same question, and he also remembered what had happened directly afterwards in the passage.

Mellish gave a different reply. "One of their chaps let it out—Pratt, I think it was—"

"I see. When's it to come off?" "To-night, I think. Jack Blake knows about it, but—but I don't quite think he's the sort of chap to uphold the honour of the School House. I mean, you three are much smarter than that lot—"

"You are right there, anyway!" said Manners heartily. "Rather not!"

"But Jack Blake & Co. are in your own Form, Mellish!" said Tom Merry, looking suspiciously at the Fourth-Former. "If you're so jolly keen on House honour I should have thought you would have had a little to spare for Form honour."

"Y-yes, but then Jack Blake and that lot are—are such rotters—"

"Piffle!" "Don't talk such rot—"

"You'd better let Jack Blake hear you say that, kid!" exclaimed Lowther. "There'd be enough thick ears to last you all your life if you live to eighty!"

"I'm not going to let him hear me say it," said Mellish hastily. "I'm not such an ass! I say, Tom Merry, wouldn't you give something to be able to turn the tables on Jack Blake?"

"Depends!" "Get on with the washing, anyway!"

"Yes, Manners. Well, I happen to know what it is Jack Blake and the others are going to do to-night to return the jape on the New House chaps—"

"How do you know that?" flashed Tom Merry again. "I—I— One of their chaps let it out—"

Tom Merry's lip curled again. "Get on with the washing, Mellish!" he said quietly. "What are you driving at?"

"Well, I'll tell you what it is that Jack Blake is up to so that you can turn the tables," the Fourth-Former ventured. "You'd give something to be able to do that. I could even tell you how you could jape both Jack Blake and Figgins with Jack Blake's own wheeze."

An ominous pause followed. Mellish ought to have taken warning from it, but he was prevented from doing so by an altogether wrong idea he had of the rivalry which existed between Tom Merry and Jack Blake.

Mellish thought that rivalry was something very different from what it really was.

The pause lasted for quite a long time. "Well, why don't you tell us?"

"I am going to, Tom Merry, only—only one good turn deserves another, you know—"

"What do you mean?" "You see, I thought that perhaps if you subscribed a shilling each—"

"What for?" "For—well, as I said, one good turn deserves another," exclaimed Mellish, in surprise. "A shilling each wouldn't hurt you chaps, and I am awfully hard up."

Tom Merry nodded. "I see," he said quietly. "You want us to bribe you to split on your own Form?"

"Not—not quite that, but—"

"Something very like it, eh?" "Well—"

Tom Merry got up. Manners and Lowther also got up at the same moment. They did so without any previous signal passing between them.

Mellish looked from one to the other. "What do you say, Tom Merry?"

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"That we're sorry we can't accept your offer, Mellish."

"No, although it gives us great regret—"

"In fact, we're almost upset about it," added Manners. "That's so," agreed Tom Merry. "However, there's one thing we can do for you, Mellish."

"Rather!" "And that won't give us any regret at all," said Lowther. Mellish looked from one to the other eagerly.

"What's that, you chaps? Will you lend me the three shillings—"

"No," said Tom Merry; "but we'll give you something instead—we'll give you a jolly good bumping!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Collar him, chaps! Shut the door—"

Mellish made for the door in alarm. "Look here, if you rotters touch me— Take your hand off my arm, Lowther—"

"Right-ho, kid! Prefer to be caught by the leg instead—"

"Yah! Rotters! Fourth—Fourth Form to the rescue—"

Bump! "That's for thinking we'd buy information in that rotten way!" panted Tom Merry.

Bump! "And that's for offering to sell your own Form chaps," chuckled Manners.

Bump! "And that's for being a general sort of all-round rotter!" exclaimed Lowther.

Bump! Bump! Bump! Mellish shouted lustily.

"All right, you rotters; you'll be sorry for this!"

"We're sorry for it now; it's making us jolly warm."

"All right, Lowther—"

"One more as a finish!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Altogether! One—two—three—bump!"

And a bump it was. It shook all the breath from Mellish's body, and made his teeth rattle.

Before he could recover the Terrible Three yanked him to his feet and ran him towards the doorway. Manners flung open the door.

Lowther chuckled loudly. "Sorry you've got to go, Mellish, but we're busy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the cad of the Fourth was evicted, landing on the passage floor with a thump. He looked up, still panting. Reilly was standing a few yards away, holding his sides.

The junior from Belfast was choking.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "All right, you rotters," shouted Mellish; "you'll be sorry for this! All right—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Reilly. "Mellish, me bhoy, did you find Tom Merry after all? Ho, ho, ho!"

And Mellish strode away, the scowl on his face darker than ever.

CHAPTER 10.

Binks Takes a Note.

MELLISH hurried back to his study. He turned up the gas and sat down, an almost tearful expression of anger in his eyes.

"The rotters! The beastly bullies!" Like most things about Mellish, his anger was small. Shut up in his own study, he would work himself up into a rage, but he had never been known to willingly take part in a fight.

For several minutes he sat by the window with his fingers clenched. He jumped to his feet at last.

"I'll do it; I told Jack Blake I would, and I will!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "It serves the beasts right; I'll send a note!"

He hurried to his desk and began to scribble. Then he tore what he had written up and started again, disguising his handwriting. Mellish was rather good at disguising his handwriting.

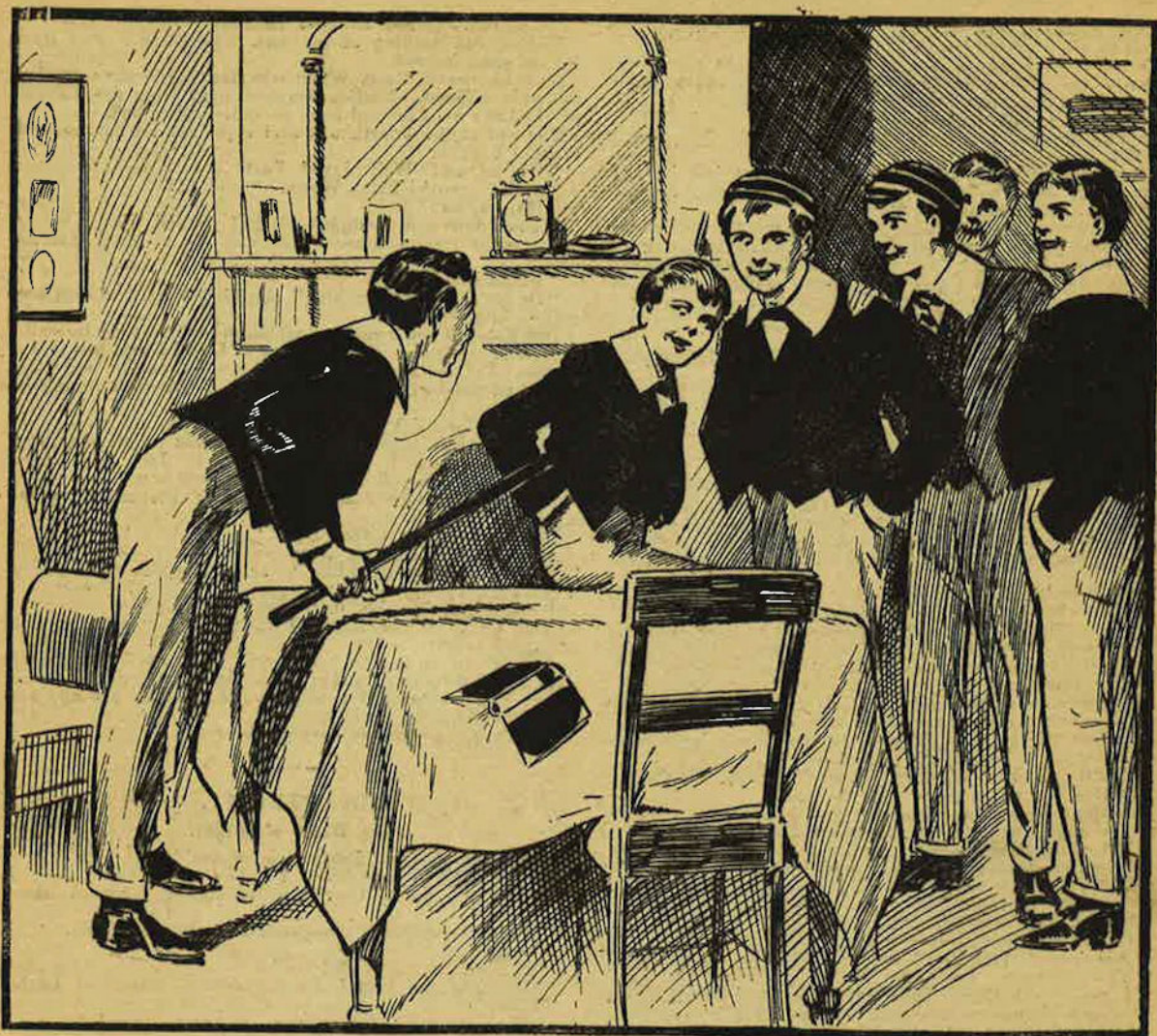
"That'll do," he mused after a time. "It'll make Figgins keep his eyes open, and perhaps I shall be able to borrow the three shillings from them. Anyway, I get my own back on the other beasts."

Mellish folded his note up, then glanced at the clock. There was not a great deal of time before the dormitory bell would ring now. How was he to get the note into the New House?

It did not occur to Mellish to take it himself to Figgins. He had had enough of visiting other juniors' studies for a long time to come.

As it happened, his problem was solved for him. Binks, the pageboy, came into the room at that moment.

"I have come to bar the window," said Binks. "Who knows what may happen in the dead of night?"



"Ordah—ordah, deah boys, or I shall have to wemove you fwom my woom!" said Arthur Augustus, banging on the table with a heavy ebony ruler.

"Don't be an ass!" said Mellish. "The window is locked—"

"Good!" said Binks, who was still under the influence of his favourite fiction. "The coast seems clear—"

"Yes, there aren't any prefects about, thank goodness!" Binks started. He had not been thinking of prefects; his mind ran more upon Red Indians, and other people who collect scalps.

"I wasn't speaking of prefects, Master Mellish—"

"Never mind what you were speaking of, Binks!" exclaimed Mellish. "I want you to do something for me."

"Say on!"

"Oh, ring off talking that piffle! I don't want you to blow up the college, or anything like that. I want you to take a note—to the New House for me."

"Carry a message! There will be risk."

"Not if you don't pass the masters' rooms. My hat! What do you think you are doing, ass?"

Binks was pushing the note down his boot. He was doing it deliberately, without a suspicion of a smile on his face.

"It is safer carried that way," he said, lowering his voice. "Once, when Deadshot David was crossing the Rockies, he carried a message in his boot for three months. He was captured seven times by brigands, but they never obtained the message. This his to be 'anded to Master Figgins?"

"Y-yes; wait a minute."

Binks waited.

"Don't say where the note came from," added Mellish.

"Couldn't you open the door, and throw it into the room or something?"

"It could be done, although the risk—"

"Rats! Probably be more risk if you walked into their beastly study with the thing, anyway. If they collar you, whatever you do you mustn't say who sent the note."

Binks nodded.

He understood. Most of his favourite heroes had been employed on similar missions before, and Binks never took any real interest in anything his favourite heroes were not used to.

He crept from the study on tiptoes, much to the amazement of Mellish.

Then the cad of the Fourth chuckled loudly. Binks was getting worse.

"But he's a useful sort of idiot at times," grinned Mellish. "Even if Figgins & Co. do collar him, he'd never say who sent the note. I believe he'd be flayed alive first. Silly ass, Binks!"

And Mellish dropped back in his chair.

The moments slipped by slowly, but he did not stir from his room. He did not want to meet Jack Blake or Tom Merry again.

Presently he glanced towards the door. Someone was approaching the study.

"Binks, I suppose," thought the cad of the Fourth. "Perhaps he couldn't find Figgins—"

The train of Mellish's thoughts was broken abruptly. If Binks had failed to find Figgins & Co., Figgins & Co. had succeeded in finding Mellish.

