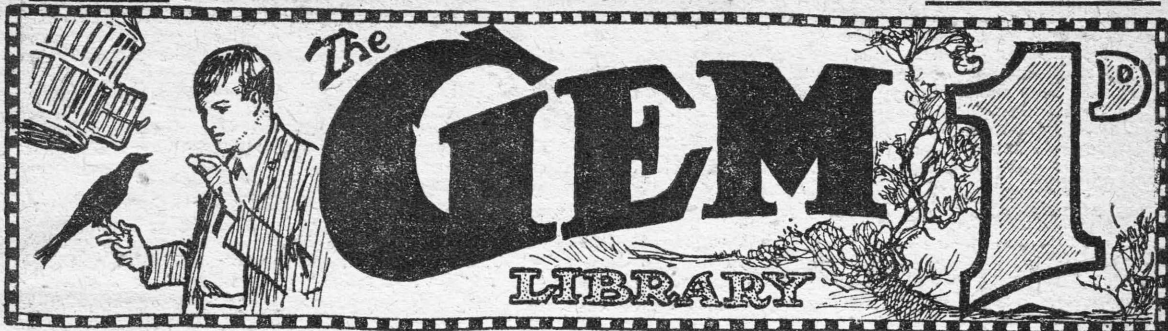


Every

Thursday.



Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem.

GUSSY'S APRIL FOOLS!

A Splendid, New, Long,
Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry and Co. at
St. Jim's,
By
MARTIN CLIFFORD

April 1st 1912

Dear Boys,

I offered to take you into my school
you treated me with the grossest disrespect
that I couldn't possibly take you in on
of April.

I rather think I have done it!
The footprints outside the Shell dorm
last night were made by my mind
so put on an old pair of boots &
glasses, for the purpose.

When you started to search for the
to be him down, I went with you, with
to in my coat pocket. I made the
that you followed through the wood
of a little ahead of you all the time
re.

I rather think that I have done you, dear
I trust you will bear no malice, and
all you me in a feed now that the se
over; just to show that you can take a l
foke!

Yours always
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.



CHAPTER 1.

No Backer.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY polished his eyeglass thoughtfully upon a spotless handkerchief, and coughed. This was a sign that Arthur Augustus, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, had something to say.

But the three other juniors in Study No. 6 did not appear to notice it. Blake and Herries and Digby were busy doing lines, and their pens were driving over the paper at a really wonderful rate. They were anxious to get out into the quad. before the bell went for afternoon school, and they had fifty lines each to get finished before they could leave the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coughed in vain.

"Ahem!"

Three pens scratched on at express speed. It was doubtful whether Virgil himself could have read those lines from his *Aeneid*, but the juniors hoped that they would pass muster with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. Mr. Lathom was a short-sighted little gentleman, and not very careful in scrutinising lines.

"H'm!"

Blake looked up for a moment, taking breath, as it were, before he made a fresh onslaught upon Virgil.

"Gussy, old man, I wish you wouldn't sit there grunting. It's put me out."

"Weally, Blake—"

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

The three pens were driving on again in unison. A quarter to two chimed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

"I've got somethin' to say to you chaps—"

"Shut up!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Got to get those lines done, fathead! Cheese it!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Scat!"

"Undah the circs.—"

Blake gave a gasp of relief, and threw down his pen. It scattered several blots over the spotless cuffs of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he leaned upon the table, and the swell of the School House gave a howl.

"Oh! You uttah ass!"

"Hallo! What's the matter?" exclaimed Blake.

"Look, you frightful ass! Now I shall have to go and change my beastly shirt before aftahnoon lessons, you awful duffah!"

"Don't you wear detachable cuffs?" asked Blake innocently.

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY'S MASQUERADE" AND "WINGS OF GOLD!"

Arthur Augustus was speechless for a moment. Blake might as well have asked him if he wore check trousers or a rolled-gold watch. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed Jack Blake with a withering glance, quite at a loss for words.

"You uttah ass!" he ejaculated at last.

"Well, they would save you a lot of trouble," said Blake.

"Never mind—lick the ink off before it gets dry!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' so disgustin'!"

Digby laid down his pen in his turn.

"Done!" he remarked. "How are you getting on, Herries?"

Herries grunted.

"Nearly finished. Don't jaw!"

"I've got somethin' wathah important to say to you chaps—"

"Shut up!" howled Herries. "I shall be mucking up these rotten lines if you jaw! I shall be done with the pious Æneas in a tick! Shut up!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Fair play!" said Blake. "Give Herries a chance! Now, look here, Gussy—"

"Shut up, Blake!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Herries, old man!" said Blake warmly. "I'm shutting Gussy up for you—"

"Oh, don't jaw!"

"Look here, Herries—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Have you done your lines, Gussy?" asked Digby.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No, deah boy. I haven't had time—I've been thinkin'—"

"We've got to show them up at afternoon school, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, and I have had somethin' more important to think of. Undah the circs.—"

"Don't jaw!" roared Herries. "You're putting me out!"

"A chap with wotten mannahs like you wants puttin' out of any respectable study, I should think, Hewwies!"

"Good for you, Gussy!" grinned Jack Blake. "Don't make yourself a general worry, Herries, because you've got a few lines to do!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"I do not regard that as an intelligent remark, Hewwies! What I was goin' to say to you fellows is—"

"There! I'm finished!" gasped Herries. "Fifty of the beastly lines done! If Lathom keeps on like this, I shall wish we had Mr. Wodyer back again; he didn't give us lines!"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Hewwies!"

"I know that, ass! It was too thick of Lathom to give us fifty lines each, just for bumping Figgins in the passage. Where are we to bump New House bounders, I'd like to know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem! I was sayin', deah boys—"

"Better get out into the quad, now for a whiff of fresh air before lessons!" said Herries, rising from the table.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"If Gussy wants to jaw, he can jaw here after we're gone out, and there won't be anybody to interrupt him! That suit you, Gussy?"

"You fwabjous ass—"

"Well, come out into the quad, and jaw there!" said Jack Blake, laughing. "Leave the imputs, here to get dry. We can collect them up before school."

"I was goin' to say—"

"Come on!"

"I insist upon you chaps listenin' to me, othahwise I shall go and powpound my wippin' ideah to Tom Mewwy, and leave you chaps out of it!"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries.

"You feahful ass, Hewwies! Look heah, Blake, this is wathah important! Do you fellows know what to-mowwow is?"

"The day after to-day!" said Blake simply.

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! You know the date of to-mowwow—it is the first of Apwil."

"Quite aware of that, Gussy!—What about it?"

"Bein' the first of Apwil, I was thinkin' that we ought to pwoceed to make Tom Mewwy and those Shell boundahs, and also Figgins & Co., of the New House, sit up," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wergard it as an excellent opportunity for a jape on those boundahs. What do you think?"

Herries yawned.

"I think we'd better get out and have a blow before lessons!" he said.

"What do you think about my ideah?" howled D'Arcy.

"Oh, rotten!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

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"Yes, rotten!" said Blake. "If anybody's japed on the first of April, Gussy, it will be you—you simply go about asking to be japed, you know! But we'll take care of you!"

"Oh, yes," said Digby; "we'll watch over him to-morrow morning! We've got to think of the reputation of the study!"

"Exactly!"

"You uttah asses! I wefuse to be watched ovah! I—"

"We'll keep an eye on you," promised Herries. "You sha'n't be japed. We'll stand by you for the honour of the study. Now let's get out!"

"Look here, you fellows—"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "Take his other arm, Herries, and you lead him by the necktie, Dig!"

"Right-ho!"

"Welease me, you silly asses!" shrieked the swell of St. Jim's. "Ow! I ordah you to welease me at once! I—"

Bump!

The swell of St. Jim's crashed against the table as he struggled in the grasp of his humorous chums, and it rocked and reeled. There was a yell from Digby as the inkpot went flying.

"Look out! Stop it!"

But it was too late to stop the rolling inkpot. The ink poured out in a flood, and fairly swamped over the three impositions which the juniors had written out with so much haste and determination. In a second the sheets were covered with ink, and the writing had become wholly illegible instead of only partly so.

There was a roar of dismay from the juniors, and they released Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and sprang, too late, to save their precious impositions.

"Oh!" yelled Blake. "They're spoiled! Oh!"

"You uttah asses!" gasped D'Arcy, setting his tie straight. "You feahful chumps! It was entirely your own fault! You uttah asses!"

"Oh, bump the silly ass!" shouted Herries.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made one leap to the door. As a rule, his manners savoured of that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But this time he stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once. The study door slammed behind him, and his footsteps died away down the passage.

Blake and Herries and Digby were left with their ruined imputs, breathing vengeance.

CHAPTER 2.

Hats Off.

"TOM MEWWY, deah boy—"

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell—were sunning themselves on the steps of the School House, while they waited for the bell for afternoon lessons.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, after a glance behind to make sure he was not pursued, slackened down his pace as he reached the door of the School House, and nodded affably to the chums of the Shell. It was said of old, that a prophet is not without honour except in his own country. Arthur Augustus's brilliant idea of celebrating the first of April by a big jape on the New House had been received with scorn in his own study. But he had by no means given it up; in fact, opposition generally had the effect of rendering the swell of St. Jim's firmer, as he considered it—more obstinate, as the other fellows chose to put it.

Tom Merry looked round lazily. A March wind was whistling in the old quad, of St. Jim's, and leaves and dust were dancing in it. Fags were chasing their caps in the quad, lifted and tossed about by the playful breeze.

Arthur Augustus set his shining silk topper more firmly upon his head as he came out upon the steps. It was seldom that Arthur Augustus wore a cap—toppers were more in his line—indeed, he was suspected of regretting the good old days when fellows played cricket in tall hats.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry.

"I want to speak to you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, surveying the Terrible Three through his eyeglass. "I want you to back me up. I have twied to make those other silly asses listen to weason—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, I have twied to make those silly asses in my studay listen to weason! I suppose you fellows know what to-mowwow is?"

Monty Lowther nodded.

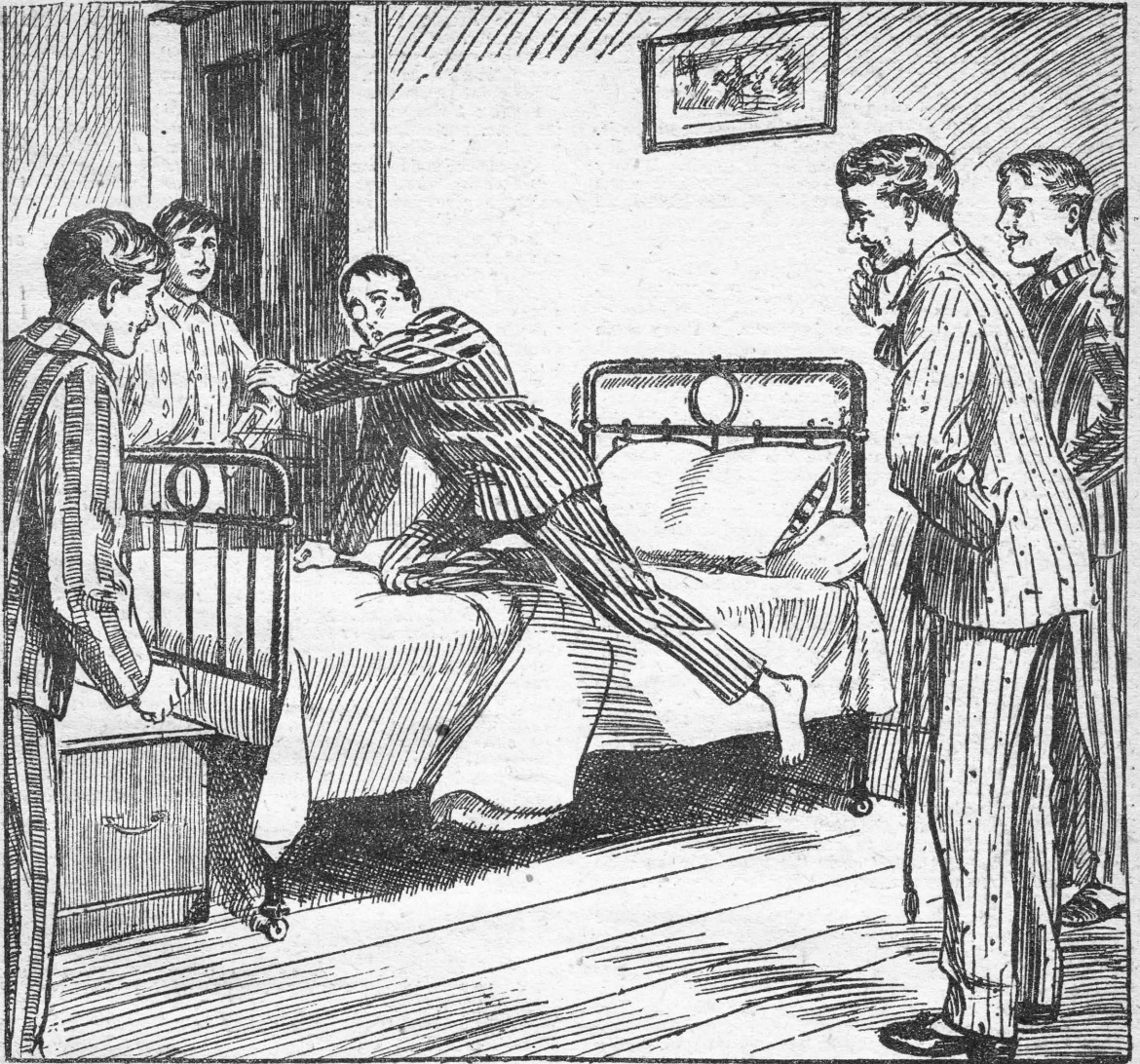
"Your birthday?" he suggested.

And Tom Merry and Manners chuckled. D'Arcy gave the humorist of the Shell a freeing glance.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Many happy returns of the day," said Lowther solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"Did you put Herries' bull-dog under your bed, Gussy?" inquired Blake innocently. "Bai Jove! Certainly not! Do you mean to say that beastly bull-dog is undah my bed?" shrieked Arthur Augustus. (See Chapter 7.)

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah! It is not my birthday to-morrow! To-morrow is the first of Apwil, and I have been thinkin' of celebratin'—"

"Your birthday?"

"Weally, Lowthah, don't be an ass, you know! I have been thinkin' of celebratin' the first of Apwil by japin' the New House fellows—"

"Oh, you couldn't jape a fag!" said Manners cheerfully. "You'd better stay in your study all day to-morrow! It's a half-holiday, and—"

"I have a weally wippin' scheme—"

Arthur Augustus broke off, and set his topper a little more firmly upon his head. He was standing now with his back to Monty Lowther, and Lowther had gently tipped the hat up from behind.

"Bai Jove, how the wind's blowin'!" said D'Arcy unsuspectingly. "Now, I was goin' to say— Bai Jove! I shall have to hold it on!"

It was jerked up from behind again, and Arthur Augustus clutched it just in time. He cast a suspicious glance round at Monty Lowther, but Lowther had his hands in his pockets, and was staring across the quadrangle, as if intently engaged in watching a group of Third Form fags who were punting a footer about. D'Arcy set his hat more securely upon his head, and turned to Manners and Tom Merry again.

"I was thinkin' of makin' Figgins & Co. sit up, you know. I've a jollay good ideah for takin' them in, you know. What do you fellows think?"

Tom Merry shook his head solemnly.

"I think the same as Manners," he remarked. "You'd better stay in your study all day to-morrow, Gussy, especially as it's your birthday—"

"It isn't my birthday, you ass!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"My dear chap," said Manners soothingly, "it's no good trying to conceal your age, you know. We know just how old you are. Now—"

"If you are goin' to play the giddy goat, Mannahs— Bai Jove! How this beastly wind catches a fellow's hat!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as his topper was jerked up again from behind. "Lowther, did you push my hat?"

"I!" ejaculated Lowther, in astonishment.

"Yaas, you ass!" said D'Arcy, turning upon the Shell fellow wrathfully. "I don't believe it was the wind this time."

Tom Merry reached out softly, and tipped the Fourth-Former's hat over his eyes.

"Bai Jove! I suppose that was the wind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Mewwy, you silly ass—"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs, and made a stride towards Tom Merry. Manners, who was sitting on the stone balustrade, lifted his foot, and pushed the topper from behind with his toe. It slid over Arthur Augustus's aristocratic nose, and the wind caught it fairly, and whirled it away into the quadrangle.

"Bai Jove! My toppah! You ass!"

"After it, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry.

But the swell of St. Jim's did not need bidding. He made

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S MASQUERADE!"

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a wild plunge down the steps in pursuit of the topper. The wind was whirling it along at a great speed, and Arthur Augustus dashed after it with his eyeglass flying behind him at the end of its cord.

"Go it!" roared the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"You uttah asses!" gasped D'Arcy.

He came up with the hat, but just as he stooped to seize it, the wind caught it again, and whirled it away towards the group of fags who were punting the footer about. D'Arcy minor—Wally, of the Third Form—was about to kick when the topper was blown fairly in front of him. He kicked, all the same, and the silk hat rose into the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the fags.

D'Arcy panted with wrath.