Figgins led the way into the study quite pleasantly.

"Hallo, Mellish!"

"Hallo!" said Mellish.

"Nice evening, isn't it?"

Mellish got up from his chair.

"Look here, Figgins, I'm not going to have you New House chaps coming in here whenever you want to," he began. "Go into your own study."

"We've just come from it, kid."

Kerr chuckled.

"That's so—"

"Rather!" agreed Fatty Wynn. "We were just having a snack—a few buns, a small cake and some apples. Between all three of us, of course—"

"Yes," said Figgins, "and when we were in the middle of it, some young ass opened the door and threw a note into the room. It stuck in a cream bun Fatty was wolfing."

"Yes, that's so, and I nearly dropped the bun," remarked Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Only just saved it in time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you can laugh, Kerr!"

"Sorry, kid. Look here, Mellish, did you bring that note into the New House?"

"Of course I didn't; I've been here for the last ten minutes."

"Do you know anything about the note?" asked Figgins quietly.

"What note?"

"This one," answered the long-limbed leader of the New House juniors. "It says that the School House intend to jape us to-night, and that we had better look-out. It doesn't say what the jape is to be, but adds that it will probably take place after lights-out, and the thing is signed 'Well-wisher.'"

Mellish looked indignant.

"Well, what has it got to do with me?"

"That's what we want to know," replied Figgins, glancing at the desk. "We thought of taking the rotten note to Jack Blake's room, but decided to look in here first of all."

Mellish started.

If Figgins took the note to Jack Blake, two and two might be put together, making a very unpleasant total for the cad of the Fourth. Mellish did not want the note to find its way into Jack Blake's hands.

"You'll probably look an awful ass if you do, Figgins."

"Shall I?"

"Suppose Jack Blake sent the note himself, as a decoy-duck or something? Those rotters are up to anything!"

"Yes, and so are other rotters."

"They are," said Kerr, who had his eyes fixed on the desk. "The chap who would split on his own House is a fair specimen of the rotter type, and no mistake. Sure you don't know anything about this, Mellish?"

"Of course, I am sure—"

"Are you sure you didn't write it?"

"Yes, of course. Look here—"

"I am," said Kerr, the Scots junior, quietly. "Funny sort of cut in that exercise-book of yours, kid."

Mellish spun round.

There certainly was a curious square cut from one of the pages. The blank space left in the page was about the same size as the note Figgins had spread out on the table.

Kerr picked up the note.

"Same paper, too, Figgy."

"Yes, and this fountain-pen has been used pretty recently. Sure you have been in the room for the last ten minutes, Mellish?"

"I— Look here, clear out of my room!"

"Right-ho! In a minute. Of course, if you haven't been in the room all the time, some other outsider may have slipped in and scribbled the note while you were away. It's poss., as old Gussy would say."

"Only not very pwob," observed Kerr.

Figgins shook his head gravely. Mellish was beginning to get frightened.

He waited anxiously for Figgins to speak.

"Of course, it's one of those cases you can never prove," remarked the New House junior. "It's all circumstantial evidence."

Mellish brightened.

"It's a lot of rot, your pretending to think it was I who sent the note. I don't know anything about it."

"And if it were a case of tar and feathering, we should have to move very cautiously in the matter," went on Kerr. "You can't tar and feather a fellow, or even boil him in oil, on circumstantial evidence, but when it's merely a case of bumping—"

"Look here, you beasts—"

"We are looking. A slight course of bumping—"

"If you jolly well dare to touch me," cried Mellish. "I'll shout for Kildare!"

"But we sha'n't need Kildare's help to bump you, kid," said Kerr almost affectionately; "we can do it ourselves for the mere love of the thing."

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"Yes, come and be bumped, Mellish."

Mellish did nothing of the sort. He made a wild dash for the door instead.

As it happened, Fatty Wynn was standing in the way, and the pair collided. Mellish bounced away from the Falstaff of St. Jim's as if he had been an indiarubber ball.

The cad of the Fourth was sent right into the outstretched arms of Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha! Well played, Fatty!"

"O-oh!" panted Fatty Wynn. "O-oh! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You idiot—you frabjous idiot!" gasped Fatty Wynn, holding his plump sides. "Let me get at him! Lemme—"

"Bump him!"

"Or let Fatty roll on him," chuckled Kerr. "Come and roll on him, Fatty!"

But Fatty Wynn went and sat down and groaned instead. Mellish made one more attempt to break away, but it was useless. Figgins and Kerr bumped him vigorously, and when they had finished, the School House junior was breathless again.

"That's for thinking we could be such rotters as to want a warning like that note, Mellish," said Figgins quietly.

"If we'd taken it to Tom Merry or Jack Blake, you wouldn't have got off so lightly, I can tell you."

"You'll be sorry for this, Figgins; I'll make you so sorry—"

"Don't talk like a young ass!"

"You see if you're not sorry—"

"Burling young idiot!" said Figgins. "Coming, chaps?"

"Right-ho! Ha, ha, ha! Coming, Fatty?"

And Fatty Wynn followed them from the study, still groaning loudly.

Mellish sat on in the little room until the bell sounded. His three attempts to approach the rival juniors of St. Jim's had not proved a success. Mellish bit his lip, and sat there thinking rapidly.

His thoughts were not very pleasant ones.

CHAPTER 11.

At Dead o' Night.

"RING off, ass! Don't make a row!"

"Yaas, wathah! But, as a matter of fact, I am not in the habit of makin' a wow. How-eva—"

"Ring off, duffer!" whispered Jack Blake quickly. "No cackling!"

"No, wathah not! But—"

"Oh, gag the young ass, someone!" whispered Digby. "Hallo!"

"Yaas, wathah! I was twyin' to explain that I thought I saw somebody ovah there, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I am almost certain I saw somebody cweep along."

The Study No. 5 juniors stopped.

Lights had been out some time now, and the prefect on duty had been the round. The Fourth-Formers left the dormitory soon afterwards.

They were in the passage now, crouching down again, the wall.

"I thought I saw someone move myself."

"Yaas, wathah, Digby, deah boy! Somebody who was cweepin' along."

"Oh, Mrs. Mimms's cat, probably," whispered Jack Blake. "Anyway, it wasn't a pref. or a master. Get on with the washing."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

"There's someone coming the other way, now."

Jack Blake peeped through the darkness.

There was someone approaching this time. There could be no doubt about it.

For a moment the leader of the School House Fourth Form was puzzled how to act.

Presently he chuckled.

"It's all right, kids. It's only Cornstalk & Co."

"Bai Jove, imposs., deah boy! Cornstalk & Co. wouldn't cwouch down by the wall—"

"They would if they mistook us for prefs., kid."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! Hallo, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus called out softly, and the other party of juniors at once came on.

Harry Noble was grinning.

"My hat, I thought we were snatched baldheaded, that time!" he whispered. "Gussy looks just like Dr. Holmes in the dark."

"Bai Jove—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies, I see no weason foah wibald laughtah in Kangawoo's wemark!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity. "I considah it weally a stwikin' honah to be mistaken foah our respected head-mastah—"

"Yes; but the doctor might feel a bit ratty about it, kid."

"Weally, Digbay—"

"Dry up, Gussy," said Jack Blake, moving forward.

"Bernard Glyn here?"

"Yes, I'm here all right!"

"Good! Let's get on with the washing, then."

The amateur inventor of St. Jim's growled. He was still a little doubtful about the safety of his motors.

However, there was no turning back now.

He led the way on tip-toe to the little box-room.

"Anyone got any matches?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of bwingin' any, deah boy!"

"Oh, we sha'n't need matches, Blake," whispered Bernard Glyn. "Get the door open, someone. There, that's better than matches."

The St. Jim's inventor touched a lever in the side of his walking giant.

The eyes at once lighted up and remained alight.

"Quite useful little batteries run those glow-lamps," he explained. "If they get damaged there'll be a row, I can tell you!"

Jack Blake chuckled.

"My hat, isn't it weird!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway get the thing wound up, deah boy."

Bernard Glyn began winding—a rather long job, but he finished at last.

"He'll walk about for a good twenty minutes, anyway, now," he observed. "That ought to be long enough to send the New House asses dotty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How's the wheeze going to be worked, Blakey?"

Jack Blake glanced out of the room. He came back chuckling gleefully.

"We're in luck, kids! Figgins & Co. have left their door ajar!"

"Good, deah boy—"

"Someone will have to slip along and open it properly, though, to let the giddy freak find its way into the room!" exclaimed Digby. "Shall I go?"

Bernard Glyn shook his head.

"No need to do that," he explained. "If the door is ajar it'll be all right."

"Weally, deah boy, I fail to see—"

"Ass!"

"Bai Jove, Glyn, deah boy, I must wequest you not to address me in that weally wotten mannah. It is both wude and widic—"

"Cheese it, kid! What's the idea, then, Glyn?"

"You'll see. Stand out of the way, Dig."

Digby jumped hastily out of the way, and Bernard Glyn started his invention working. With a controlling hand on one of the levers, he guided it through the doorway.

"Now watch!" he whispered. "Ready?"

"Yaas, wathah! Fiah ahead, deah boy! Bai Jove!"

The amateur inventor had sent his invention on its walk.

The curious, steady tramp was to be heard in the corridor again.

Jack Blake chuckled loudly, and Herries began to choke.

"My hat, look at it!"

"Phew!"

Bernard Glyn suddenly whistled thoughtfully. Jack Blake glanced at him.

"What's up, kid?"

"My hat, I don't believe I locked the steering-gear up!" exclaimed the inventor anxiously. "It may turn round any minute—"

"Bai Jove! No, it's all wight, deah boy! It's wunnin' stwaight foah the door. Ha, ha, ha!"

With a stately tread the huge figure was approaching the door of the New House dormitory. A few more seconds and the door would be reached.

Jack Blake watched expectantly. What would happen when the door was gained?

The next moment there was a crash, and the door was flung open. Bernard Glyn's invention had let itself into the large room by simply walking into the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze, Glyn!"

"Wippin'—weally wippin'!"

The School House juniors laughed silently. They were waiting for the shrieks.

They waited for about half a minute.

"My hat, the kids must be jolly sound asleep, and no mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah! Gweat Scott!"

A crash had come from the New House dormitory. It sounded as if a water-jug had been knocked off the wash-stand.

Jack Blake grinned.

"If that doesn't wake them—"

"Bai Jove, it doesn't appear to have done so, deah boy, Weally, this is wathah a wemarkable—"

"My hat!"

There was another crash. Something else had been knocked over by Bernard Glyn's invention.

"Bai Jove, they can't be there, deah boys!"

Jack Blake started. It seemed utterly impossible that anyone could sleep through the noise which was going on in the New House dormitory—even Fatty Wynn, after a study, supper, could hardly be expected to do that.

The chief of Study No. 6 began to move forward.

"I say, chaps, they can't be there!"

"Wathah not!"

"Where are they, then?"

Jack Blake wheeled round.

"Trying to jape us in some way, I expect," he exclaimed crisply. "I left word with Reilly to keep an eye open, so if they attempt to raid the dormitory, they won't have it all their own way."

"What about our study, though, deah boy?"

"Looked the door, kid."

"Good—not to say wippin'! I nevah thought of that!"

"Ring off, Gussy!"

The juniors glanced at one another in dismay.

"What's to be done, Glyn? The kids aren't in their room, that's certain."

Bernard Glyn growled.

"I know what I am going to do, anyway!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to capture that invention. Blessed if I should like the motors to be damaged."

"Ha, ha, ha! Seems to me it's the room that's being damaged, kid."

"Yes; but think of the jar to the motors as the collisions take place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right-oh, old chap! My aunt!"

One last crash rang out, then the figure came marching from the room. In the distance its movements looked so life-like that Jack Blake started.

Arthur Augustus hastily donned his monocle.

"Gweat Scott, it's coming back to us, deah boys!"

"No, it isn't, it's turned round!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

To the blank amazement of the School House juniors, Bernard Glyn's invention suddenly walked into the wall. An instant later the impact had caused it to wheel round, then it disappeared altogether.

"Gweat Scott, it's gone down the othah cowwidor!"

"So it has!"

"My hat, it'll wander right on past the prefects' rooms!" gasped Jack Blake. "And I know Kildare is sitting up working. Glyn, you ought to be boiled in oil!"

"I didn't lock the steering gear!"

"Whatevah is to be done, deah boys?"

Bernard Glyn began to run forward.

"It must be caught!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to have ripping motors like those loose about the place! It must be caught, whatever happens, Blake!"

"Rather!"

"Get on with the washing, chaps!"

And the juniors rushed forward. They had slippers on, and so made very little noise. It was well for them that that was so.

A dozen yards run, and Jack Blake had gained the turning which led to the other corridor. He stopped dead the moment he rounded the bend.

"Stop, asses!"

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Stop, ass! Kildare's there!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, and he pulled up in time. "What a nawwow escape!"

"Dry up! Not a sound, you chaps!"

"What's to be done now, Blakey?"

Jack Blake did not answer at once. He peered cautiously round the passage corner instead.

"Yes, it's old Kildare all right!"

"Yaas, wathah! Standing in his studay doorway, bai Jove!"

"What's he doing, anyway?"

Jack watched for a moment or two, then drew back.

"I think I've got it, kids!" he whispered. "He heard Glyn's giddy invention walk past his door, and looked out to see what it was. He can't have seen the thing, though, or he'd have followed it up."

"Yes, that's it!"
 "Yaas, wathah! I nevah thought of that! Bai Jove, Kildare's comin', deah boys!"
 Jack Blake glanced round the corner again, then spun round.
 "Scud for it, kids! Kildare's coming, and no mistake!"
 "Must have thought the thing came this way, I suppose."
 "Yes, that's about the size of it," agreed Jack Blake.
 "Sprint for all you're worth, kids, but don't make a sound!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 And the juniors pelted back along the corridor in record time.

CHAPTER 12. Mellish's Revenge.

"THERE go the rotters!"
 Mellish muttered the words to himself, crouching down in a recess in the corridor.
 Once he thought Arthur Augustus had seen him, but the timely arrival of Cornstalk & Co. had saved the situation as far as he was concerned. He remained where he was, crouching in the shadow, watching the group of juniors whispering amongst themselves.
 Mellish was still feeling rather stiff from his three bumpings. He thought of those bumpings now.
 "I'll make them sorry somehow," he muttered. "And Tom Merry & Figgins, too. I'll make them feel small about it."

But exactly how he was to do all this, Mellish did not quite know as yet.
 Anyway, the first thing to be done was to get away from the recess. The cad of the Fourth did not care for the idea of remaining there when Jack Blake & Co. passed along the passage.

If he were found, unpleasant questions would be asked. He glanced out from the recess.
 "They're going to the New House, of course," Mellish mused. "I ought to be able to slip along the passage and down the other by Kildare's study without being seen. Anyway, they won't recognise me even if they do catch a glimpse."

The Fourth-Former waited a few minutes longer, then flashed down the passage, keeping to the wall.

Every moment he expected a cry to ring out, but it did not come. Jack Blake & Co. must have been too engrossed in their whispers to have noticed him.

But it was with a tremendous feeling of relief that Mellish gained the other corridor. He stopped panting by the window.

What was to be done now? Kildare was up working, certainly, and it would be an easy matter to bring the captain from the study the moment Jack Blake and the others were in Figgins's room. Mellish rather liked that idea at first.

"And I could get away all right," he thought. "I'd only have to yell a bit and scud for it. Kildare would be bound to go to Figgins's dormitory, and Jack Blake would be trapped."

But suppose Jack Blake & Co. were not going to the New House dormitory?

Mellish had no reason to feel certain that they were. All he knew was, that Figgins & Co. were to be japed with the aid of some invention of Bernard Glyn's. That much the cad of the Fourth had learnt listening at the door of Study No. 6.

What the invention was, he did not know.
 "I'd better wait," he decided. "I'll keep in the shadow here and watch the rotters pass, if they do pass. If not, it wouldn't be a bad wheeze to put Knox on their track."

That again would want thinking over, though. Knox was notoriously bad-tempered, the worst tempered prefect in St. Jim's. He would be glad enough of a chance of trapping juniors out of their dormitories after lights out, but he might also drop on the junior who brought the information.

It all depended on the state of his temper at the time.
 Knowing Knox as he did, Mellish thought there was too much risk.

The cad of the Fourth racked his brains for an idea, but nothing fresh came. Presently he started violently.

A heavy tramp sounded from somewhere, from the corridor at right angles to the one he was in himself, he thought. He listened in amazement.

Surely Jack Blake & Co. couldn't be raiding the New House dormitory. The steady tramp was loud enough to give warning of their approach to Fatty Wynn even.

"My hat!"
 Mellish gasped.
 Something of tremendous height had passed the top of the corridor. The watching junior only caught a momentary glimpse of the form, but it made his face grow white.

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He had half a mind to run away.
 Then he pulled himself together.
 It could only be the invention he had heard the chums talking about in Study No. 6. Another of Bernard Glyn's great ideas, of course.

Mellish soon convinced himself that that must be the case, but his face was still very white. He felt an unpleasant desire to keep glancing over his shoulder, too. He rather wished now that he had not left his dormitory.

The minutes slipped by, and some crashes were to be heard, then the tramp sounded again.

Mellish crouched down and watched. The strange figure must be returning.

Suddenly Mellish's fear returned, and he started up to his feet.

The figure was coming along his corridor now, and its eyes had lighted up. Mellish watched spellbound.

Then he turned and fled.
 The form was following him. He could hear the steady tramp, and the sound prevented the cad of the Fourth reasoning the affair out.

He had already decided that it could be only another of Bernard Glyn's inventions, but he forgot that now.

Running as hard as he could, he neared the end of the corridor. Then it dawned upon him that the passage door at the end would be locked, that he was in a blind alley.

He glanced wildly over his shoulder. The figure was still coming on, but the eyes were not lighted up now. They flashed on again just after Mellish had looked.

The Fourth-Former dashed into another recess and stopped panting.

Of course it could only be Bernard Glyn's invention. The thing was seven feet high, but—

Mellish could not banish his fear.

He huddled up in the corner with dry lips. The tramp was becoming louder, then the huge figure passed by.

Mellish gasped.
 He had heard the buzzing of Bernard Glyn's prized motors. He peered out from the recess.

"By—by Jove! What a start it gave me!" muttered the cad of the Fourth. "What—what's it trying to do?"

Mellish was still a little scared, but his fright was wearing off rapidly now. He tried to follow the movement of Bernard Glyn's invention.

The huge figure appeared to be attempting to walk through a closed door.

Mellish started.

It must have been Jack Blake's idea that the way to jape the New House juniors was to let the invention loose in their room at night. Mellish grasped that instantly. He also remembered hearing the crashes the invention had been the cause of when in the dormitory.

There was one other thing Mellish realised as well. The door the figure was trying to walk through was Mr. Selby's bed-room.

The cad of the Fourth darted forward.
 Mr. Selby, the Third Form-master, had gone to bed, he knew. It was the chance Mellish had been waiting for.

With a quick twist of the hand, he opened the bed-room door.

Bernard Glyn's invention at once strode into the room, and Mellish closed the door again.

Then the cad of the Fourth ran along the corridor as hard as he could. By a piece of good fortune he just succeeded in missing Kildare.

CHAPTER 13.

Mr. Selby Receives a Shock.

MR. SELBY, the Third Form-master, awoke with a start.

He had not been quite as judicious in his choice of supper as he might have been, and he had been troubled by dreams in consequence. He awoke with a very violent start, in fact, and sat up.

There was someone in the room! The Third Form-master was certain of it.

"Who—who is there?"
 Mr. Selby tried to speak sternly.

He could see nothing, but he could hear someone moving about the room. Then, suddenly a chair was knocked over.

The Third Form-master was out of bed in a flash.
 "Good gracious!"

A form was striding towards him, a form which seemed to almost reach the ceiling. Mr. Selby stared at the vague outline in the darkness for a moment or two. He was incapable of movement for the time being.

The figure came on steadily, then Mr. Selby recovered himself. He turned and fled.

Round the bed he dashed, while the eyes of Bernard Glyn's

invention lighted up. Mr. Selby uttered a wild, despairing shriek.

"Help! Help!"

Mr. Selby was not a courageous man. If the awful form he could only just distinguish had been anywhere but between the door and himself, he would have rushed wildly from the room.

He could not do that without passing the form, though, so he did the next most natural thing to a man of his temperament.

He picked up a chair and flung it at Bernard Glyn's invention.

As far as he could tell, the chair struck the creature in the face, nearly knocked it over, but did not make it utter a single sound.

It was the silence as much as anything else that terrified the Third Form-master so.

He kept the bed between the figure and himself and shouted at the top of his voice.

"Help! Kildare! Help!"

He remembered with horror that his room was a good way distant from any of the other rooms, with the exception of Kildare's study. Mr. Selby forgot for a moment that Kildare was sitting up working.

"Help! Help!"

The sound of footsteps in the corridor outside was completely drowned by Mr. Selby's shouts. He heard nothing until the door was flung open, and the suddenness of it added to his distress.

"Good gracious, sir! What's the matter?"

"Kildare, is that you? Thank goodness! Look!"

Kildare started violently.

The biggest man he had ever seen was striding towards him.

Perhaps Kildare had the soundest nerves of anyone in the college, but he jumped hastily to one side as that figure approached.

"Good gracious!"

Bernard Glyn's invention's eyes lighted up again. Kildare gazed at them in amazement, then the figure blundered into the wall.

It continued its attempt to walk through it.

Kildare half grasped the situation, and whipped a box of matches from his pocket. The next instant the gas was alight.

"It's all right, sir! It's only a—a trick! Phew!"

And Kildare stood staring at Bernard Glyn's invention in blank amazement.

In the full glare of the gas the figure, of course, was not very natural looking. The face consisting of a rounded piece of wood painted by Clifton Dane. Still, the way it walked was wonderfully clever.

That was the first thing that struck the captain.

Then the seriousness of the trick dawned upon him. He glanced hastily towards Mr. Selby.

The Third Form-master's face was deathly white, and his hand was shaking.

"What—what is it, Kildare?"

"Only something one of the juniors has made," explained Kildare, who had a strong suspicion as to which junior it was. "Merely a huge walking-doll."

"But in my room, Kildare—my room!"

"Yes, sir; and no wonder it startled you. I expect you have only just woken up?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Pretty awful thing to wake up and see, and no mistake, sir," said Kildare, rather anxiously. "I—"

"But in my room! How could it have got into my room?" Kildare started.

"By Jove, I heard something walk past my study with the most extraordinary tread!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps the junior who made it, was practising with the thing, and it escaped!"

"But how could he get in here? The door was closed!"

Kildare's face became graver.

Mr. Selby turned on him furiously.

"Kildare, someone deliberately put that thing into my room?"

"We—we don't quite know that yet, sir."

"But someone must have done so!" thundered the Third Form-master. "Was my door shut when you came in?"

"Y—yes!"

"Then some lad brought that—that thing here! Opened my door and put it in!" cried Mr. Selby, almost inarticulate with anger. "And he closed the door afterwards!"

Kildare said nothing.

There was nothing to say.

He was rather upset, but he could not prove the master's suspicions unfounded. As a matter of fact, he thought they were very well founded.

Mr. Selby's explanation could be the only possible one.

The Third Form-master had recovered himself completely now.

"Take that thing away, Kildare!" he cried. "To-morrow this affair will be thrashed out!"

"Yes, sir. Good-night, sir!"

But Mr. Selby did not answer. He had been in too great anger even to hear the captain's "good-night."

Kildare dragged Bernard Glyn's invention from the room, an anxious expression still on his handsome face.

CHAPTER 14.

The Scarcity of Money.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus uttered the exclamation as he sat up in bed the following morning.

Jack Blake and the other juniors turned from the dressing-tables.

"What's up, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, I wondah what happened to Bernard Glyn's invention last night, deah boys?"