"Wally, you young wascal!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally. "I didn't know it was your topper, Gussy."

"Wun aftah it!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway catch it for me, deah boy!"

"Right you are! Come on, you chaps! Leave the footer alone!" called out Wally.

"What-ho!" grinned Jameson, of the Third.

And the fags, with a whoop, rushed in pursuit of the silk topper. Arthur Augustus dashed along after them. Curly Gibson, of the Third, came up with the hat first, and he passed it skilfully to Jameson. Arthur Augustus gave a shout of wrath.

"You young wascal! How dare you kick my hat! You—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was only passing it," said Curly, dodging the indignant swell of St. Jim's. "Go it, Wally! Pass to Jameson!"

Wally passed.

Jameson captured the hat, and dribbled it across the quad, in fine style.

Arthur Augustus panted after him. The beautiful silk topper was decidedly showing signs of wear and tear by this time, and Arthur Augustus had cause for anxiety. Arthur Augustus overtook Jameson, and shouldered him off, and the Third-Former rolled in the quad.

"Foul charge!" roared Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Play the game, Gussy."

"You young wottahs!"

D'Arcy made a dive for the hat. But the wind had it again, and the elusive topper flew into the air, and whirled away across the quadrangle. Out in the middle of the wide quad, the wind was very strong, and the hat whirled round and round and to and fro, and the fags ceased the chase, and stood yelling with laughter as Arthur Augustus panted after the damaged topper.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"On the ball!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Right over to the New House the topper went sailing. Three juniors were looking out of the doorway of the New House—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the Fourth. They watched the progress of the hat and its pursuer with broad smiles. Arthur Augustus waved an excited hand to them.

"Stop it, deah boys!"

"Right-ho!" called back Figgins. "All together, you fellows!"

The hat had whirled up to the foot of the New House steps, and rested there for a moment. In another moment it would have been off again. But Figgins & Co. acted promptly, and with great presence of mind. They jumped together, and came down upon the hat.

Crunch!

"Got it!" roared Figgins.

They had got it; there was no doubt about that. But whether it was worth getting in the state they had reduced it to, was another matter. The handsome Lincoln & Bennett was a shapeless rag under the boots of Figgins & Co. Arthur Augustus came panting up, crimson, and almost speechless with wrath.

"You—you uttah asses!" he panted.

"Got it!" said Figgins genially. "We've caught it for you, Gussy! But for us, it might have gone on over the giddy house. Here you are! Get your boot out of it, Kerr!"

Kerr disentangled his boot from the ruins of the silk hat. Figgins picked it up, and handed it to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's received it, gazing speechlessly at the hideous wreck. The topper bore some distant resemblance to a concertina, but none whatever to a hat.

"You—you fwabjous chumps!" gasped D'Arcy, at last.

Figgins looked astonished.

"Well, that's rather thick, I must say, after we've taken this trouble for you!" he exclaimed. "Is that the D'Arcy brand of gratitude?"

"You feahful ass, you've wuined my hat! What do you mean by jumpin' on my toppah?" roared Arthur Augustus.

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"We meant to stop it for you," explained Figgins innocently.

"You—you—you—" Words failed Arthur Augustus. It was a time for action. He rushed upon the New House trio, hitting out furiously.

Figgins & Co. scattered before the wild attack, yelling with laughter. Arthur Augustus paused, undecided which to pursue. A bell rang out from the School House, and Figgins & Co. rushed off for lessons.

"You wottahs!" roared D'Arcy. "Come back! I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'! Come back, you feahful wottahs!"

But Figgins & Co. did not accept that kind invitation. They ran on, laughing, and as the rest of the fellows were crowding into the School House for lessons, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy decided to follow. He tramped away wrathfully with the wreck of the topper in his grasp, and was the last to enter the Fourth Form-room. Figgins & Co. greeted him with cheerful grins, but the swell of St. Jim's went to his place with his nose very high in the air.

CHAPTER 3.

Jammy.

"PORK-PIES!"

The murmuring voice proceeded from Figgins's study in the New House, and Arthur Augustus grinned as he heard it. Lessons were over at St. Jim's for the day, and Arthur Augustus, after thinking the matter over very carefully, had walked over to the New House to pay Figgins & Co. a visit. He had endeavoured, in vain, to interest Blake, and then the Terrible Three, in his scheme for a celebration of the first of April, and Figgins & Co. were his last resource. And as he required the aid of the New House trio, the swell of St. Jim's had magnanimously decided to waive the unfortunate affair of the silk hat.

"Pork-pies and potatoes, fried—"

Fatty Wynn was evidently getting tea in Figgins's study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in at the open door. Fatty Wynn was alone in the study, and he looked very busy. He was cleaning out a frying-pan with sheets of old exercise paper, and there was a bright fire glowing in the grate. The table was laid for tea, and several pork-pies lay there in enticing array, and Fatty Wynn had peeled potatoes ready for frying.

He was buttering the pan ready when he caught sight of Arthur Augustus.

"Wynn, deah boy—"

"Hallo!" said Fatty Wynn, greasing the pan carefully.

"Have you seen Figgins?"

"No. I have come ovah to speak to him!"

"They're gone to get the jam-tarts," said Fatty Wynn.

"They ought to be back by now."

"Vewy good; I will wait."

"You can stay to tea, if you like," said Fatty Wynn hospitably. "We've got pork-pies and fried potatoes, and we're going to have a dozen jam-tarts."

"Thank you, deah boy, but tea is weady in my studay. I just wanted to speak to Figgins about to-morrow."

"Well, here he is," said Fatty Wynn. He slid the chipped potatoes into the frying-pan, and jammed it upon the fire.

Figgins and Kerr came into the study. Figgins laid down a large paper-bag crammed with tarts in the arm-chair, and Kerr placed a jam-pot on the table. The chums of the New House looked inquiringly at D'Arcy.

"Come to tea, Gussy?" asked Figgins affably. "Or do you want us to catch another topper for you?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I hear it's your birthday to-morrow," Kerr remarked.

Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply to that observation.

"I have come oval to speak to you chaps about to-morrow," he said. "You are aware, of course, that it is All Fools' Day. I have a wathah good ideah, you know, for japin' somebody. I was thinkin' of japin' the New House—"

"Oh, were you?" said Figgins warmly.

"Yaas, wathah! But the othah fellows decline to back me up, and I am goin' to take you fellows in—"

"You'll have to get up very early in the morning to take us in," said Figgins.

"Pway don't misunderstand me, deah boy. I am goin' to take you into the scheme," Arthur Augustus explained.

"Oh!" said Figgins doubtfully.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Blake and the west as a set of asses, you know, and I have wresolved to jape them to-morrow. I considah that it will serve them wright for wefusin' to back me up in waggin' you chaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah, Figgins. I am goin' to let you chaps into the scheme. Of course, you will back me up, and we will make those silly asses look a set of awful duffahs, you know."

Figgins shook his head.

"We feel very much honoured, Gussy."

"Yaas, watah! That is only natuwal; undah the circs.," Arthur Augustus assented.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "I was going to say that we feel much honoured, but you will have to excuse us."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You see, we've got our own ideas about to-morrow," Figgins explained.

"Oh, that's all wight. You can throw up any plans you had made, you know, and follow my lead, instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah. In a case like this, a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"My dear Gussy, thanks!" said Figgins. "But we won't come into the wonderful scheme, if you don't mind! We'd rather be excused."

"I wegard you as a silly ass, Figgins. Kerr is a more sensible chap. What do you think, Kerr?"

Kerr grinned.

"I think the same as Figgins," he said.

"Ass! What do you think, Wynn, deah boy?"

"A little more fat."

"Eh?"

"A little more fat," said the fat Fourth-Former.

"You uttah ass—"

"Well, look at them yourself," said Fatty Wynn.

"Look at what, you ass?"

"The potatoes," said Fatty Wynn, in wonder. "I think they want a little more fat. Don't you think so?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins and Kerr.

"You fwabjous ass, Wynn!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wasn't talkin' about any wotten potatoes! I was askin' you what you thought of—"

"Oh! I didn't hear what you were talking about. Hand me the butter, will you, there's a good chap? Make yourself useful."

"Blow the buttah! Do you think—"

"Hand me the butter, Figgy."

"Here you are."

The butter sizzled over the potatoes frying in the pan. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and gazed at the New House trio wrathfully. It really seemed as if he was destined to get as little support in the New House as in the School House, in spite of his generosity in overlooking the destruction of his Lincoln and Bennett.

"Now, look here, you asses!" he exclaimed. "I considah—"

"I think that's enough," said Fatty Wynn, handing back the butter-dish. "Put that on the table, Gussy."

"Wats!"

"Chaps who can't be ornamental ought to be useful," said Wynn.

"Weally, you cheeky fathead—"

"Never mind about the wheeze for the First, Gussy," said Figgins, laughing. "Sit down and have tea with us, and let it drop. You're not built for japing people, you know. You couldn't jape a frog."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"These pork pies are really good, and—"

"I wufuse to have tea. Upon second thoughts, I wufuse to allow you to back me up in my wippin' scheme, too," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wegard you as a set of silly asses, and I shall shake the dust of this studay fwom my feet."

"Shut the door after you, then," said Kerr cheerfully.

"You fwabjous ass—"

"What I like about Gussy is his nice, polite manner when he visits people in their studies," Figgins remarked to space.

"As a mattah of fact, Figgins, I have a jollay good mind to give all three of you a feahful thwashin' before I go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cacklin' duffah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins.

It was too much for the exasperated swell of the Fourth. He made a sudden rush at Figgins, and Figgins had just time to dodge a deadly drive at his nose. He closed with the School House junior, and they waltzed round the table.

"Look out!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "Don't biff me into the fire! If you make me upset these potatoes— Oh! My hat! You villains!"

The struggling juniors bumped against Fatty Wynn, and disaster immediately overlooked the frying potatoes. Fatty Wynn had hold of the handle of the frying-pan, steadying it on the fire, and as he was bumped he jerked the handle, and the pan turned turtle. There was a sudden, terrific sizzle, and the potatoes and the grease they were cooking in shot into the fire.

Siz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z!

"Oh! You chumps! My 'taters! Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You fathead!" roared Kerr.

Fatty Wynn glared at the heap of potatoes burning in the glowing cinders. A strong smell of burning and thick clouds of blacks swept over the study. Fatty Wynn glared at the wasted potatoes for one minute, and then he turned upon the author of the catastrophe. He rushed right at Figgins and D'Arcy, brandishing his fat fists. Arthur Augustus made an effort to avoid him, and stumbled backwards, and sat down violently in the armchair, with Figgins sprawling upon him.

"Yawoooh!"

"Oh!" gasped Figgins.

Squelch!

"B-b-bai Jove! I'm sittin' in somethin'— Ow!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Kerr. "The tarts!"

"The—the tarts!" gasped Fatty Wynn dazedly. "The tarts! Oh!"

Figgins dragged himself away from D'Arcy. The latter rose, and Fatty Wynn gave a yell of wrath as he looked at the tarts. The paper bag was burst, and the tarts were squashed out of all resemblance to tarts, and at least half the jam was upon D'Arcy's trousers.

"Bai Jove! My twousahs are ruined!" panted D'Arcy. "You uttah wottahs—"

"The tarts!" wailed Fatty Wynn. "They're done in! The jam tarts!"

"My twousahs—"

"My tarts—"

"Collar the silly chump! We'll—"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus ran for the door. Fatty Wynn dashed furiously after him. The study was thick with smoke now from the burning potatoes. Fatty Wynn's foot flew up as D'Arcy escaped through the door, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a terrific yell as he was helped out into the passage. A considerable quantity of jam remained upon the Welsh junior's boot.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Ow!"

"Good heavens! Is there a fire here!" exclaimed Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House, dashing up the passage.

D'Arcy darted past him, and Monteith ran into Fatty Wynn, who was rushing out of the study. The prefect staggered back, and then, recovering himself, he caught the fat Fourth-Former by the collar.

"What's the matter here? What's that burning?"

"Lemme squerat him!" spluttered Fatty Wynn. "I'll slay him! I'll squash him! He's ruined my 'taters and tarts! Lemme go!"

"It's all right, Monteith!" grinned Figgins. "Only some cooking upset in the fire."

"Lemme go—"

Monteith swung the fat Fourth-Former round and pitched him into the study. Fatty Wynn staggered across the room and sat down in the armchair, and there was a fresh squelch.

"You'd better stop that smoke," said the prefect sternly. "If there is any more of this I'll stop you having tea in the study at all."

And he stamped away.

"Scrape this blessed jam off my trucks," said Fatty Wynn faintly. "We sha'n't be able to eat these tarts now—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I should think not!"

"It's not a laughing matter," said the fat Fourth-Former indignantly. "The tarts are mucked up, and the 'taters are done in. There's nothing but the pork pies left. My hat! I'll squash that chump D'Arcy! The dangerous ass! He's not safe to have in a place where there are eatables about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins threw open the window to allow the smoke to escape, and the chums of the New House sat down to a meal minus potatoes and tarts. A considerable quantity of the tarts had gone over to the School House by that time, attached to the beautiful trousers of the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Means Business.

TOM MERRY met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he came into the School House, and he could not help staring in amazement at the swell of the school.

Arthur Augustus's collar was torn out, his necktie was flying loose, and his hair was wildly ruffled. His jacket was rumpled and dusty, and there was jam all over him rearward, mingled with crumbs of the battered tarts. The elegant junior—who did not look very elegant now—was panting for breath.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Have you been in the wars?"

"I have been tweated with gwoss diswespect—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Where did you pick up that jam?" gasped Monty Lowther.

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"I wefuse to discuss the mattah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus marched haughtily upstairs, followed by a yell of laughter. Blake and Herries and Digby were in the study, and they looked out as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came by. They grinned—they could not help it.

"Been in trouble?" asked Blake sympathetically.

D'Arcy sniffed.

"I have been ovah to the New House to offah to take Figgins & Co. into my wippin' scheme—"

"And that is the result?" grinned Digby.

"Yaas."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald mewwiment, Blake."

Apparently Blake did. He roared.

"Better come in and let us scrape you," Digby suggested.

"I wefuse to be scwaped. I am goin' to change my tucks. I weward you as a wotten set of wottahs. Tom Mewwy is a wottah, too, and Figgins is a wottah. Yah!"

And Arthur Augustus tramped away to the dormitory, leaving the chums of the Fourth shrieking. With a frowning brow he changed his clothes, and washed and brushed himself, and he did not come down again until he was looking his old elegant self again.

Then he presented himself in Study No. 6. Blake and Digby and Herries were having tea, but there was no cup or plate laid for D'Arcy, neither was his chair at the table. He looked round the study through his eyeglass.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Want anything?" asked Blake, looking at him.

"I want my tea, you ass!"

"Oh!" said Blake, in surprise. "I didn't think you'd have tea with a set of rotters. My mistake."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Here you are," said Blake, laughing, as he pulled a chair up to the table. "Now, I'll tell you what we'll do, Gussy—we'll listen while you tell us your idea."

Blake made that offer with the air of a fellow who felt that he was doing a generous thing. Digby and Herries nodded assent.

"We will!" said Digby. "After all, a friend's a friend, and we're called upon to let him talk rot sometimes for auld lang syne."

"Certainly!" said Herries.

"I wefuse to tell you my wippin' ideah now," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "You have remarked that you do not think I could take anybody in—"

"Well, you couldn't," said Blake. "We don't suppose your weeze is any good, you know. We're going to listen to it out of friendship."

"Sheer friendship," said Digby.

"Wats!"

"Now, go ahead!" said Blake persuasively.

"I wefuse!"

"Oh, come!" said Herries. "Get it over! We've got those blessed lines to do after tea again, as you mucked them up to-day. Go ahead!"

"Yes, pile in, Gussy!" said Digby.

"Well, if you fellows weally want to know vevy much—" began Arthur Augustus, relenting. "If you weally want me to explain—"

"Yes, we want to get it over during tea, you know—sort of kill two birds with one stone."

"You uttah ass—"

"So pile in!"

"I decline to do anythin' of the sort. I shall keep my weeze to myself, and work it off on you chaps, and take you in as well as Tom Mewwy and Figgins & Co."

"Take us in?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha! You couldn't take in my left ear, you ass! Ha, ha, ha! He's going to take us in! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

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

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glowered wrathfully. There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and the Terrible Three looked in.

"What's the joke?" demanded Tom Merry. "We can hear you from the end of the passage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"Oh, it's Gussy!" gasped Blake. "He thinks he can take us in on the first of April! He's going to take us in, and you in, and Figgins in—Gussy!"

The Terrible Three roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's rose to his feet. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded the yelling juniors with a look of lofty disdain.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S MASQUERADE!"

"You uttah chumps—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy swung round on his heel, and walked haughtily out of the study. The Shell fellows and the Fourth-Formers roared as he went, and their laughter followed him down the passage. That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, should undertake to take them all in on the first of April, struck them as very comical. But there was a very determined look upon D'Arcy's face as he walked away—a look of grim resolve. The morrow would show!

CHAPTER 5.

The Shell are Alarmed.

KILDARE, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, put his head into the junior common-room in the School House, with his good-natured smile.