Jack Blake chuckled as he struggled with a collar stud.

"Goodness knows! Cornstalk & Co. have been hunting all over the coll. for it since first bell."

"Bai Jove, has it disappeared, then?"

"Rather! No one seems to have heard or seen it. Awful rag, only Bernard Glyn's so jolly frightened about the motors."

"Oh, bother Bernard Glyn's invention!" exclaimed Digby, jumping out of bed. "What's the weather like, kids?"

"Ripping!"

"Hooray!"

"Yaas, wathah; isn't it gwand?" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "I shouldn't wondah if the wicket at Cleveland Lodge is weally in wattleing ordah to-morrow, deah boys."

"Rather; only don't cackle aloud, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus found his monocle, and screwed it into his left eye.

"Weally, Hewwies, I am not in the habit of—"

"Dry up, then!"

"I wofuse—"

"Here comes Tom Merry, ass!"

"Hallo, Shellfish!"

"Hallo, Fourth-Form kids!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Were you chaps out on the warpath last night?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Japing Figgy?"

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"Then why didn't you tell us?" demanded Tom Merry indignantly. "Jolly nice sort of idea for the School House not to act together. You must be an ass, Blakey! We three were out on the same wheeze."

"Japing Figgy?"

"Yes; only it was a frost," went on Tom Merry, with increased indignation. "Bernard Glyn says your idea was a wash-out as well. If you'd only had the sense to tell me about it—"

"Or if you had told us about your wag, deah boy—"

"Eh?"

"Funnay ideah for the School House not to act togethah, deah boy," added Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am wathah surprized that you did not come foah our advice."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry began to chuckle as well.

"Anyway, the whole thing was a misfire," he laughed. "Figgins & Co. also drew a blank, didn't they?"

"Rather!"

"Come here with bolsters," chuckled Reilly, "an' went for us in our beds."

"That's so; only we weren't in our beds—"

"No; we were jolly well under them!" grinned Kerruish, the Manx junior. "We'd left our bolsters wrapped up in the bedclothes, and the way Figgins & Co. went for them was enough to kill you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you attack them, kids?"

Reilly shook his head.

"Not much, me bhoy!" he chuckled. "There were too many of them for us, with Blakey & Co. out of the room. We just watched, and they got scared. They hurried away to see if their studies were being wrecked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a giddy frost all round!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it was a fwost myself, deah boy."

Tom Merry laughed heartily, then he became grave again.

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"But we haven't come here to talk about japes!" he exclaimed. "We've come to know whether you chaps could do us a favour."

"Bai Jove, how wemarkably funnay, deah boy!"

"Dry up, ass!"

"Weally, Digbay—"

Tom Merry looked from one to the other.

"Why funny, Gussy? We often do each other favours, kid."

"Yaas, wathah; only, as it happens, we had just decided to ask you to do us a favah, deah boy."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Good egg! Delighted, Gussy; only ours is rather a big thing."

"Bai Jove, so is ours—a mattah of gweat importance—"

"Not as big as ours, anyway!" exclaimed Tom Merry anxiously. "Look here, Blake, can you chaps lend us some money until next week—a matter of a sovereign?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

Expressions of blank amazement flashed across the faces of the Study No. 6 fellows. They stared at Tom Merry & Co. in astonishment.

Tom Merry met their glances steadily.

"I know borrowing money is rotten and all that," he said; "but this is a pressing bizney, as I can't possibly get any money from home in time—"

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry's astonishment increased.

"Of course, if you'd rather not, kids—"

"Bai Jove, it isn't that, deah boys; but, as a matter of fact—"

"As a matter of fact—"

"As a matter of fact, Tom Merry," explained Jack Blake, "we were thinking of coming to you on the same giddy mission."

"Not to borrow money?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy—or, at least, to ask you to lend us some, if a fivah I am expecting from the governah does not turn up by—"

"Does not turn up in time," added Jack Blake, flashing a warning glance towards Arthur Augustus.

"Yaas, wathah; that is how the mattah stands, deah boys; but as we wequiah the money foah a vewy pwessin' mattah—"

"Couldn't you put it off, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, uttably imposs! I was about to pwopose that you put your mattah off, deah boy, and lend us the money—"

"Then you'd have to go on proposing until doomsday, kid!" said Tom Merry decidedly. "It's jolly awkward."

"Yaas, wathah; but if you allowed your affair to stand ovah—"

"Don't be an ass, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy— However, I will ovahlook your wudeness if you will put your awwangements off foah a day or two and lend us some money, in case my fivah does not turn up."

Tom Merry shook his head, a puzzled expression on his face. Manners and Lowther were looking at one another anxiously.

"Is there a pretty good chance of your fiver turning up, Gussy?"

"Weally, Mannahs, deah boy, there is no tellin'. I twust it will—"

"Could you lend us a little if it does?"

"Yaas, wathah, with pleasure!"

"Good kid!"

"Yes, rather; jolly decent of you, Gussy."

"Not at all, deah boy!"

Tom Merry suddenly turned to Lowther.

"What about Figgy?" he whispered. "There's just a chance he may have some ready cash."

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins & Co. had come into the room at that moment. Arthur Augustus caught Jack Blake by the sleeve.

"I pwopose we tackle old Figgy, deah boy!"

Jack Blake nodded.

"Good wheeze. Hallo!"

Figgins & Co. were hurrying into the room in some excitement. The leader of the New House juniors was making straight for Arthur Augustus.

"Can I speak to you for a moment, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

Figgins & Co. exchanged glances, then Figgins plunged ahead in some concern.

"Gussy, have you any money you could lend me?"

"Bai Jove!"

"We don't want very much, just a few shillings—say, a soy."

"Gweat Scott!"

"We could let you have it back early next week."

"My only toppah!"

Figgins stopped speaking, and went rather red.

"Of course, it's not a nice thing to go about borrowing," he said apologetically, "but there are times when you can't help it."

"Yaas, wathah! I agwee with you entially, deah boy; but—"

"I thought you would, old man," said Figgins heartily. "Ten shillings would do, perhaps, but it would run us rather short."

Arthur Augustus looked very concerned.

"Weally, deah boy, it is uttably imposs.!"

"How do you mean impossible, kid?"

"Well, I am vewy pwessin' in money mattahs myself until a fivah awwives from the patah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I should be awfully pleased to lend you some then, but—"

"But as it is, we were thinking of borrowing from you, Figgy," added Jack Blake.

"My hat, so were we!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, how wemarkable, deah boys!"

Figgins looked from one to the other suspiciously.

"Are you chaps ragging?"

"No; wathah not!"

"Honour bright, Figgy?"

"Ha, ha! We're all in the same boat, it seems," said Lowther, with a chuckle. "Quite a lot of scarcity of money about, and no mistake."

"Yaas, wathah; but if you fellahs would only put off your awwangements foah a day or two, and lend us the money—"

"And if you only went in a home!"

"Weally, Figgy—"

"Or borrowed Toweer's collar and chain!"

"Bai Jove, Hewwies— Hallo, Kildare!"

The juniors stopped speaking to look at Kildare. It was not often that the captain paid a visit to the Fourth-Form dormitory at this time of the morning unless something serious had happened.

There was a very stern expression on his face as he came striding towards the little group of juniors.

CHAPTER 15.

The Row!

"HURRY into your clothes, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus started.

"Yaas, certainly, Kildare, deah boy, though I am not in the habit of hurwyin' into my clothes."

"Break your habit for once, then. Hurry up, Blake!"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Anything happened?"

Kildare looked closely at the chief of Study No. 6, then glanced at the other juniors.

"Which of you youngsters were out of your dormitories after lights out last night?"

The juniors stared blankly at the captain. Arthur Augustus even stopped in the middle of fastening his necktie, a thoughtful matter with him as a rule.

"Bai Jove, I was, deah boy!"

"And I!"

"Same here!"

The admissions came together. The stern expression on the captain's face became sterner.

"All ten of you—eh?"

"Y-yaas, wathah; but I twust—"

"I suppose Glyn and his set were out as well?"

Arthur Augustus glanced up.

"Weally, Kildare, I twust you do not expect us to say whether Bernard Glyn was out with us or not?"

"Where is Glyn now, then?"

"He is lookin' foah somethin' he—he can't find," explained Arthur Augustus.

Kildare smiled grimly.

"Yes; he'll find it in my room," he said. "Ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then."

"Bai Jove, where to, deah boy?"

"To Mr. Selby's room," answered the captain—"all the ten of you."

And the juniors followed, looking very blank. Something had happened, there could be no doubt about that. Perhaps Mr. Selby had caught sight of them the previous night—or perhaps Kildare had.

Jack Blake shook his head at that thought.

Kildare would have been one of the first to punish a junior

for breaking bounds, but he also would be one of the last to report that junior to Mr. Selby.

Jack Blake could not make it out, and, somehow, the expression in the captain's eyes did not invite questions. The ten marched along in silence.

With scarcely a pause between knocking and opening the door, Kildare led the way into the Third Form-master's room, and the juniors found themselves facing Mr. Selby.

Seated on three chairs in a severe line were Cornstalk & Co.

There was a red flush on Mr. Selby's face.

"So these are the lads, Kildare?"

"These are the lads who were out of their rooms last night, sir," said the captain. "I have not questioned them at all."

"But I have questioned Glyn," exclaimed Mr. Selby, in a voice which thrilled with anger. "He admits that—that the absurd figure was made by him. Is not that so, Glyn?"

"Yes, sir; I made it."

"And you—you dared to put it in my room?"

Bernard Glyn shook his head.

"No, sir; as I explained just now, I don't know anything about that. We—we were playing with the figure, and it escaped. It went down the corridor leading to your bedroom, sir, so if your door was open—"

"But my door was shut!" thundered the master. "That figure was deliberately put in my room by one of you boys."

"It wasn't by me, sir," said Glyn quietly. "Neither did Blake, Herries, Digby, nor D'Arcy do it."

"Wathah not, sir—"

"Silence!"

"Yaas, certainly, sir, but—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir!" murmured Arthur Augustus, with a start.

Mr. Selby glared at each of the juniors in turn.

"Which boy dared to play the trick on me?" he demanded at last. "I warn you that it will be better for the guilty lad to confess."

There was no answer.

"Which lad dared to play the trick on me?" repeated Mr. Selby, raising his voice. "Answer me instantly."

The rival groups of juniors glanced at one another. Jack Blake looked puzzled.

If the Terrible Three were the culprits, it was strange Tom Merry had said nothing about the trick. The same applied to Figgins & Co.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We didn't do it, Blakey," he whispered.

"Figgys, then?"

"Wrong again, kid!"

"Boys, answer me!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir—"

"It was you, then, D'Arcy!" thundered Mr. Selby. "I might have known—"

"Bai Jove, wathah not, sir!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "I twust I am not in the habit of playin' wathah wotten twicks on my eldahs. Weally, on my word of honah, I know nothin' about the mattah."

"What were you about to say, then?"

"I was only goin' to remark that it is a vewy funnay affair, sir," gasped Arthur Augustus.

No one even smiled. It was too serious a matter for laughter.

With Dr. Holmes they all would have felt a good deal more at ease, but Mr. Selby was a very different man from the doctor. The Third Form-master had little knowledge of human nature, and was inclined to class all the fellows together.

Someone had played the trick upon him, and he saw no reason why it should not have been Arthur Augustus or anyone else.

"I order the culprit to stand up and confess instantly!" he cried. "I shall not ask again."

No one moved. All were looking at one another again. Mr. Selby waited grimly.

"Kildare, pass my detention-book."

Kildare passed it. Mr. Selby found the page marked "Saturday," and glanced at his unwilling guests.

"All you thirteen boys are detained for to-morrow's whole holiday!" he exclaimed. "Further action will be taken, of course, but for the present you are in detention."

"Bai Jove—"

"What is it, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove! To-morrow, sir?"

"Yes, to-morrow—for the whole day!"

"Weally, sir—"

Jack Blake pulled Arthur Augustus down on his chair again. There was consternation all over Jack Blake's face, but he was cool enough to see that no good would accrue from expostulation with Mr. Selby in his present frame of mind.

Still, he was struck by what he thought the unfairness of the sentence.

Kildare glanced at their troubled faces, and turned to the Third Form-master.

"I suppose they are to understand, sir, that if the culprit is found before to-morrow the detentions are cancelled?"

"They were out of their rooms, and one of them is guilty—"

"A hundred lines is the usual punishment for being out of the dormitories, sir."

Mr. Selby frowned. Kildare had spoken very quietly, and the Third Form-master saw he could not very well avoid giving way.

"Yes, the detentions will be cancelled unless I find that the guilty lad or lads are being shielded," he said. "You can go!"

The juniors fled out of the room, directing grateful glances towards the captain of St. Jim's.

It was that sort of thing that made Kildare one of the most popular captains the old school had.

CHAPTER 16.

Ways and Means.

"**B**AI JOVE! I wergard that as simply wippin' of Kildare, deah boys."

"Rather!"

"Jolly fine!"

Tom Merry nodded gloomily.

"It wasn't so ripping of Selby, though," he exclaimed, "and it's not so ripping for us. As a matter of fact, we three had—had something special on for to-morrow."

"Bai Jove, we have somethin' so special that it is uttably impos. foah us to stay in—"

"Oh, I expect we all had made arrangements for to-morrow!" exclaimed Figgins desperately. "Chaps, what is to be done? Do any of you know anything about the beastly trick?"

"Of course we don't!"

"Weally, Figgys—"

"Oh, I didn't mean to say— Who had this beastly invention of yours, Glyn?"

"We three and the Study No. 6 kids."

Jack Blake nodded.

"That's so. You don't think we played the trick, do you, Figgys?"

"Of course not; but whatever did you want to let the thing escape for?"

Herries shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, we couldn't help that, kid! It was an ordinary sort of jape we'd arranged against you New House chaps, and it misfired. You can't help a jape missing fire sometimes, Figgins."

"No, of course not."

"We aren't trying to blame you chaps," hastily added Kerr, "but—but it's made it jolly awkward for us."

"Not as awkward as for us, I know," put in Tom Merry.

"And it's weally unthinkable in our case, deah boys."

Jack Blake rammed his hands in his pockets dismally.

"Anyway, it's no use grouching. I suppose we four and Bernard Glyn are principally to blame."

"No, I didn't mean that, old chap," said Figgins, going red. "I—I was a bit upset when I spoke."

"That's all wight, deah boy; I wathah think we undahstand."

"Of course," said Jack Blake quietly. "Now let's get on with the washing. Where were you kids, Figgins, at half-past ten?"

"In your dormitory, or just coming from it?"

"There were the whole roomful of you, weren't there?"

"Yes, only we all kept together," explained Kerr.

"And we came back by the other corridor, too. No where near Selby's room."

"Yes; it couldn't have been any of our chaps, anyway," exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

"What about you, Tom Merry?"

The Shell junior thought for a moment or two.

"I should think we were back in the dormy at half-past ten, but I couldn't be certain, Blake."

"Humph!"

"Bai Jove—"

"What is it, Cussy?"

"Bai Jove, we don't know that the wotten twick was played at half-past ten, deah boys."

Jack Blake looked round.

"That's so, kid. Look here, I'm going to have a talk with Kildare. See you later on, chaps."

And he strolled away.

Figgins & Co. turned on their heels disconsolately, and

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MARTIN CLIFFORD,

sauntered back to the New House quarters. Try as he would, the leader of the New House juniors could not rid himself of his resentment—resentment against their bad luck more than against Study No. 6 fellows.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners also walked away, leaving Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus looking after them. Digby rammed his hands in his pockets dismally.

"Pretty fine sort of finish to the jape, this!"

"Oh, it's too rotten for words!"

"We shall have to wire to Cousin Ethel and cry off, of course."

"Bai Jove—"

"And explain that the reason is because we've been kept in like Third Form kids."

"Bai Jove—"

"What's it now, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, what a wotten ideah, deah boy!"

"Of course it's rotten."

"Yaas, wathah! And it's also uttably impos.!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with a shudder. "I uttably wufuse to allow any of you to wish to my cousin and cw y off. I considah it wank bad form for fellows to cw y off at the last moment for a cwicket match."

"It doesn't matter whether it's rank bad form or rank good form, it's got to be done, kid."

"Wot—uttah wot!"

"Eh?"

"Wot!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Pway, and what do you think Cousin Ethel will do if the four pwincipal membahs of her team cw y off at the last moment?—It would put her in a feahful fluttah."

"Rotten, and no mistake!"

"I must wufuse to allow my cousin to be put in a feahful fluttah. It is a mattah of dig. with me."

Digby and Herries looked at Arthur Augustus in surprise. He was speaking quite seriously.

"Look here, ass, we can't cut detention, can we?"

"Bai Jove, wathah not—"

"Then how can we get out of it?" demanded Herries.

"The Selby bird isn't likely to forgive us at the eleventh hour."

"You're talking through your hat, Gussy!"

"Weally, Digbay, I must wuequest you to withdway that wotten wemark!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "I am not in the habit of talking through my hat. Howevah, I must ask you to give me your word of honah that you will not wish to Cousin Ethel and cw y off."

"It's what we shall have to do, anyway, kid."

"Impos., deah boy. Weally, Hewwies, I thought I had already pwoved that it is uttably impos—"

"Here comes Jack Blake!"

"Yaas, wathah! I twust the mattah is cleahed up, deah boy."

"Do you, kid?" said Jack Blake gloomily. "You must have plenty of trust, then, and no mistake."

"What did Kildare say, Jack?"

Jack Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"Jolly liddle, Dig. It must have been directly after we saw him in the other corridor that he heard the yells in Selby's room—about five minutes afterwards, I should say, because he remembers coming along the other passage looking for us."

"Bai Jove! That ought to pwove it wasn't us, deah boy!"

"What's to be done, Blakey?"

"Wire to Cousin Ethel, I suppose."

"Impos., deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus firmly.

"I have already explained to Digbay and Hewwies that it would be wank bad form to wish to Cousin Ethel. We must think of some othah plan, bai Jove!"

"What other plan is there to think of, then?"

"We must cleah up the mystery, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I pwopose we wotiah to the studey and considah the pwos and cons of the entiah mattah."

The other Fourth-Formers did not answer. They followed the swell of St. Jim's in gloomy silence.

At that moment it appeared almost impossible to Jack Blake that the strange affair could be cleared up in time.

He had just heard from Kildare that there could be no doubt about it. Some one had deliberately put Bernard Glyn's invention in Mr. Selby's room, and had shut it in there. To find out who that fellow was seemed like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack to the chief of Study No. 6.

Arthur Augustus appeared more hopeful.

CHAPTER 17.

The Culprit Owns Up.

DIGBY jumped to his feet.

"Bother it all, chaps, it's no good sticking in here looking at one another. We've been here about half an hour, and we haven't done a single blessed thing."

"Bai Jove! Still, we've talked the mattah over, deah boy."

"Yes, and got no further with the washing," growled Digby. "Coming, kids?"

"May as well."

"Something may turn up during the day," said Herries hopefully.

"Yaas, wathah, if we go on thinking the mattah ovah," agreed Arthur Augustus. "I pwopose we make full enqwies as to what fellows were out of their dormays last night."

"There are sure to have been a whole crowd."

"Yaas, wathah, and we can question them. Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus started. The other juniors looked at him in surprise.

"What's the wheeze, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! Pway excuse me, deah boys." And Arthur Augustus hurried from the room.

He heard Jack Blake's voice calling him back, but he took no notice. He almost ran towards the Third Form common-room, where his brother Wally was leader.

He happened to meet Wally in the corridor.

"Wally—Wally, pway stop a moment, deah boy."

D'Arcy minor obeyed, turning a rather inky young face towards his brother.

At any other time Arthur Augustus would have commented upon the ink stains, but he appeared not to notice them now.

"I want to ask you a question, Wally."

"Right-ho, kid; get on with the washing."

"Yaas, wathah, only pway wemembah I am your eldah, and address me with more wespsect in consequence," began Arthur Augustus severely.

"Oh, don't you beg'n, Gus. What's the trouble?"

"Bai Jove! Howevah, were any of you Third-Formahs out of dormay last night?"

Wally thought for a moment or two.

"No, Gus, not one of us."

"Bai Jove! Then it wasn't you who played the wotten twick on Mr. Selby?"

Wally grinned.

"No, but was one played, kid? Hooray!"

"Weally, Wally—bothah!"

The deep tones of the bell sounded at that moment, and Arthur Augustus had to hurry into Hall.

He was disappointed at the answer received from the leader of the Fag Form, but he did not doubt the truth of it for a moment.

D'Arcy minor would have been the first to play a trick on his Form-master, but he would also have been the first to have owned up if it became a question of some other fellow being punished for his fault.

Arthur Augustus went into class after prayers somewhat dismally; but he refused to sanction a telegram being sent to Cousin Ethel.

The moment First School was over he was met by Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries, all looking very grim.

"Gussy, we can't leave it any longer."

"That wire must be sent. Cousin Ethel will never be able to fill our places if we leave it any longer."

"Wats! It is impos—"

"Don't be a young ass."

"Weally, Digbay—do you want me, Taggles?"

"Which I do," growled the porter. "There's a registered letter for you, and you've got to sign this 'ore form."

"Bai Jove! Fwom the patah, deah boys."

"The fiver, Gussy?"

"No, wathah not; a tennah, bai Jove!"

And the dismal expressions on the faces of the others became more dismal.

They would have had plenty of money for their longed for day at Cleveland Lodge now. They could have driven over in a trap, and the whole thing was knocked on the head.

Jack Blake felt like shaking his fist at someone.

"Oh, it's too rotten, chaps."

"We shall have to go, deah boys—whatever happens we must go—"

"Don't be a young ass."

"Weally, Digbay—"

"Ring off, Gussy," growled Jack Blake. "Who has got Cousin Ethel's letter, chaps? That wire's got to be sent."

"Cousin Ethel's letter—Gweat Scott! I wondah. Bai Jove!"

ANSWERS

With the mention of Cousin Ethel's letter, a certain little incident, of which the others knew nothing, came back to Arthur Augustus's mind.

Cousin Ethel's letter, on its arrival, had been lost, and it had been found when Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, was being bumped. The letter had fallen from Mellish's pocket.

Could Mellish be the culprit?

Practically all the school knew now that there had been a trick played upon Mr. Selby, and that a number of juniors were detained on account of it. The guilty junior had had plenty of time to own up. No one but a cad would have refused to do so.

And no one but a cad would have taken a letter as Mellish had taken Cousin Ethel's.

That was Arthur Augustus's usual method of reasoning; perhaps not very strong in logic, but it often brought about a satisfactory result.

Jack Blake and the other Fourth-Formers stared at him in surprise.

"What's the jape now, kid?"

"Thought of anything, Gussy?" asked Herries desperately.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy. Bai Jove!"

And he flashed away down the corridor.

The others followed him, wondering. The passage he had taken led to the Fourth Form common-room.

Once here, Arthur Augustus burst into the large room excitedly.

"Bai Jove! There he is, deah boys!" And he hurried across to a junior reading by the window.

Arthur Augustus dropped his hand on the reader's shoulder.

"O-oh!" gasped Mellish, starting to his feet.

"Ring off there, asses," called out someone. "This isn't the giddy gym."

"Yaas, wathah; pway lowah your voice, Mellish."

"What do you want?" demanded the cad of the Fourth, a frightened expression in his eyes. "I don't want to have anything to do with you rotters."

"Weally, Mellish. Howevah, were you out of the dormitory last night, deah boy?"

"No, I wasn't."

"Certain, kid?"

"Of course I'm certain, Blake," growled Mellish. "Like your cheek asking me."

"Bai Jove! But we have been asking everyone, deah boy."

"Yes, and we're going to ask everyone again," remarked Digby grimly. "Reilly, is that you there?"

"Shure, an' it is, me bhoy. An' if you spalpeens don't stop cackling, you'll go out on your necks."