"Bedtime, you kids!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet with a yawn. He had just finished a game of chess with Monty Lowther, in which both parties had had the benefit of expert advice from Manners, with the result that they had fallen into hopeless confusion. Monty Lowther had been beaten, and he seemed to attribute it to Manners's well-meant efforts.

"Mate," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Yes; but I should have had you mate in two!" grunted Lowther. "This is what comes of Manners helping."

"I didn't help Tom!" said Manners.

Lowther grunted.

"No; he's won!"

"Look here, Lowther, you ass—"

"Peace, my children," said Tom Merry pacifically. "It's time we were in our little bunks, and don't forget the cricket-stumps!"

"Oh, all right!"

Kildare smiled. It certainly sounded rather odd, for the Shell fellows to be talking of taking cricket-stumps to bed with them; but for a week or more past, they had done so.

There had been an attempted burglary at St. Jim's lately, and Tom Merry had been the means of preventing it. The cracksmen had been arrested later, but his confederate was still at large. The police believed that he had fled from the neighbourhood, as was, indeed, very probable, as he would have been in very great danger if he had remained there. But the alarm of the burglars was still in the air, so to speak, and the juniors took the most elaborate precautions when they went to bed.

Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, who was an inventive genius, had with difficulty been restrained from fitting up burglar alarms of his own invention. Some of the juniors took cricket-stumps to bed with them, and some of them had police-whistles, and several had dark lanterns and little electric torches. If a cracksmen had come to St. Jim's again just then, he would have found himself in a fortified camp, and he would not have stood much chance. Herries, of the Fourth, had gone so far as to propose introducing his bulldog, Towser, into the dormitory of a night—and it was only by the threat of instant slaughter that the Fourth-Formers had made him drop the idea.

"Get off!" said Kildare. "I don't think you need be nervous about burglars, you kids!"

"We're not nervous," Tom Merry explained. "It's a case of defence, not defiance, you know. If you are prepared for war, that's the best way of avoiding war, Kildare; I saw that in a newspaper somewhere."

The St. Jim's captain laughed.

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"Well, well; off you go! So long as you don't lay in firearms, you can take what you like to the dormitory!"

"Nothing like being prepared," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The best thing is to have a burglar alarm fitted up to every door and window!" remarked Bernard Glyn. "I should be willing—"

"But nobody else would be willing," said Kildare, laughing.

"Now, enough jaw; buzz off!"

And the juniors tramped up to bed.

The Fourth-Formers stopped at the door of their dormitory, while the Shell fellows went further along the passage to their quarters. Some of them looked under the beds when the light was turned on. As Gore remarked, there was nothing like making certain.

"Quite an easy thing for a burglar to get into the school, and stay hidden under a bed," Kangaroo remarked. "It is all rot to say that a burglar won't come. What's happened once may happen again!"

"Lightning never strikes twice in the same place," said Clifton Dane.

"But burglars do," said Tom Merry. "There was a burglar here once who got in at the window of this very dormitory!"

"Yes, rather—can't be too careful!"

"Of course, we're not afraid of the rotters," said Tom Merry. "But it's no good blinking the facts. They have been here, and they might come again—and that villain, Jerry Horrocks, is still loose!"

"And the other rotter had a revolver when he was caught," Manners remarked.

"I jolly well wish he would come again, and we'd have a chance to lay him by the heels!" said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

And the Shell fellows turned in, their minds running upon burglars and burglaries. It was only natural, considering what had lately happened at the school. After Kildare had put out the light, and left the juniors to go to sleep, the talk ran on the same subject. Some of the Shell fellows, who wanted to jape the New House on the morrow, All Fools' Day, started that subject; but they had no chance—burglaries easily won, so to speak.

Manners told a story of a burglary he had heard of during the last vacation, and Gore capped it with a tale of a murder. Then Kangaroo told a story of a fearful outrage in the lonely Australian bush, which he had heard before he came to St. Jim's. By that time the juniors were very sleepy, but in such a state of uneasy shuddering, that they hardly cared to close their eyes and go to sleep.

"Groo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Kangaroo concluded his thrilling yarn. "What asses we are to talk these things after bedtime! We shall dream burglars now!"

"I—I believe I heard a sound!" muttered Skimpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed, but his laugh did not have its usual cheery and hearty sound. His nerves were a little shaken, too.

"Somebody tell a funny story!" said Glyn.

"Go it, Lowther!"

"All right!" said Lowther. "There's the story of the man with the iron saucepan—"

"Oh, we've had that!" said Gore.

"Then I'll tell you what happened to my uncle at Brighton—"

"Had that!" yelled Dane.

"Well, there's the story about the boiled cod—"

"Too old!"

"Look here," said Monty Lowther wrathfully, "if you're so jolly particular—"

"I'm going to sleep," said Manners, yawning. "Good-night, all!"

"Good-night!"

Monty Lowther's funny story was never told. The Shell fellows settled down to slumber; but as they did so, there came a sudden sound through the silence of the dormitory. It was a sound of a rattle at the high windows.

In a moment every fellow was sitting bolt upright in bed.

"W-w-what was that?" gasped Gore.

"D-d-d-did you hear it?"

"I—I heard something," said Tom Merry, staring towards the glimmering windows. "It—it sounded like the window rattling!"

"Or—or a stone rattling on the window!" muttered Skimpole.

"Ass! How could a stone rattle on the window?"

"Someone might have thrown it, my dear Lowther."

"Fathead! There's nobody in the quad. at this time of night, and if there were, I suppose he wouldn't be chucking stones up at this window!"

"Well, no," agreed Skimpole. "Probably not. Still—"

"Listen!" muttered Tom Merry. "Don't jaw! Listen!"

There was tense silence in the dormitory as the Shell fellows listened for a repetition of the sound. There came a soft sound from the window, but it was the familiar sound of a shower of rain, driven on the panes by the wind.

"There's no one there!" muttered Lowther.

"It must have been the wind!"

"It's—it's all right!"

Tom Merry jumped out of bed.

"The sound certainly came from the window," he said.

"I'm jolly well going to see!"

The hero of the Shell mounted to the window, and opened it softly and looked out. There was a glimmer of starlight in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Below, Tom Merry could see a gleam of ruddy light from lower windows. Certainly, if a burglar were there, he had chosen a very early hour for his visit; it was as yet barely ten o'clock.

Tom Merry leaned out and scanned the dusky quadrangle below.

Save where the glow of light fell from the windows below, he could see nothing; the quadrangle was very dark and silent, the faint starlight only serving to make darkness visible, as it were.

Tom Merry searched the quad. with his eyes, and scanned the ivy upon the wall below the dormitory windows. It was rustling in the wind, and the raindrops were dashing on it; but there was certainly no sign of a climber. Tom Merry shivered, and closed the window, and dropped back into the dormitory.

"Well?" demanded half a dozen breathless voices.

"Nothing there!"

"Oh, I suppose it was the wind," said Monty Lowther.

"I'm going to sleep!"

Tom Merry got into bed again.

"I hardly think it was the wind," he remarked thoughtfully.

"Well, it was the rain, then!"

"I don't see how the rain could rattle the window."

"Well, what was it, then?" demanded Kangaroo.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Good egg!" suddenly exclaimed Manners. "If there was anybody prowling outside the window we shall find traces of him to-morrow, anyway. It's raining; and the ground down there will be soft and muddy."

"Lot of consolation that will be, if we get burgled!" said Monty Lowther, yawning. "Anyway, if I'm burgled, I'm going to be burgled asleep. Good-night!"

And Monty Lowther went to sleep. And the rest of the Shell were not slow in following his example.

CHAPTER 6.

Wally Gets Wet.

KILDARE came out of his study with Darrel, and the two Sixth-Formers walked along the passages in the School House, looking at the windows. Since the attempted burglary by the Badger and Jerry Horrocks, the prefects had been very careful of a night. It was a great deal like locking the stable after the horse was stolen; but they had the Head's instructions, and they carried them out. Every night, either Kildare or Mr. Railton made a round of the School House to make sure that the windows were secure, before going to bed.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Darrel suddenly.

He stopped at the window at the upper end of the dormitory passage. This window was a small one, at the back of the house, and it looked out over an outhouse. More than once that window had been used by juniors when breaking bounds, as it was in a quiet corner, and easily reached from the ground outside. Darrel cast his lamp's light upon it, and Kildare echoed his exclamation.

"By Jove, it's not been fastened!"

"Lucky we saw it!" said Darrel.

Kildare slipped the catch into its place.

"That's done!" he said.

And the two prefects continued their rounds, and the passage was left in darkness and solitude again.

About ten minutes later there was a sound at the window. On the sloping roof of the outhouse below a dim form appeared in the starlight, and a hand glided over the window. If the prefects had been still there they would certainly have imagined that the cracksmen had come at last.

A hand tried the window, and tried it again; and as it refused to budge, there was a low exclamation:

"My only Aunt Jane!"

And if anyone belonging to St. Jim's had heard it he would have known that the dim figure was not that of a cracksmen, but of Wally D'Arcy of the Third Form.

"My only aunt! It's fastened!"

Wally gave a low whistle of dismay.

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It was raining with soft, steady persistence, and the hero of the Third was wet. He had a coat on, with the collar turned up, but the rain was soaking him. Over his boots he wore a very large pair of ragged boots, which had at some period belonged to a man with very large feet, and those boots were smothered with mud, as if he had been tramping in very soft soil. The fag crouched under the window out of the rain, in dismay.

"Oh, great Scott! Some silly jossler has been and closed the window, and I'm dished!"

D'Arcy minor certainly was dished. Not being a cracksman, he had no means of opening the window from the outside.

The rain beat down softly.

"Gussy won't come out of the Form—that's part of the game," murmured Wally. "I'm dished, unless Curly thinks of me!"

He waited.

He could do nothing else. In the Third Form dormitory in the School House only Curly Gibson, his chum, knew of his nocturnal expedition. It was a secret from the other fellows. Jameson, his other close chum in the Third, was a New House boy, and was far enough away just then. And Curly was a sound sleeper. It seemed only too probable that Curly, knowing that Wally had left the window unfastened for entrance, had gone off to sleep, and he would probably not wake again until the rising-bell went in the morning.

Half-past ten rang out from the clock-tower.

Wally shivered.

The rain was finding him out, although he was crouching close under the window, and the night wind of March was cold.

"Groo!" murmured Wally. "I shall be catching a rotten cold! I shall be doing a sneezing turn to-morrow! Ugh! Oh, rats! Blow Gussy and his giddy schemes! What an ass I was to come out in the rain! Grooo!"

And Wally began to sneeze.

"Atchoo-choo-oooh!"

He listened in painful suspense. Had his sneeze been heard? If the prefects caught him outside the House at that hour of the night he knew what his fate would be. His hands seemed to tingle in anticipation.

But silence reigned.

Wally moved at last. There was no chance of Curly Gibson waking up, apparently, and no other way of getting in excepting at the window—which had to be unfastened. Wally dropped from the outhouse, and made his way round to the window of the Third Form dormitory. There it was, high above his head, beyond the possibility of scaling. But Wally was not thinking of that. He stooped and selected a small stone, and with unerring aim he pitched it up at the dormitory window.

Clink!

The stone clinked on the glass and dropped back noiselessly upon the rainy ground.

Wally waited and shivered.

Had it been heard?

Three or four minutes passed, and he was thinking of throwing up another pebble when the window above opened, and a shock-head was projected into the night. He could not see the features, but he recognised the head. It belonged to Curly Gibson.

Wally gave a low, soft whistle.

The head was withdrawn.

Curly Gibson turned back into the dormitory.

The Third-Formers were asleep, with two or three exceptions. Frayne and Hobbs had awakened. Curly Gibson had been sleeping but lightly, thinking of Wally as he dozed off.

"What was it?" asked Joe Frayne.

"I heard something at the window, I believe," said Hobbs. Curly yawned.

"Oh, it's not a burglar!" he said. "You can go to sleep."

"But I'm sure I heard something," persisted Hobbs. "Did you see anything out there, Gibson?"

"Only the trees and the rain," said Curly truthfully enough. He did not think it necessary to say that he had heard anything. He had not seen Wally in the gloom, but he had heard his chum's cautious whistle.

"Well, you remember those giddy burglars the other night," said Hobbs uneasily.

"My dear chap, there aren't any burglars."

And Curly dropped into bed again and began to snore. Reassured, Hobbs turned over and went to sleep again; and Frayne followed his example.

Curly Gibson did not go to sleep this time. He knew that Wally's signal at the window must mean that he had been shut out, and that he wanted to be let in. But Wally had cautioned him not to let a single fellow in the Form know.

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of the wheeze, and so it was necessary to wait till Hobbs and Frayne were asleep before he made a move.

Curly Gibson waited ten minutes.

By that time Hobbs and Frayne were safe again in the arms of Morpheus, and their steady breathing showed that they slept.

Then Curly crept softly from bed.

Without waiting to put on any clothes, he crept to the door and stole out into the passage, clad only in his pyjamas.

He stepped softly along the passage to the little window overlooking the outhouse. He knew, of course, that Wally would have returned there, to wait for admittance.

He reached the window, and found a face outlined outside, the nose flattened upon the pane. He tapped the window softly, and the face jerked back.

Curly Gibson unfastened the window, and opened it softly.

"Wally, old man—"

"Atchoo-o-o-oooh!"

"Don't make a row!" whispered Curly. "Somebody'll hear!"

"Atchoo-o-o-oooh!"

"Quiet, old chap!"

Wally sneezed chokingly.

"You—you frabjous ass!" he muttered. "Do you think I'm doing it on purpose? You silly ass, I've caught a cold! Why didn't you let me in before?"

"The other fellows woke up—"

"Phew! Do they know?"

"No; I waited till they'd gone to sleep again."

"Oh, good!"

Wally had crept in at the window. He removed his boots before he entered, so that there would be no stains of mud on the floor inside. Curly Gibson closed the window softly and refastened it.

Wally suppressed a sneeze, and nearly exploded in the effort.

"Poor old chap!" murmured Curly, with something that sounded suspiciously like a chuckle. "You have caught a cold, and no mistake!"

"Grooooooh!"

They crept away. Wally stopped at the box-room to hide the big muddy boots in an empty box, and then they hurried to the dormitory.

The Third Form were sleeping peacefully when they entered.

They tumbled into bed.

"It worked all right?" whispered Curly.

"Yes."

"Gussy will be pleased!" chuckled Curly.

"Blow Gussy!"

Wally sneezed again.

"Good-night!" murmured Curly sleepily.

"Atchoo-oooh!"

Wally did not sleep well that night. At intervals through the small hours there came a sound of sneezing from his bed. And when the rising-bell clanged in the morning Wally was already awake—and sneezing.

CHAPTER 7.

The First of April.

CLANG! Clang!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House and rubbed his eyes. The rising-bell was clanging, and the sun was shining in at the high windows. The rain had passed away with the night, and the sun of the first day of April was gleaming cheerfully upon the wet glass of the windows.

"Fine mornin', bai Jove, aftah the wain!" said D'Arcy.

"Good egg!" said Jack Blake, as he turned out of bed.

"It would be rotten to have a rainy day for a half-holiday! Hallo, Gussy, old man!" he added, staring at the swell of St. Jim's, with a startled expression.

D'Arcy groped for his monocle and jammed it into his eye and stared back at him.

"What's the matter, Blake, deah boy?"

"Nothing, only—"

"Only what?"

"Did you put Herries's bulldog under your bed?"

"What?"

"My hat!" said Herries, sitting up in bed and grinning.

"Did you fetch Towser in here, Gussy?"

"Towzah?"

"Yes. Did you?"

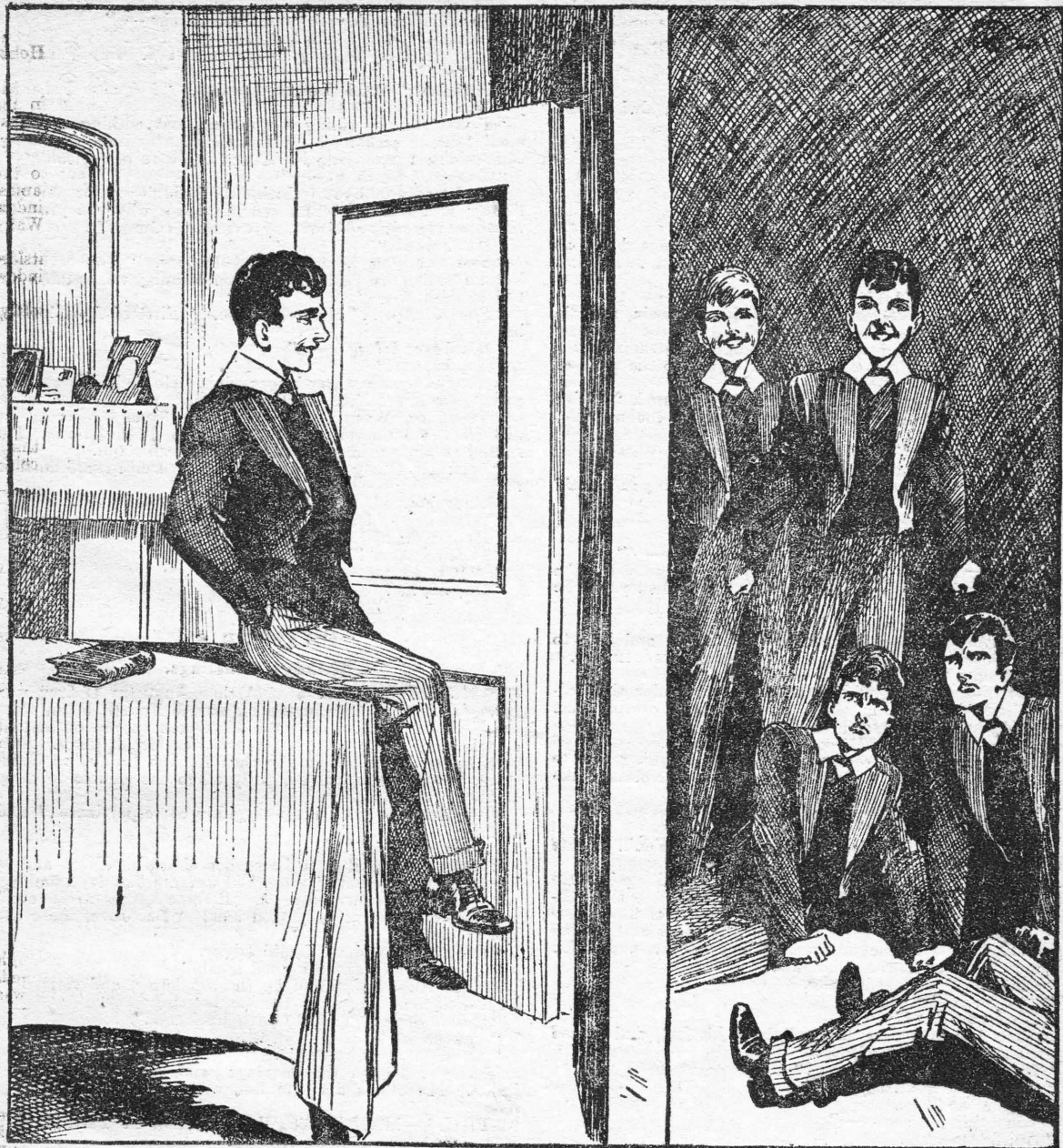
"Bai Jove! Certainly not! Do you mean to say that that beastly bulldog is undah my bed?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind your calf!"

"Look out, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus had put one leg out of bed. He whipped



The new boy looked out of the study after the ejected trio. "This is my study now," he said. "If any of you fellows want to come in again, you'll have to apologise for the caddish way you treated me." "Chucked out, by Jove!" grinned Bob Cherry. "The Sheeny wins!" For the above incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars, entitled "THE SCHOOLBOY OUTCAST," which is contained in this week's issue of our grand companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. On sale at all newsagents. Price One Penny.)

it back again in the twinkling of an eye, and dragged the bedclothes round him again.

"Hewwies, you ass——"

"Look out! Mind how you step!"

"Call the beast away!"

"Rats!" said Herries. "I'm not going to call Towser. Besides, he wouldn't come!"

"He's your wotten dog, and you ought to teach the feahful beast to obey you, Hewwies. I wegard it as disgustin' to havy that beast into the dorm. He has no respect what-eyah for a fellah's twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dwive him out before I get up."

"Can't be done!" said Digby, as he turned out of bed.

"Jump out and chance it. If he fastens on you I'll go for him. Dogs are allowed one free bite, you know."

"You uttah ass——"

"Put your leg out and see if it's bitten. If it isn't, you can get out safe enough, D'Arcy darling," said Reilly.

"You fwabjous chump——"

"Faith, and ye'll have to stay in bed if you don't get out!" said Reilly.

"Call that beastly dog away, Hewwies!"

"Rats!"

"I shall no longah wegard you as a fwiend."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the Fourth had turned out now. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained sitting in bed in a state of great

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trepidation. Herries' bulldog, Towser, had sometimes a somewhat uncertain temper, and it was no joke to put out a bare leg within reach of his teeth.

"Blake, deah boy, dwive him away——"

"I couldn't, Gussy!"

"Lumley-Lumley, my deah fellow, will you dwive that howwid beast fwom undah my bed?"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"I simply couldn't do it, Gussy," he said.

"Levison, dwive him away——"

"Impossible!" grinned Levison.

"Mellish, deah boy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to laugh at, Mellish. I wegard you as a wottah! Hancock, old man, I wish you would dwive that beast away for me!"

"Impossible!" said Hancock.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle a little tighter into his eye, and simply glared at the grinning Fourth-Formers. They seemed to be taking the matter as a joke; but it seemed like anything but a joke to the swell of St. Jim's.

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" he shouted. "Dwive that beast away! I can't we remain in bed all the mornin', you silly asses."

"Chance it, then," advised Blake.

"I wefuse to chance it."

"Jump out suddenly, and he won't bite you," said Herries.

"He might, you ass."

"Well, dogs are allowed one free——"

"Pway don't be an ass, Digby. Look here——"

"Tell you what," said Blake, "jump from your bed to the next, without getting on the floor at all, and then you'll be all right."

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah!"

Arthur Augustus threw back the bedclothes, and rose to his feet on the creaking bed. Levison gave a sudden yell.

"Look out!"

In an instant the swell of St. Jim's was under the bedclothes again, dragging them round him, to form some protection against the teeth of Towser.

"Bai Jove! Is the beast comin'?" he panted.

"No," said Levison coolly. "I was only telling you to look out, on general principles, you know. Nothing like keeping one's eyes open."

"You uttah wottah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better make a rush for it," said Blake. "You'll be late for brekker."

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet on the bed again. He peered over the edge of the bed, expecting to see the bulldog's nose, but there was nothing to be seen of Towser so far. The swell of St. Jim's made a wild leap, and landed upon the next bed, and fell upon his knees there, and rolled off upon the floor on the other side.

"Look out!" shrieked Blake.

"Run for it!"

"Mind your eye!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled wildly to his feet, and leaped upon another bed, gasping.

"Bai Jove! Is he after me?"

"Oh, no you're all right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fwightful asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped down gingerly from the bed. He caught up a poker, which one of the juniors had brought up to the dormitory in view of possible burglars over-night. Then he turned a stern eye upon Herries.

"I an goin' to dwive that beast out of the dorm.," he said. "If he twies to bite me, Hewwies, I shall cwack his beastly head with this pokah."

"Go it!" grinned Herries.

Poker in hand, Arthur Augustus advanced cautiously towards his bed. He made a lunge under the bed with the poker, and shouted.

"Come out, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Bai Jove! Where is he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no sound from Towser. Arthur Augustus stooped lower, and looked under the bed. Blank space met his eye. There was no sign of Towser under the bed, or in the dormitory at all. Arthur Augustus stared blankly, and the expression on his aristocratic features made the Fourth-Formers shriek.

"You—you uttah wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy, whirling round towards the yelling juniors. "The beastly bulldog isn't there at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 216.

"THE SCHOOLBOY OUTCAST!"

"You told me Towsah was there, Blake——"

"I didn't," said Blake indignantly, "I asked you if you had put Herries' bulldog under your bed. Didn't I, you chaps?"

"Certainly," said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess I heard you."

"I was merely asking a question, not making a statement," Blake explained. "If you choose to jump to wrong conclusions, I can't help it. Chaps ought to be logical."

"You—you uttah ass——"

"And I only told you to look out—I didn't say Towser was there," said Herries. "Blessed if I know why you jump to these conclusions without any evidence, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fwabjous asses!" yelled D'Arcy. "You certainly led me to believe that that wotten bulldog was undah my bed, and——"

"First of April!" chanted Blake. "First of April! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I forgot——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned very pink. He had elaborated a great joke himself for the first of April, with the assistance of his minor, Wally; but he had not been on his guard against the humorous attempts of his Form-fellows. He sniffed as he turned away towards his washstand.

"Look out, Gussy!" shouted Digby. "Don't tread on that nail!"

D'Arcy jumped.

"What nail? I don't see——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First of April!" yelled Digby.

"You uttah ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 8.

Birthday Greetings.

THE aristocratic nose of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was held very high in the air as the Fourth Form went down to breakfast. But his frozen expression melted a little as he saw several letters piled beside his plate. As a rule, letters were left in the rack for the juniors to claim them, but someone had evidently taken the trouble to bring D'Arcy's letters in.

"My hat! What a heap of giddy correspondence!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What a thing it is to be such a charming chap, and to have heaps of friends," remarked Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

"I cannot undahstand whom all these lettahs are fwom," said D'Arcy, with a perplexed look. "Bai Jove, there are five of them!"

"Open them and see," said Digby.

"Yaas, that's wathah a good ideah."

Arthur Augustus picked up the top letter, and started as he looked more closely at the handwriting.

"Gweat Scott! That's Lowthah's hand!"

"Lowther's?"

"Yaas. It is vewy cwivious."

D'Arcy slit open the envelope, and took out the sheet inside. There was a single line written upon it, with the date:

APRIL 1.—MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY!"

Arthur Augustus grew crimson.

"The uttah ass!"

"What is it?" grinned Blake.

"Only a wotten joke."

"By George, I forgot that it was your birthday!" exclaimed Herries.

"You uttah duffah! It isn't my birthday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem! Not so much noise at the table, please," said little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth.

Arthur Augustus opened the second letter. It was in the well-known handsome calligraphy of Manners, of the Shell.

"April 1. Many happy returns of the day!"

"Bai Jove!"

"More kind wishes," grinned Blake.

"Oh, wats!"

The third letter was in the hand of Figgins, and the fourth in Kangaroo's sprawling writing, and the fifth was written

ANSWERS

by Lefevre, of the Fifth. They all bore the same message: "April 1.—Many happy returns of the day." Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face was crimson as he finished looking at them, and his eyes gleamed. The Fourth-Formers up and down the table grinned joyously. It was not really D'Arcy's birthday at all, but D'Arcy almost began to believe that it was, with so much evidence to that effect.

"I fail to see what you chaps are gwinnin' at," said the swell of St. Jim's stiffly. "I regard this as a wotten joke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Lathom. "Not so much noise!"

And the juniors chuckled more quietly. D'Arcy sat very stiffly during breakfast. Like many other fellows, he failed to appreciate humour when it was directed against himself. He tore the letters across, and left them lying on the table when he walked out with the Fourth after breakfast.

In the hall outside, Toby, the School House page, met him with a parcel in his hands.

"Postman left this for you, Master D'Arcy."

"Thank you, Tobay!" said Arthur Augustus, taking the parcel.

"Birthday present, I suppose," suggested Digby, and the juniors roared. A crowd of fellows gathered round to see D'Arcy open the parcel. He laid it upon the hall stand, and cut the string.

"It cannot be a birthday present," he remarked. "It is not my birthday. Pwobably it is my new collahs come home."

He unwrapped the paper. A cardboard box was disclosed, and the crowd of juniors looked on very eagerly as he removed the lid.

There was another paper packet inside, and D'Arcy had to remove many layers of paper before he came to a smaller cardboard box.

"The present's in that!" remarked Blake.

"Ass! It is not my birthday, I tell you!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Well, if it isn't it ought to be—it's a suitable date."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let's see what's in the box," exclaimed Levison.

Arthur Augustus opened the little box. Inside was a slip of cardboard, and upon it was written the now familiar legend:

"April 1.—Many happy returns of the day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"Which of you wottahs sent me this?" he demanded, glaring round at the crowd of chuckling juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors streamed out into the quadrangle, laughing. Arthur Augustus walked out with a crimson face. The Terrible Three were already out of doors, and they greeted the swell of St. Jim's with a shout.

"Many happy returns!"

"You wottahs! It isn't my birthday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The infuriated swell of the School House made a rush at them, and they scattered. Figgins & Co. came over from the direction of the New House, and they grinned cheerfully at Arthur Augustus and greeted him.

"Many happy returns!"

Then they fled.

The idea that it was D'Arcy's birthday seemed to prevail in the whole school. Fellows greeted him on all sides with "Many happy returns!" D'Arcy returned into the School House at last, breathing fury. Kildare, of the Sixth, met him in the passage, and he gave the elegant junior a friendly nod.

"I hear it's your birthday, D'Arcy," he said. "Many happy returns!"

"You ass!"

Kildare jumped. He had never been called an ass before by a junior at St. Jim's. He stared blankly at the crimson face of Arthur Augustus.

"D'Arcy! What do you mean? How dare you?"

"It's not my birthday!"

"Oh! Someone said it was!" said Kildare. "It's a mistake! But—"

"Sowwy, old man," said Arthur Augustus, realising that Kildare, at least, had spoken in good faith. "Pway excuse me, but it's a wotten wag, you know! They are pwetending it's my birthday because it's the first of April, you know!"

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"Oh, I see! Well, never mind!"

He walked away, laughing.

"The wottahs!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He looked round the School House for Wally. He found him sitting over the fire, smelling strongly of

eucalyptus-oil, and sneezing. D'Arcy looked at him in concern.

"Bai Jove, Wally! Have you got a cold?"

Wally snorted.

"Yes, I have! It was the rain last night!"

"I'm sowwy, old chap! I nevah thought of that, you know!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" said Wally. "If you catch me going out again helping you with your rotten wheezes, you can use my head for a footer! Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"I'm sowwy! But did it work all wight?"

"Yes," growled Wally, "it worked all right! And if I don't get rid of this cold I shall be shoved into sanatorium! Gr-r-r-r-r! Don't come too near me, or you'll catch it! Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Bai Jove! It's wotten!"

"I should say it is!" said Wally. "Have those Shell duffers found the footmarks yet?"

"I don't know. Pwewgaws you had bettah get leave from your Form-master to go to bed again, Wally, deah boy."

Wally sniffed.

"Catch me going to bed again!" he said. "I've smothered myself with eucalyptus so that the other chaps won't catch it, and that's enough. Nice niff, ain't it? Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"I'm weally sowwy!"

Arthur Augustus walked away, with a lingering odour of Wally's eucalyptus-oil about him.

Wally sneezed and grunted over the fire till it was time for chapel. In the passage a fag yelled after Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! Many happy returns!"

Arthur Augustus gave chase, and the fag vanished. The swell of St. Jim's, who was feeling quite fed up with the jape by this time, went into the Fourth Form-room, there to wait for the bell for chapel. He gave a snort as he caught sight of a card pinned upon his desk. It bore the inscription he was now getting used to:

"Many happy returns!"

"The wottahs! I will thrash somebody for this!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That is in Tom Mewwy's w'iting, the silly ass!"

Arthur Augustus's rage had reached boiling-point. He threw the card into the Form-room fire, and dashed out in search of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 9.

The Mysterious Footprints.

TOM MERRY & CO. were busy just then. The chums of the Shell had not forgotten the incident of the night, and after breakfast it occurred to them to look for possible footprints under the windows of the dormitory. The rain of the night before had rendered the ground soft and spongy, and if a cracksmán had been prowling round the house in the night, it was pretty certain that he would have left footprints behind him. Even on the gravel paths in the quadrangle there would be traces of feet, and the juniors, who had had a great deal of experience as Boy Scouts, rather prided themselves upon their ability to follow tracks. The Terrible Three strolled round the house to examine the ground under the dormitory windows, and several other Shell fellows followed them.

"Mind where you tread!" said Tom Merry warningly. "If there are any tracks here, we don't want to get them mucked up! You fags can clear out!"

"Rats!" replied Curly Gibson promptly.

Half a dozen fags of the Third were on the scene, and in fact, quite a crowd of fellows had gathered to see the investigation. The Shell fellows had talked of the peculiar happening of the night before, and most of the School House had heard of it.

"Well, keep off the grass!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, you Shell chaps are a lot of giddy, nervous old hens!" said Hobbs, of the Third. "You see a burglar in every shadow, you know!"

"That's just what's the matter!" agreed Curly.

Monty Lowther made a movement towards the fags, and they beat a prompt retreat. But Lowther was recalled by a shout of excitement from Tom Merry.

"My hat! Look here!"

"What is it?"

"Footprints!"

"Great Scott!"

"The cracksmán!"

The Shell fellows stared at the footprints in surprise and some satisfaction. The alarm of the night had not been without grounds. Someone had evidently been prowling round the School House in the hours of darkness.

In the soft soil below the windows there were distinct footmarks. So deep, so distinct were the prints of the big, heavy boots, that it seemed as if the wearer of them had jammed his feet down specially hard in the soil on purpose.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 216.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S MASQUERADE!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

There was a flower-bed along the wall at this point, and the soft soil was specially adapted for keeping traces of this kind. Deep in the soil showed the outlines of a very large pair of boots—going close up to the wall and then receding from it, back to the gravel path where the juniors were now standing.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with startled faces.

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry at last. "There was really someone here in the night! No mistake about it now!"

"No fear!"

"Chap with jolly big feet, too!" said Monty Lowther, scanning the footprints. He took a tape-measure from his pocket, and measured the nearest track. "This chap took at least nines, I should think!"

"Then it couldn't possibly have been a chap breaking bounds!" Manners said thoughtfully. "Must have been a full-grown man!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo, you fellows! Found anything?" exclaimed Blake, coming up.

"Look there!"

"Phew!"

Blake stared at the tracks.

"The giddy cracksmen!"