Digby did not laugh. He did not feel very much like laughing.

"Don't get ratty, Pat," he said earnestly. "Look here, kid, who was out of the dormy last night?"

"Shure, and you four were."

"Yes, we know that. Anyone else?"

Reilly thought, keeping a finger on his place in the book he was reading.

"You were, weren't you Mellish? Funked it because you thought we were going to be raided."

"No I wasn't."

"Don't tell fibs," said the junior from Belfast shortly.

"You left directly after the other kids, and were in a spalpeen of a funk, because you thought you might meet Figgins. Now ring off, Blake."

And Reilly went on reading.

Jack Blake & Co. turned to Mellish. They did not speak for a moment or two, and Mellish looked scared.

"It's—it's a lot of rot about my being in a funk last night," he began. "I only went downstairs to the study to get something for toothache."

"Bai Jove! Did you go anywhere neah Mr. Selbay's woom?"

"No I didn't; I never went near the master's bod-rooms at all."

"My hat! You thought you saw someone in the recess, just before we met Cornstalk & Co., Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah, I was forgettin' that."

"Look here, Mellish, if we find out it was you, you'll be sorry you didn't own up," said Jack Blake quietly. "It's particularly important we aren't detained to-morrow, and if we do have to stay in through you, you can look out for rocks."

"Yaas, wathah—"

Arthur Augustus was interrupted by a voice across the room.

"Hallo, you chaps!"

The Study No. 6 juniors turned hastily. Tom Merry and Figgins were standing in the doorway.

"What is it, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, we don't want you. Is Mellish here?"

Jack Blake started.

"Yes, he's here all right. What do you want him for?"

"Figgins has found something of his," said the Shell junior grimly; "pencil case."

"Yes, is that yours, Mellish?"

And Figgins held out a silver pencil case. Mellish took it.

"Yes, it's mine."

"Dropped it yesterday sometime, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"In the recess just outside Mr. Selbay's bed-room?" flashed Tom Merry. "Mellish, did you play that trick upon Mr. Selby and mean to let us be detained for it just because we bumped you yesterday?"

"Did you pump him, Tom Mewwy, deah boy?"

"Rather, and Figgins & Co. did the same."

"Bai Jove! So did we."

"It's a beastly plot," cried Mellish. "You're trying to get out of detention by putting the blame on me. I never went near Mr. Selbay's bed-room."

"How did you lose the pencil case in the recess, then?"

"I lost that in the afternoon—in the morning, I mean. It's a beastly plot."

"Yaas, wathah, that's what I considah it is myself," said Arthur Augustus in disgust. "I am afwaid, Mellish, you have given yourself away."

"Look here—"

"Oh, you've told too many fibs to make it worth while listening to you," said Jack Blake shortly. "If you only went out of the dormitory to get something for toothache, why did you want to tell fibs about it for? The thing is, what is to be done?"

"As a matter of fact, there is only one thin' to be done, deah boys," observed Arthur Augustus. "Mellish will have to wethiah to Mr. Selbay's woom and confess, or I shall have to administrah a feahful thwashin'."

Arthur Augustus's threats of "feahful thwashin'" were innumerable, but there was something in his voice at the present moment which made the others glance up.

Mellish looked more scared than ever.

"What do you mean, D'Arcy?"

"I mean, you can eithah go to Mr. Selbay and own up or come down to the gym, and put on the gloves with me," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "Unfortunately, it is impos. for us to bump you until you do own up, as it is wathah against the wiles of the game. Pway let me know which you have decided to do, Mellish."

"It's all nonsense—"

"Weally, the mattah has been settled as far as I am concerned; there is no cause to considah it furthah."

"I'm not going to Selby—"

"Then you are comin' down to the gym?"

"No, I'm not—"

"Weally, Mellish, I wergwet to say that you will have to do the one or the othah," said Arthur Augustus still more quietly.

In his heart the swell of the Fourth Form had not the slightest doubt now about Mellish's guilt, but in spite of that, if Mellish had stuck to his guns, the affair would have had to fall through for want of evidence.

But Mellish was not the junior to stick to his guns. He easily became frightened, and he threw his cards down at once.

"I didn't open the door on purpose—I was flustered. I didn't know what the thing was—"

"Bai Jove!"

"That has nothing to do with us!" flashed Tom Merry scornfully. "All we care about is that we've cleared ourselves."

"And Mellish is going to Mr. Selby—"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway lead the way, Mellish, and we'll come with you. It is poss. we may be able to help you with Mr. Selbay, as I intend to point out any extenuatin' circo. I may happen to think of."

But Arthur Augustus was not given an opportunity of pointing out extenuating circumstances, even if they had occurred to him. Mr. Selby was too angry to listen to logic.

"So it was you, was it, Mellish?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the cad of the Fourth. "but it was a mistake. The awful thing was coming after me, and—and I ran into your room. When I saw it was your room I came out again—"

"The door was found shut, Mellish."

"Y-yes, sir; I—I suppose I closed it after me."

Mellish made his excuse a great deal better than would have been expected, but he was dealing with the last master in the college likely to be influenced by excuses.

Mr. Selby had not the slightest chance of proving Mellish was speaking falsely, but then Mr. Selby did not mind much

about that. He was quite convinced in his own mind that a trick had been played upon him, so he punished Mellish accordingly.

"You will stay in to-morrow!" he snapped. "You other lads have a hundred lines each for being out of rooms last night! You can go!"

The juniors hurried from the room, and Arthur Augustus's natural generosity came to the front at once.

"Weally, Mellish," he said pleasantly, "if your explanation was twue, I am wathah sowwy foah you—"

"You're a set of bullies! You'll be sorry for this, you see if you aren't!"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, you are talkin' like an uttah duffah now— Gweat Scott! He has gone while I was in the middle of makin' a remark!"

"So he has, kid!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Anyway, he got off lightly, and I can guess why."

"Because Selby didn't want the doctor to take the matter up on account of the funk Kildare found him in?"

"That's it, Blakey, my son!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, thank goodness, it's all ovah, and we can go—"

"Ring off, ass!"

"Yaas, wathah, Digbay, deah boy! And I say, Figgay, I can lend you that money now."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Gussy—"

"And the same remark wefers to Tom Mewwy— Wow! Wottah! O-oh!"

"Yes, good old Gussy!" chuckled Tom Merry, thumping away at Arthur Augustus.

"Good old Gus!"

And Figgins also thumped.

Then Jack Blake thumped, and when they had all finished the swell of St. Jim's was too breathless to expostulate for a moment.

The faces of the Terrible Three were flushed with excitement. Tom Merry linked arms with loyal Lowther and Manners, and they hurried away, chuckling and whispering.

Figgins & Co. had also gone before Arthur Augustus had recovered.

"Bai—bai Jove—"

Jack Blake grinned enthusiastically.

"See what it is to be popular, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! The uttah wottahs! I am all in a fluttah—"

"But think of to-morrow!" exclaimed Digby. "We go to Cleveland Lodge to play cricket for Cousin Ethel's eleven, aftah all!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hooway by all means, but I am quite bweathless— Wow! Jack Blake, if you touch my shouldah again I shall administrah a feahful thwashin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha— Bother! There goes the bell!"

But they did not mind the bell going very much this time.

The great outing to Cleveland Lodge was to take place after all. Nothing very much mattered to the chums of Study No. 6 except that now.

CHAPTER 18.

Starting for Cleveland Lodge.

THE Saturday dawned one of the finest days of the year so far.

The sun shone from a cloudless sky, and there was not a breath of wind. Jack Blake & Co. were out in the quadrangle the moment they were dressed.

They glanced anxiously round the horizon.

"Not a giddy cloud, chaps!"

"No, wathah not! I considah that settles it, deah boys."

"Settles what, Gussy?"

"That we go ovah to Cleveland Lodge by twap, Digbay," returned Arthur Augustus. "If we start at ten we shall have plenty of time to get there and have a west befoah the game starts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We sha'n't want a rest, kid, but the trap idea is ripping."

"Yaas, wathah! Shall I go and ordah it, deah boys?"

"Rather!"

"Get hold of the telephone. Let's go with him, chaps."

Jack Blake nodded, with a grin.

"Right-ho! It's always safer. Get on with the washing!"

They hurried into the college, making their way towards the telephone-box. At the top of the passage all four stopped.

"Bai Jove, Figgay, theah, deah boys—"

"And Tom Merry at the other end, too!"

"We shall have to be feahfully careful, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Whatevah we do, we mustn't let them heah us ordah a twap. They'd ask a feahful numbah of questions."

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Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby exchanged glances.

They certainly would have to be careful with Tom Merry looking out of one window of the passage and Figgins viewing the notice-board a dozen yards from him.

Jack Blake turned on his heel.

"We'll look back in a few minutes, kids," he said, "don't you think?"

"Yaas, wathah! I pwopose we go and pack our bags, deah boys."

"Good wheeze!"

The four hurried away, and carefully packed their cricket bags. When once this was done, there was still time to ring up the local livery stables and order the trap.

They walked back towards the telephone-box, Jack Blake going ahead. He stopped halfway down the passage with a start.

Tom Merry was just leaving the telephone-box.

"My hat! Narrow escape, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, he appeahs in a huwwy, deah boys!"

"Oh, they're going for a cross-country run, or something, poor kids!" remarked Jack Blake. "Give me a signal if anyone comes along, and I'll slip into the box and ring them up."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Jack Blake was not long in the small telephone cupboard, and he came out grinning.

"It's all right, chaps! We can have the large trap, and the man's promised to put a decent horse between the shafts."

"Ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, we had anothah nawwow escape—"

"My hat, I should say so!"

Figgins & Co. came along.

Jack Blake looked up thoughtfully.

"My aunt! They aren't watching us, are they?"

"I don't know, but I don't think so," answered Digby.

"Directly they saw us they sauntered away—"

"Bai Jove, pewhahs it's a wag they are thinkin' of, deah boys!"

"Then they can go on thinking of it!" said Jack Blake decidedly. "We arn't having anything more to do with rags this side of the cricket match."

"No, wathah not! Bai Jove, theah goes the bwekkah gong, deah boys!"

They hurried into the dining-room, and the meal soon came to an end. A hasty glance through the open window showed them that there was no likely change in the weather prospects.

The sun was shining with greater brilliance than ever.

It glistened on Arthur Augustus's monocle in splendid fashion.

"Bai Jove—"

"What's it now, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, I have a wippin' ideah, deah boys!"

The "deah boys" did not look unduly impressed.

"Get on with the washing, then, kid!"

"Yaas, wathah! I pwopose we wandah down the woad and meet the twap—"

"My hat, there's something in that!"

"Yaas, wathah! If the twap dwove up to the coll, and Tom Mewwy or Figgay saw it—"

"Exactly! What do you say, Dig.?"

"Good biznay—"

"We can easily slip out with the bags."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I pwopose we go at once, deah boys."

It certainly appeared to be the better plan, and the four acted upon it at once. They succeeded in slipping from the college grounds without being seen by anyone that mattered.

Once they were a few hundred yards down the road they were glad to drop their bags amongst the bracken and rest on a gate. It was magnificent cricket weather, but not the sort of weather to make carrying cricket bags a pleasant task.

"Bai Jove, I am weally vewy fatigued, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wait until you have put in half a day leather-hunting, Gussy, before you talk of fatigue," laughed Jack Blake. "I say, the trap can't be long now."

"No, wathah not! Pway give me a little more woom, Digbay, deah boy, as it would nevah do foah me to turn up at Cleveland Lodge with my blazah wumpled!"

Digby grinned, but he said nothing.

As a matter of fact, he had taken the precaution of putting his handkerchief down on the gate before sitting down himself, and Digby did not take those sort of precautions as a rule.

Herries and Jack Blake had new ties on, which even satisfied the exacting taste of Arthur Augustus.

The Four certainly looked very neat and handsome.

Five minutes passed; then the sound of footsteps in the

road made Jack Blake jump down from the gate. He was back again in a flash.