"Only one of them, I think," said Tom Merry. "The tracks all seem to belong to the same feet!" He had gone up close to the wall. "And look here! The ivy is dragged out in places, as if he tried to climb, and then found it wouldn't bear his weight!"

"He must have climbed, if it was him we heard at the window!" said Gore.

"Yes; that's so!"

"And he'd have got in, too," said Kangaroo excitedly, "if we hadn't been awake! It was our being awake last night that prevented a burglary!"

"Looks like it."

"I suppose we'd better tell Mr. Railton," said Tom Merry. "The police ought to know about this. They may be able to catch the rotter."

"I don't see why we shouldn't!" said Blake. "I'd trust a Boy Scout to follow a track better than a policeman any day! Look here, it's a half-holiday to-day, and I think we might do worse than run him down."

"It's jolly dangerous having the villain hanging about the school like this," said Herries thoughtfully. "He's not given up the idea of getting at the school silver, though the other chap has been put in prison! It must have been Jerry Horrocks, the man the police are still looking for, who came here last night."

"No doubt about that!"

The crowd was thickening upon the spot, staring at the deeply-indented tracks. Figgins & Co. and a crowd of New House fellows came over to see what was up. They stared at the footprints with as much interest as Tom Merry & Co.

"Did you hear anything in the night, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

Figgins shook his head.

"Not a sound," he said. "But of course, a burglar who knew about the place wouldn't come to the New House. All the valuables are on this side."

"Last time they tried to get into the School House, you know," Kerr remarked. "This must be the same gang."

"Somebody had better fetch Kildare, I think," said Tom Merry.

"I'll go!" said Blake.

And he ran off towards the door of the School House. He passed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the way. The swell of St. Jim's did not deign to look at him, but came up to the crowd under the dormitory windows.

"Tom Merry, you ass—"

"Hallo, Gussy! No rotting now!" said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand.

"I'm goin' to give you a feahful thwashin—"

"Pax!"

"Wats! I—"

"Don't rot, I tell you!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Can't you see this is serious? There were burglars here last night—one burglar, at any rate!"

"Burglars!"

"Yes! Look there!"

Tom Merry pointed to the tracks in the soil. To his surprise, Arthur Augustus grinned.

"It's not a laughing matter, you ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "If we hadn't been awake last night, the school would have been robbed! And there might have been worse than that! The cracksmen belonging to the gang who was captured had a revolver, and he used it, too! Some of us might have been shot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 216.

"Why, you ass!" roared Blake. "What are you cackling at? Is there anything funny in fellows getting shot by burglars, you frabjous chump?"

D'Arcy seemed to think there was, for he roared with merriment. The juniors gathered round him angrily. They could not understand what he was laughing at, but they decidedly thought that it was no occasion for laughter.

"Look here, you ass—"

"Look here, you fathead—"

"You burbling chump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled D'Arcy.

"Oh, he's off his rocker!" said Blake. "We'll jolly well leave that silly ass at home when we track down the giddy burglar this afternoon!"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"You're goin' to twack down the burglar?" he gasped.

"Yes, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Bai Jove! You won't succeed, you know! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm fed up with your cackling!" said Tom Merry. "Bump the silly ass, and he may learn to be serious when things are serious!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove! Hands off! I—I— Oh, you wottahs!"

The exasperated juniors seized the swell of St. Jim's, and he was bumped in the mud. He quite obliterated one of the tall-tale tracks as he was brought down with a squeal into the soft earth.

"Ow! Yaw-o-oh! Oh!"

"Roll him over!" roared Blake.

"Ow—ow—ow! Yaw-o-o-o-op!"

"Mind the footprints!" exclaimed Tom Merry hastily.

"Oh, good! Roll him in the gravel!"

"Yaw-o-o-o-oh! Ow! Stop! Yow! Help! Yah!"

They rolled the swell of St. Jim's over and over, to a considerable distance. He struggled in vain in the grasp of the angry juniors. They left him at last, floundering in a deep puddle in the middle of the quadrangle, and trooped away.

Arthur Augustus sat up in the puddle, and groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and gasped wildly for breath. He looked a fearful wreck, smothered with mud and gravel from head to foot. His eyeglass was muddy, and he could not see through it. He wiped it upon his sleeve, but that did not improve it. He rose, dripping with water.

"Ow!" he gasped. "The feahful wottahs! Ow! Yow!"

The muddy junior staggered away towards the School House. Kildare was going to join the excited group under the dormitory windows as D'Arcy went in. Blake was with the captain of St. Jim's, eagerly and excitedly explaining to him. Kildare glanced at D'Arcy but did not stop to speak, and the swell of St. Jim's escaped to the Fourth Form dormitory, where he succeeded in cleaning himself in time for morning school.

CHAPTER 10.

The Expedition.

MORNING school was a farce so far as Tom Merry & Co. were concerned.

Their thoughts were not in lessons, and the fortunes of Cæsar in the war with the Helvetians did not concern them nearly so much as the mysterious footprints in the quadrangle at St. Jim's.

In the Shell and the Fourth, the fellows whispered to one another about the mysterious footprints, much to the annoyance of Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton.

Lines came thick and fast. But they made little difference. The juniors were excited about what had happened, and they could not get it out of their minds.

If the cracksmen were still lingering about St. Jim's, in the hope of plundering the school when vigilance had relaxed, it was a very real danger. Not only the juniors, but the masters took it seriously. Kildare had examined the footprints, and decided that they could not possibly have been made by a boy; and as for a master, it was hardly possible to suppose that a St. Jim's master had been prowling under the windows of the Shell dormitory in the middle of the night and attempting to scale the school building by means of the ivy.

It was evidently some outsider. And who could it be if not the member of the gang of cracksmen who was still at large? It seemed conclusive enough to the juniors, and very probable to everybody else.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, had gone to examine the footprints, and, after thinking the matter over, he had telephoned to the police-station in Wayland. This was done while the boys were in class, and they did not know anything about it until the recess after

third lessons, when they had a quarter of an hour to themselves in the quadrangle. They left the Form-rooms, discussing the affair excitedly, and a crowd of them rushed to the spot again, and found it in possession of a constable and a fat inspector from Wayland. Inspector Skeat was examining the footprints and making copious notes in his pocket-book.

He looked very wise, too, and he went into the Head's study afterwards, and remained there some time. When he went away with the constable, both of them looked very important and mysterious; the fat inspector seemed simply to bristle with clues, so to speak. The juniors watched them go, with considerable awe.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out in time to see them cross the quad. The swell of St. Jim's put up his eyeglass and looked after them in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "What have they been here for?"

"You ass!" said Blake politely. "Have you forgotten the discovery?"

"What discovery?"

"The footprints."

"The—the footprints!" ejaculated D'Arcy dazedly.

"Yes, fathead!"

Arthur Augustus gave a gasp.

"You—you don't mean to say that the police have been here lookin' at those footprints in the flowah-bed?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; of course they have. Railton telephoned for them."

"Bai Jove!"

"Why shouldn't he?" demanded Tom Merry. "It's a proper thing for the police to look into, isn't it?"

"Wot!"

"What's rot?" demanded Blake.

"It's all wot! You're a set of asses!! But I suppose it can't be helped now. Bai Jove, fancy the inspectah comin'!"

"Oh, you're dotty!" said Blake crossly. "The police are going to search for the man, of course. They thought he had left the neighbourhood, but it's jolly clear now that he's still hanging round St. Jim's. Don't you think so?"

"How can he think so? He's got nothing to think with," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"It's a jolly serious matter, anyway," said Figgins, "and I think we ought to look for the scoundrel."

"The—the what?" demanded D'Arcy.

"The scoundrel who made those footprints."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You see, he must be hiding in the woods about here somewhere," said Figgins sagely. "He can't be in any of the villages, because his description is all over the country. He must be sticking in the woods, or else in some nook on the moors, or perhaps in the quarries. It's certain that he's in hiding in the neighbourhood, and we've got a jolly lot more chance of finding him than the police have. We haven't been Boy Scouts for nothing, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, if you want to be rolled in the mud again, you've only got to go on cackling," exclaimed Figgins wrathfully. "Blessed if I can understand the ass at all!"

"Pway don't get watty, deah boy. But—"

"Hallo! There's the bell!"

The resumption of lessons put an end to the discussion. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was smiling as he went back to the Fourth Form-room. Even while lessons were going on, the juniors discussed in whispers their plans for the afternoon. Quite a number of the fellows had resolved to utilise the sunny April day in hunting for the crackman. Fellows who had intended to perpetrate First-of-April japes on other fellows seemed to have quite forgotten their intentions now. In the deep interest evoked by the discovery of the footprints round the School House, the St. Jim's fellows had almost forgotten, indeed, that it was April 1st.

When morning lessons were over there was a rush from the Form-rooms.

The Terrible Three, and Figgins & Co., and Blake and his comrades had resolved to go together in search of the hidden scoundrel who was supposed to be lurking in the neighbourhood. Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, of the New House, were going "on their own," and several more parties were made up with the same object.

Tom Merry & Co., recalling all their experience as Boy Scouts, prepared with great earnestness and determination for the quest. They intended to take the trail at the beginning, and follow wherever it led. It might fail them; but by trying up and down, and to and fro, there was no reason why they should not pick it up again. The man who had worn those big boots could not have got away without leaving footmarks here and there in the soil softened by the rain.

"I'm comin', you fellows," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy

remarked, looking into Study No. 6 after dinner, where Blake and Herries and Digby were engaged in an argument. Herries was urging the advisability of bringing Towser.

"Oh, you'd better not come, Gussy!" said Blake, with a sniff. "This will be hard work, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"

"If you do come, you've jolly well got to take the matter seriously and not let us have any of your silly cackling," said Digby, with a glare.

"Vewy well, deah boy, I won't cackle," said D'Arcy, with unexpected mildness. "I will take the mattah as sewiously as poss."

"What about Towser?" persisted Herries.

"Oh, blow Towser!"

"Look here, Blake!"

"I object to Towshah, Hewwies. That wotten bwute has no respect whatever for a fellow's twousahs."

"I'm jolly well going to bring Towser. Towser has a wonderful gift of following a track. You chaps can remember how he followed a track before when burglars broke into the school chapel—"

"I can remember how he followed a kipper," growled Blake.

"Look here, you fathead—"

"We'll put it to the vote," said Blake. "Who says Towser?"

"Towser!" said Herries promptly.

But Herries' voice was solitary, like the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Herries gave a snort.

"Well, I shall jolly well take Towser, and go on my own!" he exclaimed.

"Now, look here, Herries—"

"Oh, rats!" said Herries.

And he quitted the study.

Blake and Digby selected a couple of stout sticks to take with them. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass inquiringly upon these weapons.

"What is that for, deah boys?" he asked.

"Ready for the crackman, ass!" grunted Blake. "We don't want to have to tackle him with our bare hands when we run him to earth."

"But the police say he's left the neighbourhood, so there's no dangah of meetin' him, you know."

"Fathead!" roared Blake. "How can he have left the neighbourhood, when we found his hoofmarks in the flowerbeds close up to the house wall. If you are going to start being funny, you'd better stand out of the party."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, shut up, and don't play the giddy ox!"

"I wefuse to be called a giddy ox!"

"You fellows ready?" asked Tom Merry, looking into the study. The Terrible Three and Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn had come down the passage together, and, like Blake and Digby, they were armed with stout sticks.

"Yes, we're ready."

"Just a minute!" said D'Arcy. "I'll join you fellows in the quad."

"Going to get your silk topper?" asked Monty Lowther, with heavy sarcasm. "Of course, you'll need it to do scouting in a wood and over ditches and things."

"Certainly not! I'm going to get a stick. I don't see why I shouldn't have a stick, in case we meet any stway burglahs."

"Well, buck up! We're starting now."

"Wight you are, deah boy."

Tom Merry & Co. made their way into the quadrangle. Figgins & Co. were waiting for them, and Fatty Wynn carried a large bag. It was not necessary to ask what it contained. The Falstaff of the New House was not likely to run any risk of going hungry if the expedition should last a long time.

"Better pick up the trail from under the dorm. windows, I suppose?" Figgins suggested.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The gravel has been trampled a lot all the morning," he replied. "There won't be a trace left to pick up. The crackman must have got out into the road again, and we shall very likely pick up his trail there."

"All serene!"

Gr-r-r-r!

It was the gentle voice of Towser. Herries came up with the bulldog on a chain.

"Going to take Towser?" he asked.

There was a quite unanimous shout in reply.

"No."

"All right! I'm going with him, then, and I'll bet I'll find more burglars than you do," said Herries defiantly.

And he tramped off wrathfully with the despised Towser. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came dashing after Tom Merry & Co. as they reached the gates. The swell of St. Jim's

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had a coat on, with bulging pockets. Fatty Wynn gave him a glance of appreciation.

"Sandwiches?" he asked.

"No, deah boy."

"Steak-and-kidney pie?"

"No."

"What have you got, then?"

"I've got a clothes-bwush and a comb."

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"Well, of all the asses—"

"We shall want our clothes bwushin', if we go wangin' the woods aftah the wain," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

"Oh, rats!"

The swell of St. Jim's was twirling a light cane in his gloved hand. Tom Merry glanced at it, and frowned.

"Is that what you've brought for a weapon?" he asked.

"It will be all wight."

"Do you think you could hurt a cracksmen with that, you thampion ass?"

"Yaas, all the cwacksmen we are likely to meet, deah boy."

Blake halted.

"If Gussy is going to be funny, he's not coming along with this party!" he exclaimed. "I'm fed up with his humour. He's got to chuck it, or stop behind."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins. "I must say I'm fed up with it, too. The ass was talking last evening about jokes on all St. Jim's to celebrate the first of April. If these remarks are specimens, I can only say that his humour isn't the kind we want."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Quite right," said Tom Merry emphatically. "It's got to be understood, Gussy, that if you come you're not to be funny—not more funny than Nature made you, I mean."

"Why, you ass—"

"Is it a go?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, vevy well, I will be as sewious as a judge, deah boys!"

"Come on, then!"

And the party sallied out of the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 11.

On the Track!

THE cracksmen-hunters were very serious, as befitted the serious occasion; and even Arthur Augustus had suppressed his desire to smile, and maintained a demeanour of perfect solemnity. It was evident that the swell of St. Jim's did not desire to be left out of the party. They proceeded up the road, and met Kildare and Darrel, who had just gone out. The captain of St. Jim's halted.

"Hallo, what's the little game?" he asked.

"We're going to do some scouting," said Tom Merry evasively.

Kildare laughed.

"Looking for the burglar?" he asked.

"Well, yes," admitted Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at," said Blake rather excitedly. "I suppose you admit that it's dangerous to have an awful scoundrel like that hanging round the school, looking for a chance to break in, Kildare?"

"Well, the police are looking for him," said Kildare good humouredly. "And I really think they have almost as much chance of finding him as you kids have. But go ahead; the more the merrier. If you find him—bring him safe home, and don't let him slip through your fingers."

And Kildare and Darrel walked away smiling. Evidently they had not much faith in Tom Merry & Co. as burglar-hunters. If they had supposed that the juniors had any chance of being successful, they would probably have stopped them from undertaking a dangerous quest. Arthur Augustus allowed himself to smile.

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"Kildare seems to take the whole affair in wathah a comical spiwit," he remarked.

Blake glared.

"You'd better not, though, if you don't want to be bumped in the ditch!" he said.

"Weally, Blake—"

"We won't leave a stone unturned to find the burglar," said Tom Merry resolutely, "if only to show Kildare that there's nothing to snigger about."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's look for the tracks along the road," said Blake. "My idea is that the villain bolted after he was alarmed last night, and very likely he came over the wall, and ran right across into the wood. He might have been afraid of having Taggles's mastiff after him. Don't you think so?"

"Very likely," said Tom Merry.

"Then we'll begin here."

Opposite the school wall, across the high road, was the wood, and a deep ditch separated it from the highway. There were planks across the ditch in several places, and the ground up and down by the border of the wood was very soft and spongy from recent rain. The juniors filed over the ditch by the planks, and plunged in among the trees on the edge of the wood.

Certainly, if the cracksmen had been at St. Jim's, and had fled suddenly, it was very probable that he had taken directly to the wood to avoid pursuers. The juniors had high hopes of discovering tracks among the trees and underbrush.

"Mind you don't trample on any footprints," Tom Merry called out, as the juniors scattered to search for traces.

"Look where you go."

"Yes, that's all right."

"The chap who finds a track can whistle to the rest," said Figgins.

"All serene."

To and fro, in the trees and bushes, on the border of the wood, the juniors went cautiously. All of them had measurements of the boots which had left tracks under the windows of the Shell dormitory, ready to measure and compare any tracks they might find in the wood. The ground was soft, almost sloppy, and there was no doubt that if anybody had been tramping there traces would be left. Wherever the juniors moved now, they left tracks in the damp and clinging soil.

Rain-drops fell upon them from the branches as they moved. There was much rain left in the wood, though the weather was dry and sunny now. But they did not mind a little wet. They were too keen on the search to heed little discomforts like that.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy plunged further into the wood than the other fellows, and disappeared from view.

"Don't lose yourself, Gussy," called out Blake.

"That's all wight, deah boy."

"And don't run into danger, you ass!" said Figgins.

"Wats!"