"Tom Merry & Co.!" he whispered. "Get to the other side of the hedge like anything!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway bring the bags, deah boys!"

The cricket-bags were soon bundled to the other side of the hedge, and the juniors followed them. They crouched down, peering through the thick bushes.

"Yaas, wathah! It's Tom Mewwy all wight, deah boys!"

"Ring off, ass!"

The footsteps came nearer, and Tom Merry & Co. came striding past. They were walking at a good rate, chatting excitedly.

Digby grinned.

"Going out for the day," he whispered.

"Yaas, wathah! And in flannels, too."

"Don't blame them, if they're going to do much walking in this sun!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Hallo!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What's up?"

"What's the matter?"

"Pway wing off, Digbay, you uttah duffah! Bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus pointed across the field.

Three more juniors were crossing rather stealthily, keeping an eye on the main road. The three were Figgins & Co.

"Bai Jove, they are scouting after Tom Mewwy, deah boys!"

Jack Blake looked puzzled, shaking his head.

"Looks to me as if they're trying to keep out of Tom Merry's way, Gussy," he observed. "Funny."

"Yaas, wathah! I wogard it as funnay myself."

The Study No. 6 chums crouched where they were, watching the rival juniors in their hurried walk. Figgins & Co. were certainly walking at a tremendous pace.

They could hear Fatty Wynn grunting quietly to himself.

Jack Blake watched the three disappear through the hedge at the end of the field, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyway, it's nothing to do with us, kids," he chuckled.

"If they are scouting after the other kids, Tom Merry will have to look after himself to-day."

"Yaas, wathah! It is uttably impos. foah us to protect him from Figgys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Digby chuckled loudly, then the crunch of light wheels on the road brought them all to their feet.

"The trap, kids."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And a jolly ripping turn-out, too!" exclaimed Herries, vaulting the gate. "Hooray, chaps!"

The driver pulled up and touched his cap.

"For Cleveland Lodge, Master Blake?"

"Yes, that's right. Get the bags in, kids!" exclaimed the chief of Study No. 6 excitedly. "We shall get there in good time for eleven, I suppose, driver?"

"Do it nicely, sir!" exclaimed the man, jumping down.

"You take the ribbons, sir!"

"Good!"

And the juniors scrambled into their places.

Jack Blake whipped up the horse, turning off on to the main road.

They had started for Cleveland Lodge at last!

CHAPTER 19.

Cousin Ethel's Joke.

"HEAH we are, deah boys!"

"Yes, first on the left, driver," grinned Digby, who had just handed the reins to Herries. "Nice long innings with the ribbons you've had, and no mistake, kid!"

"Silly ass!"

Herries growled as he brought the trap round into the private road leading to Cleveland Lodge. "I forgot all about this. I'm driving back, mind."

"Wight-ho! Pway is my necktie stwaight, deah boys?"

"Blow your necktie! Hooray! There's Cousin Ethel!"

And Jack Blake was out of the trap before it came to a standstill. The next moment he was shaking hands with a pretty girl of about his own age.

The other juniors were out of the trap almost as quickly.

"Hallo, deah gal! We've awwived safely!"

"Have you really, Arthur?" laughed Cousin Ethel. "I hope you are fearfully fit, because we have a very strong side against us."

"Yaas, wathah! We've been twainin'—"

"I should hope you had. Do you know, three of my eleven have already arrived, and—and I believe I can see three more coming across the field."

Arthur Augustus shaded his eyes with a lofty sweep of the hand.

"Yaas, wathah! There are thwee cwicketais comin' across the field, deah gal!"

"And the other three are just coming from the pavilion."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway, who are they?"

"My hat!"

"What's the matter, Digby?" asked Cousin Ethel coolly.

"My—my aunt! Isn't that Tom Merry?"

"Bai Jove, so it is! Weally, Cousin Ethel, it's awfully wippin' of you to ask the poor kids ovah to watch us play!"

"By Jove, there's Figgins!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"And Manners!"

"And Lowthah, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as the respective groups of juniors approached. "Gweat Scott, Cousin Ethel—"

Figgins & Co. commenced to run. Their faces wore expressions of blank amazement.

The Terrible Three also began to run. Tom Merry's mouth was open, as if he had forgotten to close it through astonishment.

The rival juniors stared at one another.

"Blake—"

"Merry—"

"Figgins—"

"Yes, of course you recognise one another," said Cousin Ethel pleasantly. "How did you come over, Tom Merry?"

"We—we cycled," gasped the hero of the Shell. "Sent our bags on by the carrier."

"And you, Figgins?"

"We came by train," gasped the New House junior.

"Binks took our things down to the station this morning."

"And Jack Blake & Co. came over in a trap," smiled Cousin Ethel. "I hope you are all going to play very hard for my eleven."

"All—"

"Going to play—"

"For your eleven!"

The juniors were gasping with amazement. They were still staring at one another.

Cousin Ethel laughed in great glee.

"Yes, all of you, of course. This is my eleven." And she waved her hand in a way that included them all, herself as well.

Arthur Augustus let his monocle fall from its place in his eye.

"Bai Jove, deah gal, but you made us pwomise not to say a word to the othahs!"

"My hat! She made us do the same!"

"And us as well!"

"Yes, of course," explained Cousin Ethel coolly. "And you all received your invitations by the same post. Really, Tom Merry, you mustn't think only schoolboys can—what do you call it?—jape. Girls can—sometimes."

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

For a moment the ten juniors were too astounded to grasp the situation, then Lowther burst into roars of laughter.

Lowther had the keenest sense of humour of them all, perhaps.

But Tom Merry and Jack Blake were not long behind in seeing the humorous side of the trick their girl-chum had played upon them, while Figgins thought everything Cousin Ethel did perfect.

"Jolly good wheeze, Cousin Ethel!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We never guessed—"

"Bai Jove, wathah not!"

"No, I didn't think you would," laughed Cousin Ethel.

"But that isn't all the joke."

The juniors waited rather anxiously.

"Weally, Cousin Ethel—"

"It is nothing like all the joke," added the girl-chum.

"Here is my brother coming across to us; you'll see the other half of the joke when he arrives."

Tom Merry started violently.

"Cousin Ethel, who are we playing?"

But before Cousin Ethel could answer, Captain Cleveland hailed them.

"How d'you do, Merry? Come over to watch us, begad?"

"No, they have come over to play you," smiled Cousin Ethel. "This is my team."

"Begad, but—"

And Captain Cleveland looked as blank as Tom Merry & Co. had looked not three minutes before. But Tom Merry was looking very blank again.

"We—we aren't playing Captain Cleveland's touring eleven, Cousin Ethel!"

"That is exactly who you are playing, though, and the eleven against us is the very team my brother opens his tour with at Brighton on Monday."

"My only hat!" And Tom Merry collapsed.

He had heard of the eleven the captain had got together

for the tour, a first-class team. There were one or two of the lesser lights of county cricket, and quite a fair number of 'Varsity men. There was even a "blue," who was expected to do great things before long.

Tom Merry felt exactly as he looked, very blank.

There was still rather a blank expression on Captain Cleveland's face, but he recovered himself very quickly. At the very least, he had expected his sister intended pitting St. Jim's first eleven against them, but he did not want the juniors to see that.

He turned to Tom Merry pleasantly.

"Let's hope it's a close game, begad!" he exclaimed heartily. "I've seen most of you youngsters play. Who is captain, begad?"

"Cousin Ethel," exclaimed Figgins.

"Rather!"

"Of course, deah boy."

"Ah, yes! It's her team, isn't it, begad? As home captain, I'll toss." And he spun a coin in the air.

Cousin Ethel lost, and the captain hesitated for a moment. He knew it would embarrass the juniors considerably if he took the match lightly—they would much rather lose by a huge margin than that, so he took every advantage of winning the toss.

"First knock for us, then, begad," he said. "The pitch may wear a bit after the dry weather. I'm ready, begad!"

And a few moments later he and one of the minor county men came out to the wicket.

Cousin Ethel took her place in the slips, and waved the field rather deep.

"Fatty Wynn takes first over," she ordered; "Jack Blake the other end."

Fatty Wynn took the ball nervously.

He was one of the crack bowlers at St. Jim's—the best for his age—but he had never bowled to a county man yet. And the man he had to face was even wearing his county colours.

Fatty Wynn looked unhappier than ever as he measured his run.

CHAPTER 20.

The Match.

DOWN the pitch the ball came—then the umpire waved his arms. Fatty Wynn had opened the game with a wide.

Jack Blake shuddered. He wondered what sort of stuff he was going to send along when his turn came, if the crack bowler of the side served up wides.

Fatty Wynn had gone very pink.

"I'm awfully sorry, Cousin Ethel—"

Cousin Ethel did not answer. She was looking very severely at the Falstaff of St. Jim's.

Fatty Wynn wished he had had something more substantial for breakfast to sustain him, but it was too late to think of that now. The county man was waiting.

The best junior bowler of the St. Jim's junior eleven pulled himself together.

He ran forward, and the ball came off the wicket sharply. The length had been splendid, and the county man played back. He had had all his work out out to keep his wicket intact.

That was all that was needed to steady Fatty Wynn.

The next ball was got away to the boundary for four, certainly, but the ball after that astounded the field—it took the county man's middle stump clean out of the ground.

"Hooray!"

"Good old Wynn!"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel. "Splendid!"

The county man had perhaps taken the junior a little too easily, but even if that were the case, it was his own fault. The ball that had beaten him would have beaten a much better man.

The next batsman did not mean to make the mistake of taking the bowling too cheaply whatever other mistake he might make, and he opened very cautiously.

In spite of that he gave a hard chance out in the country, Manners just failing to get at the ball. Then Fatty Wynn's over came to an end.

Jack Blake started with a tremendous attempt to take Captain Cleveland's wicket, but he was not good enough for that, and three fours came from the first four balls. Then the chief of Study No. 6 altered his tactics and began to send down good length stuff that stopped the scoring.

The wicket taking could be left to Fatty Wynn for a long time yet.

And the New House junior did wonderfully well. He gave half a dozen away in his second over, and in his third got Captain Cleveland to hit at something which twisted up on to the shoulder of the bat. The captain made an excellent effort to recover himself, but it was too late.

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The ball was soaring away into the slips at a good pace, and the next moment it was safely lodged in Cousin Ethel's little hands.

"Hooray!"

"Well caught, Cousin Ethel!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, a weally wippin' catch!"

It certainly had been quickly taken, and Cousin Ethel's eyes sparkled with enjoyment. Her pleasure was tremendous as her brother walked past her, his bat under his arm.

Two wickets were down for twenty.

That was better than any of them could have hoped for, but better still was to follow. With the last ball of his over Fatty Wynn got the new man, and three overs later, Jack Blake obtained his first wicket by a splendid catch in the long field. Manners had succeeded this time.

Four were down for thirty, but a change came over the game then, for fifty appeared on the board without further loss.

Cousin Ethel glanced round the field. Then she threw the ball to Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn was taken off, much to the surprise of Captain Cleveland. The Welsh junior himself was a trifle surprised, too, but he would not have let this be seen for the world. He dropped back into the slips near Cousin Ethel.

Tom Merry proved rather expensive at first, but he soon got his length, although sixty showed on the board by the time his over came to an end. Cousin Ethel caught the ball.

"Try this end, Wynn," she said. "You'll find the light ever so much better."

And Fatty Wynn's plump face lighted up. He remembered now that the light had troubled him a good deal during the last over or so.

With the sun behind him, Fatty Wynn became terrible to the batsmen. He got a wicket with his very first delivery from the pavilion end, and not a run was scored from the whole over.

Tom Merry saw what was required of him, and did splendidly. He put his field deep, and bowled his best possible length.

That made run-getting difficult work.

At 76 another wicket fell to Fatty Wynn. Then a splendid catch by Figgins gave Tom Merry a wicket.

After that a second stand was made, but it was not a very long one, and once it was brought to an end, Captain Cleveland's remaining men spent the time struggling desperately for runs. A dozen more were added, then Fatty Wynn surpassed himself.

He obtained two wickets with successive balls, and the innings came to an end for 94.