"I think I'll keep close to him, in case of accidents," said Blake. "He's an exasperating ass, but I shouldn't like him to run upon the burglar alone!"

And Blake pressed on after the swell of St. Jim's. Suddenly, as he came upon an open patch of ground under the trees, he uttered an exclamation. There was a stretch of muddy soil before him, and the tracks of Arthur Augustus's elegant boots led across it. But, apart from D'Arcy's tracks, distinct to the view, was the mark of a large and clumsy boot.

"My hat!"

In a moment Blake was on his knees on the ground, regardless of the mud and of his trousers, and was measuring the track.

It fitted exactly!

Blake rose and gave a shrill whistle. The signal was answered from all directions, and the juniors came running through the bushes.

"Found it?" shouted Kangaroo.

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

"Stand clear! Don't tread on it!" shouted Blake.

"Right-ho! By Jove, here it is!"

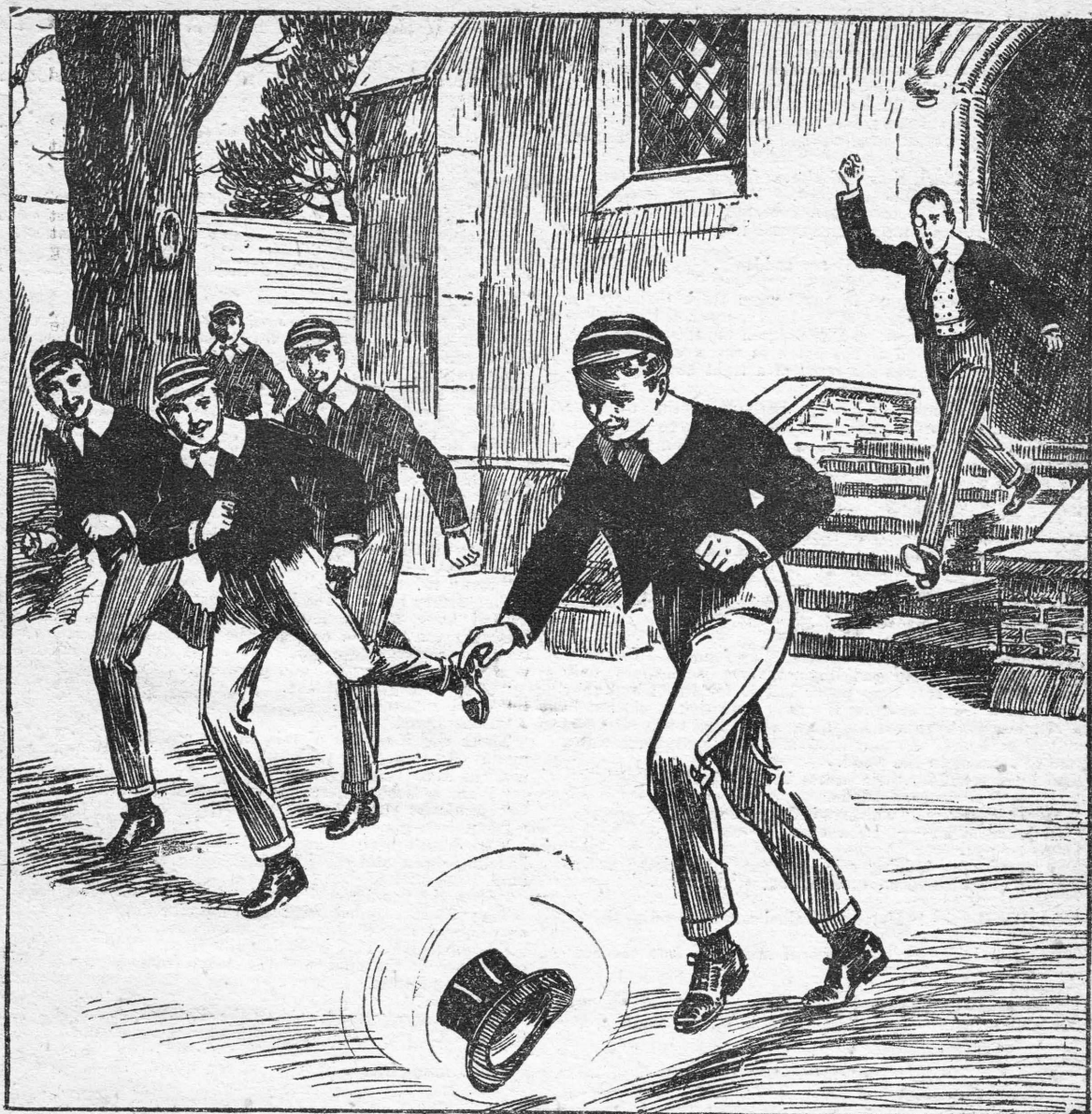
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"Come on, you chaps!" called out Wally. "On the ball!" "What-ho!" And the fags, with a whoop, rushed in pursuit of D'Arcy's beautiful silk topper. "You young wascal!" roared Arthur Augustus, dashing after them. "How dare you kick my hat!" "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 2.)

The juniors gathered round the track in glee. They were almost as much surprised as they were pleased. They had hoped to find the trail of the cracksman in the wood, but now that they had found it they realised how slight their expectation had been, though their hope was strong.

But they had found it! It was the track of a right boot—only the one boot, but it corresponded exactly with the track that had been found under the windows of the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's. Half a dozen of the juniors measured it, and it fitted the measurements to a hair.

"There's no doubt about it," said Tom Merry, drawing a deep breath. "Look here. Here's the very mark of a patch on the sole of the boot, just the same."

"It's the same, right enough."

"Queer there's only one track, though," said Manners, with a puzzled look. "Where did the chap put his other foot?"

"The track must be here somewhere."

"I can't see it."

"Perhaps he hopped along on one leg," said Blake.

"Rot!"

"Well, there's only one track, anyway. That's enough to follow. Let's look round and see where it leads."

"I dropped on this quite by chance, following Gussy,"

Blake explained. He put his hands to his mouth, and called out, "Gussy, Gussy! Hallo!"

"Hallo, deah boy!" came back an answering shout through the wood.

"Have you seen any more tracks?"

"No, deah boy."

"Well, the silly ass would miss them, anyway!" said Blake, with a sniff. "Let's get on in this direction."

And the juniors pressed on eagerly in the direction in which the solitary footmark pointed. They were on the track, at all events.

CHAPTER 12.

A Hot Scent!

TOM MERRY & CO. scanned the ground as they advanced, with the keenness of Indian hunters. In many places the earth was hard, or so cumbered with fallen twigs and old leaves that it gave no sign. But here and there were soft places, and in these soft places they looked eagerly for tracks. If the cracksman had trodden there in his retreat through the wood, he would have left plain traces behind, and a single track was enough to tell a

whole story. They only wanted to know that they were going in the right direction.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed to have disappeared.

They did not find his tracks in the mud, perhaps because the swell of St. Jim's was purposely treading in places which would leave no sign. Whether he was still ahead of them or not, they did not know; but they supposed that he had wandered away, as the mud showed no trail of the elegant boots.

As a matter of fact, they had almost forgotten him now, in their eagerness to follow the trail. It was not likely that D'Arcy would find the cracksmen, especially as they knew he was not taking the hunt seriously, and they had no time to waste thinking of him.

"Look!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly.

"By Jove, there it is again!"

In a soft patch of mud in the beaten track through the wood was the clear imprint of the heavy, patched boot. The measurement was correct, as half a dozen tapes soon testified, and there was the sign of the patch in the sole, and of the worn-down heel. It was the track of a right boot again; no sign of the left was to be seen.

"The chap had hurt his left leg, perhaps, getting over the wall," Figgins observed sagely. "Looks like it to me."

"Well, the other foot may have come down on the stones here," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, one print is enough to show us the way. He came by here."

"Yes, rather."

"This path leads to the old hut in the wood," Figgins remarked thoughtfully. "You remember there was a chap hid there once from the police. I shouldn't wonder if this villain is in that very place, hiding."

"Quite likely."

"It's just the place where he would be," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "We'll soon see."

The juniors hurried on.

Here and there, in muddy places, they found the footprint again, sometimes deep and distinct, and sometimes only faintly legible. But they never lost it for long; and they found that it led them along the path towards the old hut in the wood—a little ruined building, which had once been the haunt of poachers. As they drew near that spot, there was a sound of a rustle in the wood.

The juniors halted, their hearts beating hard.

"Listen!" murmured Blake.

"Might be Gussy!" whispered Kangaroo.

"Or it might be— Look out!"

Gr-r-r-r-r-r!

The growl of a bulldog echoed through the damp underbrush. Blake uttered an exclamation.

"Towser!"

"Oh, it's Herries! Herries!" called out Monty Lowflier.

"Hallo!"

Herries and Towser came out of the wood into the footpath.

"Found anything?" asked Herries.

"Yes, we're on the track. You can bring Towser along. He may be useful. We shall have a fight on our hands pretty soon, I expect."

Herries whistled.

"Good," he said. "I'm on!"

They moved on together down the footpath. The old hut stood in a little clearing, and they paused on the edge of the clearing to look towards it. In the open ground, Blake breathlessly pointed out a series of tracks in the muddy soil.

"The trail again!" he muttered.

"And it leads right up to the hut," muttered Digby.

"He's there!"

The juniors exchanged excited glances.

The trail led into the doorless opening of the ruined hut, and certainly whoever made those tracks had gone in. He might have left again, but there were no tracks leading outward. All the prints they could see had the toes pointing towards the doorway of the old hut. The man had gone in, and he had not come out. It was evident that the St. Jim's juniors had discovered the spot where the cracksmen was lurking during the daytime, from the searching of the local police.

"There's no doubt about it now," Tom Merry muttered.

"Not a bit of it."

"He can't have gone out from the back, because the plantation there is too thick," said Kerr. "I know this ground well. If he came out, he'd have to come out the way he went in. And there would be some tracks."

"Then we've run him down!" muttered Kangaroo breathlessly.

"Yes, rather!"

"Shall we rush him?"

The juniors looked to Tom Merry for orders. Their hearts were beating hard. They remembered the desperate resistance of the cracksmen who had been arrested the week

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before, and they knew that if the hunted man was there, the crack of a revolver might greet them as they rushed into the ruined hut.

"Let's give him a chance to surrender," said Manners. "We can call out to him, and when he sees there's a dozen of us, he will know he's got no chance."

"Good! Come on!"

The juniors stepped into the clearing, and Tom Merry called out.

"Hallo, there!"

There was no reply from the hut.

"Hallo! We've found you. You'd better give in."

Tom Merry's voice echoed among the trees, but only the echo answered him. No sound came from the ruined hut.

"Hallo!" called out Herries. "If you don't show yourself, you scoundrel, we'll send the bulldog in to fetch you out."

Still no reply.

"He's lying low," whispered Fatty Wynn. "Better go slow, in case he's got a pistol. We can think it over, and have some sandwiches while we're waiting."

"Rats!"

"Shall I send Towser in?" asked Herries.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

Herries loosed the bulldog.

"Go it, Towser! Fetch him, boy! Fetch him!"

Towser understood. He needed no second bidding. Like an arrow he rushed into the hut.

The juniors waited tensely, expecting a terrific uproar, perhaps the sound of a revolver.

But there was no sound save the scampering and the growling of the bulldog.

"He can't be there!" said Digby.

"Hang it! Let's see."

Tom Merry ran into the hut desperately. The other fellows dashed after him. They burst into the little building. Through the roofless opening the sunlight fell. It showed up every corner of the ruin. It was empty, save for Towser, who was sniffing round and growling.

"Gone!" muttered Blake.

"What rotten luck!"

"Look here!"

There was a puddle of rain in the middle of the cracked, muddy floor, and in the mud was a distinct footprint. It was the same track again.

"Well, he's been here, anyway," said Manners.

"No doubt about that."

"But he's gone."

"He hasn't been gone long," said Tom Merry, who was kneeling down and carefully examining the footprint in the mud.

"How do you know?"

Tom Merry smiled with the superior knowledge of an experienced Boy Scout.

"Look here! This track is quite fresh. You see that it's quite deep in the mud, and the water from the puddle here is trickling into it. It won't be long before it's full of water. Do you see?"

"By George, yes!" said Blake breathlessly. "Why, in five minutes more the water will have filled it up!"

"Exactly!"

"The mark hasn't been made ten minutes."

"By Jove!"

The juniors looked round quickly and uneasily. There was no doubt of it; their scouting knowledge was not at fault. The boot that had left that trace had pressed upon the soft mud within the last ten minutes.

"We must be close upon him," Tom Merry muttered, his hand closing more tightly upon his cudgel. "He must have been here when we reached the clearing, I should think, and he has squeezed out through the plantation at the back."

"Let's look!"

They searched, stepping easily through the gaps in the rear wall of the hut. There were plain traces that someone had recently squeezed through the thick bushes at the back. The branches were broken in places, and here and there a fragment of cloth could be discerned upon the thorns.

"This is the way!" said Tom Merry.

"Come on!" said Figgins.

And, with Herries and the bulldog in the lead now, the excited hunters pressed upon the trail.

CHAPTER 13.

A Hasty Capture.

KEEPING a keen lookout now, and their cudgels ready for war, the St. Jim's juniors pressed on. Towser gave a growl occasionally, and their hearts leaped into their mouths; but each time it proved to be a false alarm. Towser was apparently simply exercising his vocal cords.

"Keep that blessed dog quiet, Herries!" said Tom Merry

at last. "We don't want to give the rotter the alarm when we get near him."

Herries grunted.

"Rats! Towser won't give the alarm."

"Well, keep him quiet. Hallo, what is he after now?"

Towser had suddenly strained upon his chain, and he tried to bolt into the bushes.

Herries held fast on the chain.

"Hold on, Towsey!"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Towser.

"He's on the track!" exclaimed Herries excitedly. "He's smelt out the villain! Come on! Towser will lead the way!"

"More likely smelt out a rabbit," said Blake.

"Look here, Blake—"

"We're sticking to the trail," said Tom Merry. "Pull Towser in!"

"Rot! I'm going to follow his lead," said Herries.

And Herries followed the excited Towser into the bushes and disappeared. Tom Merry & Co. kept on the trail. They did not share Herries' implicit faith in the sagacity of the bulldog. And they were soon satisfied that they were right, for the footprint appeared again and again in the depths of the wood.

"The villain is making for the moor, or else the old castle of Wayland," said Blake. "The odds are on the castle. He may be hiding there now."

"Very likely."

The ruined castle, one of the great sights of the neighbourhood, lay on the edge of the moor. The juniors knew the place well; they picnicked there often in the summer, and once, as they all remembered well, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been kidnapped and kept a prisoner in the vaults below the old castle. It was just the place where the cracksman, scared out of the poacher's hut, might have fled for refuge. The old masses of masonry came into sight on the edge of the wood, and among the mud and puddles on the slope of the hill the juniors found the footprint again.

"He's there!" said Blake, as the party halted, and looked towards the old walls of the castle, shattered and scored by the cannon of Cromwell hundreds of years before.

"Hark!" exclaimed Manners, in a suppressed voice.

There was a sound from within the ruin.

It was the unmistakable sound of a boot scraping over loose stones, as someone moved within the ancient, moss-grown walls.

"Come on, and be careful!" muttered Tom Merry.

The juniors trod cautiously and silently towards the gateway. Huge blocks of fallen masonry encumbered the ground, and afforded them ample cover as they advanced. The sounds within the old castle came more plainly to their ears. A stone clinked on the old flags, and they heard a hurried breath.

Tom Merry waved his hand to his followers, and they halted, just within the shadow of the old broken gateway.

Someone was within the old walls, and the sound of his footsteps showed that he was coming towards them.

"Cover!" muttered Tom Merry. "Lie low, and jump on him as he comes out."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors waited breathlessly.

In a few seconds whoever it was would come into the gateway from within, and they would be able to hurl themselves upon him and make him a prisoner in the twinkling of an eye.

"It—it might be somebody else," murmured Lowther.

"Rot! Collar him as he comes out."

"All—all serene."

Clink!

A loose pebble rolled into the gateway, from a foot within. Then a form appeared in sight, and the juniors hurled themselves upon it, without stopping to speak, without even stopping to look.

Bump!

Down went the new-comer, with the juniors sprawling over him, and there was a wild yell.

"Ow! Ow!"

"Got him!" shrieked Figgins.

"Yaroorh!"

"You scoundrel!"

"Ow! Leggo!"

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's not—it's not—My hat, it's Redfern!"

"Yow!" roared Redfern, of the Fourth. "Yaroorh! Lemme gerrup! What are you up to? You silly asses, what's the little game?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Blake.

The juniors released their prisoner.

It was not the cracksman. It was Redfern, of the Fourth, and he staggered to his feet, smothered with mud, and glowering with rage. Lawrence and Owen came running out of the old castle.

"What's the trouble?" exclaimed Lawrence.

Redfern snorted.

"These silly asses piled on me," he roared. "The chumps! They've let the burglar get away now. Oh!"

"Sorry!" gasped Tom Merry. "We—we took you for the burglar."

"Me!" roared Redfern. "You ass!"

"What are you doing here, then?" demanded Blake angrily. "What were you sneaking about for, you silly chump?"

"Looking for the burglar, ass!"

"Have you seen him?"

"No, idiot! But we should have had him, I expect, if you hadn't given the alarm," growled Redfern. "We heard him."

"We've been following his trail," Tom Merry explained, as the wrathful Fourth-Former dusted down his clothes. "The trail leads right up here."

"Ass! We've been searching the vaults under the castle," said Redfern. "We were down there when we heard somebody up here."

"You heard somebody?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes; somebody moving in the ruins, and we came up jolly quietly," said Lawrence. "We thought it might be the man."

"I'll bet it was, too," said Blake. "We've followed the trail here, and it's quite fresh. We thought you were the villain when we jumped on you."

"You say the trail leads here?" asked Redfern, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Yes; you can see for yourself."

"Then it must have been the man we heard when we were in the vaults. He can't be far away. Scatter, and look for him."

"Good egg!"

The juniors promptly scattered among the ruins.

Tom Merry climbed to the top of the shattered wall, and scanned the vicinity. There was nothing to be seen of the cracksman. He caught sight of a figure in the distance for the moment, before it disappeared into the wood. But it was the figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, not of him whom they sought.

"See anything?" called up Figgins.

"Only Gussy. He's just gone into the wood yonder."

"Oh, blow Gussy! Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Can't see anything of him down here," said Blake. "The chap seems to have the gift of disappearing into thin air. It's jolly curious. He must have been here, but he's gone now."

The juniors, excited and exasperated, gathered together again. They had searched the old castle on all sides, but they had found nothing. A shout from Redfern called them out from the old castle, however, and they found the New House junior scanning a deeply-indented track on the hillside.

"Look here; here it is!"

It was the footprint again.

Tom Merry gave a low whistle.

"He's taken to the wood again, then," he said, glancing in the direction indicated by the toe of the bootmark. "That's the direction I saw Gussy in. The ass will run into the cracksman, and get knocked on the head."

"Let's get on!" exclaimed Blake.

The juniors ran down the slope.

Again and again, as they entered the wood, they found the track, fresher than before, and here and there near it was the elegant footprint of D'Arcy's boots.

"Gussy is tracking him now," said Blake.

"He'll get into trouble, as sure as a gun."

"Hurry up!"

They dashed on into the wood. The footprints of D'Arcy disappeared, and nothing was seen of the swell of St. Jim's himself; but the track of the well-known boot was picked up again and again. It was always the track of a right boot, but the juniors had ceased to wonder over that peculiarity by now.

The track led through the wood, back the way they had come. The fugitive had doubled on his tracks, that was evident. The juniors hurried on. Every now and then they lost the track, and some minutes were spent in seeking it; but they always found it again, and pressed on more eagerly than ever.

They reached the edge of the wood on the high road, opposite the wall of St. Jim's, within a dozen paces of the spot where they had entered the wood to begin the search, a good two hours before.

There they halted, looking at one another in wonder.

"He's doubled right back to where he came into the wood," Tom Merry said, at last. "Of course, he thought that would throw us off the track. He must know we're tracking him."

"Not so easy to throw the St. Jim's Boy Scouts off the track!" said Blake, with some satisfaction, which was surely justifiable under the circumstances. "He's taken to the road now."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It's odd if he ventured on the high road in broad daylight," he said. "His description is known all over the county. I wonder—"

"What?" asked Redfern.

"Let's look across the road."

Tom Merry crossed the ditch by the plank, and examined the road. There was a fresh track in the mud by the end of the plank, and another close by the school wall. Then another and another, leading along the wall.

"He's gone along here, keeping close to the wall," said Figgins.

"Looks like it."

At the end of the school wall were the palings of a plantation. Tom Merry examined the palings. The tracks ceased there, and on the damp palings were plain signs of someone having climbed. The wood was scored with scratches as of nailed boots.

"He's gone into the plantation," said Tom Merry.

"And we're after him," said Blake.

"Come on!"

Tom Merry climbed the palings. He dropped down inside among the trees, and the other fellows followed him fast. Excitement was now at fever heat. It seemed almost incredible that the fugitive should dare to seek refuge in the plantation under the very walls of St. Jim's. But the tracks told their own tale. Among the firs and beeches of the plantation, the tracks were visible wherever the ground was soft and muddy. With beating hearts the juniors followed, and the trail led them by a roundabout way through the plantation, to the east wall of the school. There they stopped, at the foot of the wall, and the juniors stopped, too, thunder-struck.

There was no doubting the amazing truth!

Whoever had left that trail, had climbed the walls of St. Jim's on the east side, from the beach plantation, and was now within the precincts of the school.

CHAPTER 14.

Run to Earth.

TOM MERRY & CO. were silent with sheer amazement.

They knew that they must have been close upon the track of the unseen fugitive all the time, and they could easily guess that he had been rendered desperate by their close pursuit. But that he should adopt such a desperate, unheard-of resource as taking refuge in the precincts of the school itself was astounding.

Yet there could be no doubt. The trail stopped at the foot of the wall, and there was no sign that the fugitive had turned back.

"My hat!" said Blake, breaking a long silence. "I never heard of such nerve! The fellow is in St. Jim's—St. Jim's itself."

"He must be. Yet—"

"It's a cunning dodge," said Figgins. "Of course, he never thought that anybody would dream of looking for him in the school itself, and there are lots of old nooks and crannies in St. Jim's where a dozen men could hide. Only it wanted a jolly lot of nerve to try it in the daylight."

"Blessed if I catch on to it," said Redfern. "I say— He paused.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"I suppose there can't be any spoof about it?"

"Spoof! What do you mean?"

"Well, it seems jolly queer, that's all," said Redfern hesitatingly.

"What rot!" said Blake warmly. "We've tracked the fellow for miles, and it's been the same track all the time. How could there be any spoof about it? You're an ass!"

"Anyway, we're going to finish the bizney now," said Tom Merry. "Follow your leader."

He leaped up, and caught the top of the wall in his hands. He clambered over, and the other fellows clambered over after him. Redfern, in spite of his strange doubts, followed with the rest.

Inside the school wall at this side was a shady walk, shadowed by big elms. It was quite possible that the fugitive had climbed the wall, and dropped inside without attracting any attention. Most of the St. Jim's fellows who were not out of gates were on the playing-fields. The elm-shaded walk was quite deserted. The gravel was wet with the late rain, and in the soft ground the juniors soon picked up the trail again. There could be no more doubt, as even the doubting Redfern admitted. There, in the soft gravel close to the wall, was the imprint of the burglarious boot—the same track that had been found under the Shell dormitory windows that morning—the same track that had led them on the long trail through the wood to the old castle, and back again to the walls of St. Jim's. There it was, as clear and distinct as ever—as distinct, as Blake sagely remarked, as if the fellow had deliberately made it so to help them track him.

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There were other footprints near it, but they were not so easily discerned.

Again and again the track was picked up in the damp gravel. As the trackers came in sight of the quadrangle they were observed, and several fellows joined them, inquiring what on earth they were doing.

"Is it a game?" asked Curly Gibson, of the Third, as he came up.

"Playing follow your leader?" asked Lefevre of the Fifth.

"We're tracking the cracksman," said Blake loftily.

Lefevre stared.

"Here!" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"What rot!"

Tom Merry pointed to a track, almost at the feet of the captain of the Fifth.

"Look at that!" he said coolly.

Lefevre looked at it.

"Well, what's that?" he asked.

"That's the same track that was found under the dorm. windows this morning."

"My hat!" exclaimed Lefevre. "Honest Injun?"

"Yes. We've followed it through the wood, and then into the beech plantation, and now it's here."

"By George!"

"Here it is again!" said Blake.

"But—but the man can't be here," said Lefevre, in amazement. "Some of us would have seen him if he'd been inside the school walls in the daytime."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Curly Gibson.

The juniors turned angrily upon the fag.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Blake wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Curly.

"You young ass!"

Curly Gibson retreated. He chuckled as he departed, evidently rushing off to inform his friends of the Third of the great discoveries Tom Merry & Co. were making. He could be seen in the distance talking to Wally and a crowd of other Third-Formers, and all of them were shrieking with laughter.

"The young rotters!" growled Blake. "They'll laugh in another way when we've captured the cracksman."

"Yes, rather; let's get on."

"You're being spoofed," said Lefevre, grinning. "It's all rot! How could the giddy burglar be here? If he's here, where is he?"

"Hiding somewhere," said Tom Merry.

"That's his dodge," Blake explained. "He thinks that nobody will dream of looking for him right on the spot like this. We've routed him out of his hiding-place in the wood."

"Rats!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—rats!"

"Oh, go and eat coke," said Figgins. "Don't waste time talking to that ass, Tom Merry. Let's get on, and see where the trail leads."

And the juniors pressed on, leaving Lefevre of the Fifth laughing. He was soon seen talking to other fellows of the Fifth, and they were laughing, too. Taking no notice of their jeers, however, the burglar-hunters went on their way. There was one most probable place where a fugitive might seek a hiding-place, and that was in the old tower of St. Jim's. The old tower was in a shaky condition, and although the fellows were allowed to enter it, they were not permitted to ascend to the top of the spiral staircase. On the third storey of the tower, the staircase was barred across, and any fellow who had gone farther, and was discovered, was certain of lines, if not of a licking. If the fugitive knew of the place, what more likely spot for him to conceal himself in? And the track was found again, in the very doorway of the tower.

The juniors halted in the low, arched doorway with beating hearts. The track led inwards, but it did not lead outwards. And from the stone tower there was certainly no other exit. The rascal could not escape thence as he had done from the hut in the wood. He was fairly cornered at last.

"He's there!" said Tom Merry, with conviction.

There was a sound within.

"Hark!"

"It's somebody on the stair!" said Figgins.

"But he's coming down," muttered Redfern. "Careful! Don't collar the wrong chap again, as you did with me, you chumps!"

Tom Merry & Co. watched the lower steps of the spiral stair eagerly. Someone, certainly, was coming down. A form appeared round the curve of the staircase, and they made a movement, but it was the form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you seen him?"

D'Arcy put up his eyeglass, and surveyed the eager juniors tranquilly.

"Seen whom, deah boys?" he asked.
 "The cracksmen."
 "Wathah not!"
 "You followed the tracks here, I suppose, didn't you?" demanded Blake. "You were ahead of us on the trail."
 "Yaas; I was ahead of you, deah boy!"
 "Well, then—"
 "Have you been to the top of the tower?" asked Tom Merry.
 "No, deah boy."
 "How high did you go?"
 "Only as fah as the second stowey, Tom Mewwy. It's out of bounds to go highah, and it's wathah bad form to go out of bounds, you know."
 "Ass! What do bounds matter when it's a question of laying a criminal by the heels?" growled Jack Blake.
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Oh, seat! Come on, you chaps! We're going to have him now!"
 "He must be there," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.
 "Of course he must! Come on!"
 "Look!" exclaimed Digby.
 On the lowest step of the tower was the print of a muddy boot. The stair was dry and dusty, and the muddy footprint was quite plain to see. It was the old familiar footprint again.

a key in it—the juniors remembered the big, heavy iron key that belonged to it. They did not doubt that it had been shifted to the inside. At all events, the door was locked.
 "He's in there!" said Tom Merry.
 "Cornered at last!" said Redfern.
 Tom Merry knocked on the door.
 "You are run down, you scoundrel!" he called out, through the big, old-fashioned keyhole. "You had better give in!"
 There was no reply.
 "Obstinate brute!" said Monty Lowther. "He wants to make us fancy that he isn't there. If he isn't, what's the door locked for?"
 Knock, knock, knock!
 "Open the door, you rascal!"
 Silence.
 "We shall have to break in the lock somehow," said Tom Merry, looking rather doubtfully, however, at the ponderous door.
 "Better have Kildare up here first," said Blake. "It will make a fearful row, and the Head might be waxy if we bust it in."
 Tom Merry nodded.
 "Good!" he said. "It's pretty plain that the villain doesn't mean to surrender, and Kildare will be useful if it comes to a serap."

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The following readers have been awarded handsome prizes in connection with THE GEM LIBRARY "Coupon" Competition:

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J. W. Turner, Denver Station, near Downham Market, Norfolk	Electric torch.
E. Phillips, 124, Bothwell Street, Glasgow	Electric torch.
F. A. de Jezaos, 3, Blythswood Drive, Glasgow	Electric torch.
R. Lane, Felhampton, Upton Bishop, Ross-on-Wye	Electric torch.
P. Gill, 8, South Terrace, Esh Winning, Durham	Electric torch.
E. Black, 38, South Constitution Street, Aberdeen	Steam vertical engine.
A. Anthony, 86, Neville Street, Riverside, Cardiff	Penknife.
Miss S. Stewart, 19, Melville Street, Perth, Scotland	Box of chocolates.
F. Taylor, 229, Whittington Road, Bowes Park	Box of paints.
C. Jones, Junr., 6, Grange Road, Plaistow, E.	Cricket ball.
W. E. Kime, Post Office, Stopsley, Luton	Harmless pistol.
E. de Kreber, 111, Hewitt Road, Green Lanes, Harringay, N.	Set of chessmen.
H. Bell, 79, Edmund Street, Camberwell, London, S.E.	Mouth organ.
G. Bunyan, High Street, Melrose, Scotland	Mouth organ.
Miss E. Cross, 69, Aldbourne Road, Coventry	Dog collar.
Miss Josephine Hanrahan, Castlegrove, Tuam, Co. Galway, Ireland	Brooch.
H. Bolt, 4, Burstow Terrace, Windsor Park, Tottenham, N.	Penknife.

"He's here!"
 "Come on!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped out of the old tower, smiling. But the juniors had no eyes for him. Grasping their cudgels firmly, they pressed on up the narrow spiral stair.

CHAPTER 15.

Amazing.

THE juniors reached the second storey of the tower. There was a wide landing, on the other side of which the spiral stair recommenced. On the landing were two doors, and one of them was closed. Outside the closed door, clearly legible in the dust, was the final track of the boot they had followed so far. Further it did not go. On the upper stairs the dust was undisturbed. It was clear that whoever had made that track, had stopped at the second storey, and the closed door told the rest.

Outside the door the juniors halted, breathing hard. Tom Merry tried the door, and found that it was fast. There was a ponderous lock on the door, and there should have been

"We'll keep guard here, in case he makes a break, while you fetch him."
 "Good!"

Tom Merry hurried down the dusky stair again. Outside the tower a crowd had gathered, of fellows of all Forms. The Third Form fags were grinning joyously, as if they were in possession of some excellent joke not known to the rest of the school. But most of the fellows seemed amused. There was evidently little faith in the genuineness of the discovery made by Tom Merry & Co.

Indisputable as the evidence seemed to the trackers themselves, the other fellows did not seem to be convinced. Humorous remarks greeted Tom Merry as he appeared in the arched doorway of the tower.

"Got him?"
 "Is he in your pocket, Tom Merry?"
 "Have you slaughtered him?"
 "Rats!" said Tom Merry. "We've cornered him, and he's locked himself in the room on the second storey."
 "You don't mean to say that he's really there?" exclaimed Thompson, of the Shell.

"Yes, I do, ass!"
 "Have you seen him?" yelled a dozen voices.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S MASQUERADE!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co, at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I can't see through a locked oaken door six inches thick!" said Tom Merry sarcastically. "If I could I should have seen him. But my eyesight isn't quite strong enough for that. But he's there."

"I'll believe that when I see him!" said Pratt, of the Fourth. "If he's got into the tower, how is it somebody didn't see him?"

"Oh, he sneaked in, you know!"

"Rats!"

"Faith, and it sounds too thick, intirely!" remarked Reilly.

"I guess it's steep!" said Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, with a grin. "Where are you going, Merry—to fetch the police?"

"I'm going to fetch Kildare."

"He's on the footer-ground. They've finished, I think."

Tom Merry hurried away to the football-ground. He left a great crowd surging round the tower of St. Jim's. Fellows were swarming from all quarters to join in, as they heard of what was going on. There was a ceaseless buzz of voices, commenting upon the amazing news that the burglar was cornered in the tower, and there were many chuckles.

If the cracksmen were really found there, it would certainly come as a surprise to the greater part of the fellows. And yet—if the trail had really led there—there must be something in it, Lumley-Lumley remarked. It was certainly very curious, at all events.

Curly Gibson and Wally were chuckling together. Wally's chuckles were punctuated with sneezes, but he did not seem to mind his cold now. Apparently he was enjoying the siege of the old tower. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had gone into the School House, but nearly everybody else belonging to St. Jim's seemed to have joined the thronging crowd round the tower.

Kildare had just changed after playing football, and was chatting with Darrel and Rusden, of his own Form, when Tom Merry came panting up. The seniors were already aware that something very unusual was proceeding in the quadrangle, and they looked inquiringly at the hero of the Shell.

"What's the row over there on the east side?" asked Darrel. "Some of you rascals exploring the tower out of bounds?"

"No," gasped Tom Merry. "It's the cracksmen!"

"The what?"

"The cracksmen!"

Kildare looked at him sternly.

"If you are trying to play a First-of-April joke on the Sixth, Tom Merry, you are going the right way to work to get a licking!" he exclaimed.

"It's not a joke, Kildare," said Tom Merry earnestly.