Cousin Ethel was wildly excited, and the juniors themselves were wonderfully pleased. But during the calmer moments at lunch, Tom Merry did not quite see how they could expect to beat even that modest score against the attack which would be offered them.

It would be uphill work, anyway.

CHAPTER 21.

A Grand Finish.

BUT the St. Jim's innings opened in rare style directly lunch was over, Cousin Ethel and Tom Merry carrying the score to 20 before Cousin Ethel's wicket fell. Of that 20 she had made a dozen, and nothing would have offended her as much as gentle bowling.

She faced exactly the same deliveries as Tom Merry, and her dozen was obtained in excellent style. The ovation she received at the pavilion brought blush after blush to her pretty, girlish face.

"Hooway! Thwee cheahs, deah boys!"

"Hoorah!"

"Ripping, Cousin Ethel!"

"Splendid!"

Above all the voices, Figgins could be heard the loudest, and Figgins was also colouring a little. Jack Blake had to leave the excited little crowd to join Tom Merry at the wicket, a grim expression on his face.

He started well, getting the ball away at once, then rather a disaster befell the St. Jim's side. A change of bowling was productive of Tom Merry's wicket, and perhaps the best junior bat at the old school was out for exactly the same score as Cousin Ethel.

St. Jim's looked rather thoughtfully at that.

Still, Tom Merry had done excellently with the ball, and no one could be expected to be always at his best. And there was Jack Blake yet, although he had done a lot of work at bowling as well.

All eyes were on Jack Blake as Kerr joined him, then a groan went up. After a couple of 4's, Jack Blake was caught and bowled in the most marvellous manner. If the

chance had been missed it would never have been spoken of as a chance.

Three wickets were down now, and 40 was all there was to be seen on the board. That was not so very bad, except that Jack Blake and Tom Merry were the crack bats of the side.

Figgins was good, of course, but it was doubtful whether he quite came up to the others.

Tom Merry turned to him anxiously.

"Feel pretty fit, Figgys?"

"I feel all right, kid. Is it pretty fierce stuff?"

"Good, of course, but then so is the wicket. You going in, Manners?"

Manners nodded, but he did not stay long. A catch at the wicket sent him back.

"I'm sorry, Cousin Ethel—"

"Oh, that's all right, Manners!" smiled their girl chum. "We haven't forgotten that catch of yours in the country."

"No, wathah not; fortay-thwee, deah boys!"

"And five down."

"No," said Lowther, as a shout went up; "six!"

And Digby was coming back, looking rather crest-fallen.

Cousin Ethel turned to Figgins.

"We are expecting great things from you, Figgins," she said. "I've kept you until now in case there was anything like a rot."

"I'll—I'll do my best," stammered the New House junior, a deep crimson.

And he hurried from the pavilion.

He opened rather cautiously, but he seemed to be playing himself in all right. To Tom Merry's critical eye, he was getting more at home with every ball he returned to the bowler. Then suddenly his long reach gave him a chance.

He had Captain Cleveland away to the boundary for a beautiful 4.

Tom Merry brightened up.

"Looks a bit healthier—eh, Blakey?"

"Rather! Who else is there that can keep his end up?"

Tom Merry glanced round.

"Gussy may do something—"

"Yes, of course. When do you go in, Gussy?"

"Last wicket, deah boy, as I am wathah fatigued," said Arthur Augustus coolly. "The whole game may depend on me, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Jack Blake's chuckle died away suddenly, for another wicket had fallen. Herries was out for nine, getting his leg in front of a straight one being the cause.

The wickets fell rapidly now, and all the scoring came from Figgins's bat. But, as it oftens happens, he did not get anything like his share of the bowling.

When Fatty Wynn went to the wicket 25 runs were still required, and Fatty was not the junior to get them. But he had played his part in the match with the ball, and they all cheered loudly as he came back after his second ball, the first "blob" on the St. Jim's score-sheet.

Arthur Augustus jumped to his feet.

"Bai Jove—twenty-five! It is wathah a large numbah for a last-wicket stand, deah boys."

No one smiled.

The game looked over, for Arthur Augustus could scarcely be expected to succeed where fellows like Tom Merry and Jack Blake had failed.

Figgins had 15 to his account when Arthur Augustus joined him. He met the School House junior as he came from the pavilion.

"Try and keep your end up, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus stared loftily.

"Weally, Figgys, what an uttably widiculous wemark to make, deah boy. I wathah fancy I am heah to keep my end up."

And he took middle and leg as coolly as if it had been a scratch game.

The first ball he just stopped, and the second one he got past third man. Then he ran.

"Only one, deah boy!"

A couple might easily have been obtained, and a cheer greeted Arthur Augustus's unselfishness.

Anyway, he meant to let the set man have as much of the bowling as possible.

Figgins set his teeth, then waited. It was a good ball, but just a trifle short, and once again Figgins's reach stood him in good stead. He had the ball to the boundary in fine style.

The next delivery produced 2, and a cheer went up. Every stroke was being cheered now, and when Arthur Augustus got 4 with a pretty late leg glance, there was almost an uproar.

But it was Figgins they were all relying upon, and they were justified in doing so. He did not make a single mistake, and at one point he was scoring runs at the rate of one a minute.

The score was creeping up. The board showed 85—10 required for a win, and Captain Cleveland's eleven were at their wits' end.

The captain scarcely liked to risk a change in the attack in case it took the new man too much time to gain his length, and so the present bowlers were kept on. Figgins treated both alike.

He was playing one of the games of his life.

A couple of beautiful strokes reduced the difference in the scores to 5. All that was needed now was 6.

The next over was a maiden, then Figgins got 3, and Captain Cleveland smiled.

Arthur Augustus would have to face the next five balls, and he was nothing like set yet.

Tom Merry groaned. Three were needed. If only Figgins had the bowling.

The Varsity blue had the ball, and there was a very grim light in his eyes. He sent down a ball, which very nearly found Arthur Augustus's blind spot.

But not quite. The swell of St. Jim's managed to rise to the occasion.

Another ball like that, though, and the game would probably be won and lost. But the next delivery was not quite so good, and Arthur Augustus got it well away.

"Come on!" yelled Figgins, and they raced down the pitch. "Again!"

"No!"

It was an absolutely safe 2, but even with the couple to their account, the game was only a draw. A single would be still required for a win.

Arthur Augustus had played the right game in giving Figgins the bowling, but the juniors in the pavilion cheered him to the echo for that, all the same.

But would the couple be made? It almost looked as if they would not, for Figgins was in difficulties for the first time in his splendid innings. He did not give a chance, but he was hard put to it to keep his wicket intact.

Ball after ball came down, splendid stuff of almost perfect length, and still the two runs were needed.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were on their feet.

It seemed wonderful to them that the New House junior did not hit out.

Then suddenly there was a loud click. Figgins had got his bat to the ball with a drive at last.

For an instant they all thought he was caught, then a terrific roar went up.

The ball was soaring yards over the heads of the fielders, and would eventually land somewhere behind the pavilion. Cousin Ethel's eleven had won the match.

And Figgins had carried his bat for a perfect 30.

He was a deep crimson when the juniors crowded round him, led by Cousin Ethel, but the scene which followed does not need describing.

That it was a wild one goes without saying.

THE END.

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Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, joins the Navy under peculiar circumstances, becoming a midshipman aboard the frigate *Catapult* under the name of John Smith. The frigate is wrecked, and only a mere handful of survivors are picked up by a slaving-brig. The captain of the brig, a man named Kester, sends for his "prisoners," as he calls them, and accuses Captain Burgoyne, the *Catapult's* former commander, of being the nephew of a certain miser named Maydew, of the little English village of Wilminster. "Well, and what of that?" asks Captain Burgoyne boldly.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Madman.

"Thirty years ago this man Maydew drove me from my home. He fastened a crime on my shoulders—a crime which he himself had committed. I was forced to fly to save my life, leaving behind me the woman I loved, and who I was to have married."

A look of unquenchable hate came into Kester's eyes as they rested on Burgoyne's face.

"He had a double motive in making a criminal and a fugitive of me," he went on. "He wished to shield himself, and he wished to rob me of my future wife. He did both. He succeeded. In less than a year from her marriage day the woman he married was dead, killed by his brutality and neglect. I, living under an assumed name, dared not go back to the village, for to show my face there would mean arrest and death. But one day I shall return. One day that scheming reptile shall cringe before me on his knees, praying for his life, but—" Kester broke off suddenly with a short laugh. "My vengeance has been a long while coming, but it will come one day," he added quietly.

"But what is this to me? How does this affect me?"

"You—you are his flesh and blood. You—" A frenzy of passion came over Kester. He sprang to his feet, and struck Burgoyne across the face with the back of his hand. "Dog! What is it to me that you are Maydew's flesh and blood? What is it to me? You shall learn! I will give you cause to curse the accident of birth that allied you with that man. Take the prisoners out!" he added, in a calmer voice. "Place that man by himself!"

He waved his hand, and, surprised and wonder-stricken by the scene they had witnessed, the prisoners were marched from the cabin back to that which they had quitted—all but Burgoyne, who, half blinded by the cowardly blow he had received, was led away by his guards to another part of the vessel.

No sooner had they returned to the cabin than several of the crew entered, and placed handcuffs attached by short chains on their wrists.

Dr. Telford submitted quietly. He knew that no good could come of resistance. Brabazon submitted, too, and Maxwell and Oswald, seeing that their superiors offered no resistance, offered none, either.

But the negroes found they had a more difficult subject to deal with in Fid.

Planting his back against the bulkhead, the old man clenched his fists and dared them to come on.

"Put them things on me, likes as if I was a common pick-pocket!" he shouted.

"Come, Fid, it is no use struggling against it," said Dr. Telford.

"Begging your pardon, sir, I'm a-going to struggle!" said Fid. He landed out as he spoke, and sent one of his black assailants spinning. "Come on!" he shouted.

But the resistance was quite useless. In another moment he was surrounded and dragged down to the floor, where he was held while the handcuffs were secured around his wrists.

Mr. Pringle would have stood out against the indignity, too, but saw how useless it would be, and gave way.

"I cannot understand this extraordinary treatment!" said Dr. Telford, when the negroes had withdrawn, leaving them alone in the cabin, now their prison. "It seems to me that the captain of this brig is letting this old enmity he bears against Captain Burgoyne's relative influence him in his treatment of us all. Did you happen to notice the man's eyes, Mr. Pringle?"

"Can't say I did, sir!" replied the master. "He's an ugly-looking customer altogether, with his white face and black whiskers!"

"I don't believe the man is sane," said Dr. Telford quietly. "There is a peculiar look in his eyes that I have noticed in those of mad people. I feel nervous and anxious—not for ourselves, but for Captain Burgoyne. I wish to heaven we could signal to the schooner in some way!"

Although they were prisoners, with chains on their wrists, they had little to complain of regarding their treatment.

Manuel still waited on them and tended them, with the exception of Fid, who swore that he would brain the mulatto if he came near him.

Not one of them slept soundly that night, for, apart from the thoughts of the unpleasant position they found themselves in, their steel handcuffs and jingling chains proved very uncomfortable bed-fellows.

Not once during the following day did they see Captain Kester, nor could they learn anything of the fate that had befallen Captain Burgoyne from Manuel.

The mulatto was obstinately dumb, and refused to answer any questions at all; and so the day was passed in doubt and anxiety.

"You'se to come on de deck!"

It must have been after midnight when Manuel made his appearance in the cabin, accompanied by four of the negro crew of the brig. All five were armed with cutlasses, and all wore pistols in their sashes.

"You'se to come on de deck," repeated Manuel; "and de captain's order are dat if you make one noise, one hullabaloo, I'se to cut your throats! You understand dat?"

"What are you going to do with us? What is going to happen?" asked Dr. Telford.

"You shut yo' face, and mind yo' own business, dat's all. Noting habben to yo' if yo' 'boy orders; but if yo' make one leetle noise, de orders mose pre-emp-tary am dat I cut your throats!"

(Another instalment of this Thrilling Serial will appear next Thursday.)

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