"It's honest Injun! We've been tracking the villain down, and he's been dodging us, and we've routed him out of the old hut in the wood, and out of the ruined castle on the moor. He doubled back to St. Jim's, and now he's hidden himself in the room on the second floor in the tower, and locked himself in."

Kildare jumped.

"Are you sure, Tom Merry?" he ejaculated.

"Quite sure!"

"You've seen him?"

"No; he kept out of sight. But I saw tracks——"

"The same tracks that were under the dormitory windows?" asked Darrel.

"Yes. We followed him by them, and they lead right into the tower, and up to the door of the room on the second storey."

Kildare whistled softly.

"Blessed if I quite understand this," he said. "It's jolly extraordinary. But I suppose we ought to look into it, if it's not a jape."

"Honour bright, Kildare!"

"Well, I'll come."

The three seniors hurried with Tom Merry to the old tower. There was a buzz in the crowd as they appeared, and a sound of laughter.

"He's being spoofed, Kildare!"

"First of April, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare took no notice of the remarks. He entered the tower, followed by Darrel and Rusden and Tom Merry, and ascended the spiral staircase to the second landing, where the burglar-hunters were awaiting his arrival anxiously. Kildare looked at the door, and tried it with his hand.

"It's locked!" said Blake.

Kildare cast a sharp glance round upon the juniors.

"Look here, you kids, I know it's the first of April," he said. "This door may be locked on the inside, but the key isn't in the lock. It may have been locked on the outside, and the key taken away by a practical joker. Do you all say that this is not a jape, and that you have really followed the tracks here?"

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"THE SCHOOLBOY OUTCAST!" is the title of the splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on sale. Price—One Penny.

"Yes, Kildare."

"Honour bright!" said Blake.

Kildare could not doubt their earnestness. If there was any practical joke in the matter, they were the victims of it, not the perpetrators, that was clear. They were all in deadly earnest.

Kildare nodded.

"Very well," he said. "Buzz off and fetch Taggles, one of you, and tell him to bring his tools for forcing a lock!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

And he dashed off.

Tom Merry pointed out the track of the famous foot in the dust of the staircase to Kildare, and the captain of St. Jim's could not help being impressed. It was the same track that he had examined under the dormitory windows in the morning, and if it was genuine then, why not now? And yet—the locked room was very silent—it was not easy to believe that a desperate criminal was lurking there. But soon all would be known, for in five minutes Blake returned with Taggles, the school porter, and his tools.

Taggles was not in a good humour; his surly expression was evidence enough that he suspected a First of April jape. But he had to obey Kildare.

"Break in that lock, Taggles!" said the St. Jim's captain.

"Werry well, Master Kildare."

The lock, ponderous as it was, was old and rusty. Taggles drove an iron chisel between the door and the jamb, and dragged on it. There was a loud-sounding crack as the lock yielded.

Crack!

Kildare drew a deep breath. The juniors grasped their cudgels, and stood ready. Taggles hastily backed away. If there was danger in the room, Taggles had no intention whatever of bearing the brunt of it.

"The lock's broken, Master Kildare," he said, from the rear.

"Very good, Taggles!"

Kildare, with a firm hand, threw the heavy door open.

"Follow me!"

The captain of St. Jim's strode into the room. Tom Merry & Co. dashed in after him, with cudgels uplifted.

They were ready for the foe!

But no foe was to be seen!

Kildare's brows contracted into a frown, and a gasp of amazement and dismay escaped the juniors.

The room was empty!

CHAPTER 16.

Who'd Have Thought It?

TOM MERRY & CO. stared about them blankly.

There was no one in the room!

The little barred window in the corner would hardly have afforded passage for a sparrow; it was quite certain that the fugitive had not escaped that way. Then where was he? He was not in the room! The April sunshine fell in golden bars through the little window, and showed up every corner of the bare, unfurnished room. The man was not there! Had he vanished into thin air? For a moment the dumbfounded juniors were almost prepared to believe that he had!

"Great Scott!"

"Gone!"

"He—he can't have been here!" stammered Blake. "He couldn't get out, excepting by the door. And it was locked! What does it mean?"

"It's—it's magic!" muttered Digby.

Kildare frowned darkly. He did not think there was magic in it, though for the moment it seemed so to the thunder-stricken juniors. Kildare strode across the room, and pointed to a large, ragged, muddy boot that lay in the middle of it.

The juniors gazed at it. Their voices seemed to have left them; they made no sound. The captain of St. Jim's looked round at them angrily, then, as he saw their dismayed faces, his own relaxed a little.

"Is that the boot that made the tracks?" he asked.

"Oh!"

"Measure it," said Darrel, grinning.

Tom Merry silently measured the boot. It was exact! It was a boot belonging to the right foot, and it was the exact size, and there was the worn-down heel, and the patch on the sole that the trackers had come to know so well! What did it mean? Had the man been there, and vanished into space, leaving only a boot behind? Their brains reeled as they tried to think it out.

"That is the boot?" asked Kildare grimly.

"Ye-e-es; I—I think so!"

"You young asses!"

"But I—I don't understand!" stammered Tom Merry. "How did it get here? It's the boot that made the tracks under the dorm. window last night—or one of them—there

were left foot tracks as well under the dorm. window. I don't understand this. How did the man get out, and how did he come to leave a boot here behind him?"

"You young fathead!" roared Kildare. "He hasn't been here at all!"

"What?"

"Not been here?"

"Oh, draw it mild, Kildare!"

"He's not been here, you silly young asses! It's a jape—a first of April jape, I suppose, though I can't see who did it, or how it was done. I—"

"It—it can't be! I tell you we followed the tracks all the way—"

"And they led up here—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Darrel, who had taken the famous boot and was looking at it. "There's a letter in this."

"My hat!"

Darrel had taken a folded paper out of the boot. It had been pinned upon the inside. He unfolded it in amazement, and looked at it, and then he simply staggered. The boot fell from his hand with a crash to the floor, and Darrel reeled against the wall, gasping with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare jerked the note from Darrel's hand, and read it. Then he burst into a roar, and the tears of laughter streamed down his cheeks.

The juniors were amazed and exasperated.

"Show us the letter!" yelled Jack Blake.

"Hand it over!" roared Tom Merry, making a grasp at the letter. Kildare was laughing too much to reply. Tom Merry caught the letter from his hand, and the juniors crowded round him to read it as he held it up. They were able to read it at last, and this is what they read:

"April 1.

"Dear Boys,—I offered to take you into my scheme yesterday, and you treated me with the grossest disrespect. You all said that I couldn't possibly take you in on the first of April.

"I rather think I have done it!

"The foot-prints outside the Shell dormitory windows last night were made by my minor, Wally, who put on an old pair of boots discarded by Taggles for the purpose.

"When you started to search for the burglar to track him down, I went with you, with one of the boots in my coat pocket. I made the tracks that you followed through the wood, keeping a little ahead of you all the time for that purpose.

"I rather think I have done you, dear boys!

"I trust you will bear no malice, and will all join me in a feed now that the search is over, just to show that you can take a little joke.

"Yours always, A. A. D'ARCY."

Tom Merry read the letter, and then it fluttered from his hand. Somebody else caught it up and read it aloud. The juniors looked at one another. For a time they could not even speak. The stupendousness of the jape had taken their breath away.

This, then, was the jape Arthur Augustus had wished to propound to them the previous night; this was the wheeze he had offered in Study No. 6, and then to the Terrible Three, and then to Figgins & Co., and having being laughed to scorn by all of them, he had proceeded to work it against them, and to take them all in, in a body!

It seemed almost incredible. The proposal to follow the trail of the burglar, and to hunt him down, had been simply playing into the hands of the practical joker. No wonder Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had refused to take the matter as seriously as they desired, when he knew that the tracks outside the windows had been made by Wally with a pair of old boots on, and that the tracks in the wood had been made by himself, with the old boot he was carrying in his coat pocket for the purpose. That accounted for the fact that the track showed only the right boot—D'Arcy had not even troubled to take the pair of them with him. And then he had laid the trail back to St. Jim's, and led them to the school again, and finally deposited the boot with the letter in it in the room in the tower, and locked the door and walked away, with the key in his pocket, of course. They had actually passed him leaving the tower, as they entered it; and they had never guessed! But then, how could they have guessed? They had been taken in all along the line.

The juniors did not laugh. They did not feel like laughing just then. Monty Lowther held the note in his hand, gazing at it blankly, while Kildare and Darrel staggered helplessly out of the tower, weak with laughter. A shout of inquiry greeted them from the crowd outside, but the seniors could not reply to questions—they had no breath left.

"Have you found him?"

"Where is he?"

"Where's the giddy burglar?"

"Ask Tom Merry!" gasped Kildare. "I can't speak! Ha, ha, ha! You can ask the kids in there! Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the fellows into the tower. Lumley-Lumley was the first in the room where Tom Merry & Co. were standing in dismay. He caught sight of the note in Monty Lowther's hand, and understood. He caught the note from Lowther's fingers, and rushed downstairs with it.

"Here, give that back!" shouted Tom Merry.

But Lumley-Lumley was already reading it out to the crowd.

Yells of laughter rose.

"Well, we're done!" said Tom Merry at last. "It was a jape of that bouncer Gussy! Who would have thought it?"

"By Jove—who would?"

"And we told him he couldn't take anybody in!" murmured Figgins.

"My hat!"

"The cheeky young villain! We'll give him the bumping of his life for this, anyway!" exclaimed Digby wrathfully.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Redfern. "Come on—let's have him out!"

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors tramped furiously down the staircase, and wild yells of laughter greeted them from the crowd in the quad. All the fellows, of all Forms, School House and New House alike, were shrieking with merriment over the first of April burglar-hunt.

"Here they come!"

"Have you caught him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First of April!"

Tom Merry & Co. tramped through the crowd with crimson faces, making directly for the School House. The crowd followed them, yelling and jeering, and reciting parts of the letter D'Arcy had left in the boot. One roar of laughter seemed to sweep across the quadrangle from the old tower to the School House. As they drew near to the house, a well-known voice hailed them from above. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the window of Study No. 6, and his eyeglass gleamed in his eye as he gazed urbanely down upon the excited crowd.

"Gentlemen—"

"You rotter!" roared Figgins.

"You ass!"

"You bouncer!"

"You spoofer!"

"Gentlemen and deah boys," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Pway listen to me for a minute. I have locked the door of this study, and bawwicaded it with all the furniture, so you cannot possibly get at me. If you are willin' to make it pax, I am willin' to ovahlook your gwoss diswepsect to me yestabday, now that I have pproved to you that I can take you in quite easily—"

"You—you—you—"

"Pway take it smiling, deah boys, and come up and have a feed, instead of gettin' watty," suggested Arthur Augustus. "I am quite willin' to be fwends."

The juniors looked at D'Arcy, and looked at one another. The crowd round them were still laughing, and certainly they would not make the fellows laugh any the less by ragging the swell of St. Jim's. It occurred to them that it would be more sensible, and more sportsmanlike, to take the matter in a good humour. Tom Merry had already recovered his temper. He burst into a laugh.

"Gussy's right!" he exclaimed. "It's no good feeling soro about it—and it was a jolly good jape! Make it pax."

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm hungry—"

"Oh, all right," grunted Blake. "But—"

"Is it pax, deah boys?"

"Yes."

"Vewy good. Pway come up—I've got a weally wippin' feed, and I'm sure you must be hungry."

They were! They had not noticed it in the excitement of the chase, but they were certainly very hungry, and when they crowded into Study No. 6, and found what a really royal spread the swell of St. Jim's had prepared, they were glad that they had made it pax!

Arthur Augustus did not crow over his victory, and ere long, under the influence of the good cheer, Tom Merry & Co. were able to laugh heartily themselves over the great jape with which the swell of St. Jim's had celebrated the historic date, and caused them to be pointed out by the whole school for some time to come as Gussy's April Fools.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete story of the chums of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled: "Tom Merry's Masquerade," by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

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CROOKS—The ship's cook.

JOSEPH JACKSON or **SHOREDITCH JOSE**—A Cockney member of the crew, whose constant companion is a game bantam named the *Smacker*.

TEDDY MORGAN—Ship's engineer.

WILLIAM TOOTER—The hairy first mate.

The *Foamwitch* is on an expedition with the object of exploring the strange land which is believed to lie beyond the barrier of eternal ice near the South Pole.

As soon as the first land is reached the construction of the aeroplane, *Wings of Gold*—which has been carried in pieces on the *Foamwitch*—is proceeded with, and in it begins a wonderful voyage into the heart of the Antarctic.

Fearful creatures, thought to be extinct since prehistoric

times, are encountered when the adventurers reach a mysterious mountain country never before trodden by the foot of man.

Once the aeroplane is wrecked; but, by dint of much ingenuity and hard work, is repaired, and her head is turned towards the North. A terrific wind, however, springs up, and *Wings of Gold* is forced through a ravine in the mountains, and the crew find themselves flying over a large inland lake, surrounded by the vast, unknown mountains. They encounter such fearful creatures here that they decide to go back and return to the *Foamwitch*; but investigation reveals that the ravine is now blocked up, and they are prisoners in that vast enclosure.

Their tinned provisions have all gone bad, but the larder is replenished by Lance, who shoots a huge elk. While Crooks is occupied in peeling potatoes, the professor creates a terrific uproar by hurling one of the vegetables at the *Smacker*. The missile, of course, goes wide, hitting Tooter, and in a moment all is confusion, the professor, Crooks, and Tooter going down together amidst a hail of half-peeled potatoes.

(Now go on with the story.)

Crooks Has a Bite, and Tooter a Surprise—An Amazing Discovery.

Lance roared, and Morgan laughed softly. Wiping his chin, Crooks got up and fixed his eye on Mr. Tooter.

"Why not?" he growled. "We must all die sometimes. Was you ready to die? Why not? I was ready to 'elp you, Bill. Cheer up, and take that! Was it tender and nice?"

"Wow!" yelled Tooter, as Crooks' doubled fist pounded against his ribs. "Blackbirds! What did you do that for?"

"For fun. Why not?" growled the cook. "You mopped me, and I was going to mop you. This was another."

"Ouch!" gasped Tooter.

Then he got hold of the mop, and made it whizz round the angry cook's ribs and features in a fashion that made Mr. Crooks beg for quarter.

"Ach, dot teufel of ein fowl, he shall die!" groaned Von Haagel. "He is der very worry of der life of me. Phew! I have swallow and drenched myself mit der poisonous stuff! Shaf! You have der pig, fat head, Crooks!"

Crooks rubbed his ribs. Tooter had not been gentle with the mop. The cook seemed inclined to retaliate as he wiped his face, and Maurice wanted to know what it all meant.

When the matter had all been explained, and Crooks and Tooter ordered to be good or pitched overboard, Teddy Morgan went forward. He noticed that one of the suspensory screws was working badly. Without troubling to send for a ladder, he swarmed up the column, only to slide down swiftly and blow his fingers.

"Bearings as hot as hot, Mr. Maurice," he said. "It's a smashed ball, I expect, and if you don't watch it, it will cut clean into the cone."

"Anything very bad, Teddy?"

"Oh, no! We'll have to take the screw off. I'll get at it at once. A stitch in time saves a jolly lot more than nine."

In two minutes the engineer was perched on the ladder with a wrench in his hand and a hammer in his pocket, working and whistling. He removed the screw, and found as he had conjectured, that one of the highly-tempered steel balls, on which the screw spun as easily as a bicycle-wheel, had splintered.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY OUTCAST!"

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The bather splashed and revelled and felt deliciously cool. Crooks, with a pipe so short that it must have steadily cooked the end of his long nose every time he lighted it, fixed his eye on the fishing-line, and kept going to sleep and waking in fits and starts.

"Get my pipe, Crooks!" called Lance. "It's in the pocket of my pyjama jacket."

Lance lay back chin-deep luxuriously, and Crooks returned to his line. The aeronef was just drifting, but very slowly.

"Why not?" growled Crooks, his thumb and finger on the line.

Something had taken the bait, but not violently. Something was struggling at the end of the line.

"It was a bite," said the cook, in disgust; "but it was not big enough to put in a pickle-jar. Why not? Come up and show your ugly face."

It came up, but it was somewhat heavier than the cook imagined it to be.

It lay on the deck a shapeless mass of greyish-white jelly, the size of a man's head, quivering and shaking.

"William," growled the cook, his eye on the capture, "what was this? Why not?"

He swung the thing over and dumped it down near the tank.

"A jellyfish!" said Tooter. "Bonny blackbirds! Don't touch it. Them things sting!"

"It's a rummy kind of jellyfish," said Lance. "Give it a poke, and see if it'll unravel. It seems all wrapped up in a lump."

Tooter prodded it with a hammer. The yell he gave nearly brought Morgan down the ladder on his head. The lump of jelly suddenly took shape and came to life. With a hideous writhe, and a vicious snapping, it sprang erect on eight squirming legs and pumped a stream of black liquid into Tooter's face.

"A cuttlefish!" said Lance, screaming with laughter. "I mean a little octopus. Ha, ha, ha! Oh, don't hurt it!"

The cook gave it one kick that sent it, still attached to the line, flying half-way across the deck. Then, without a vestige of a smile on his face, he turned to the spluttering spitting, and dancing Mr. Tooter and growled:

"Why not? England was a free country, and Englishmen was free. He can dye his hair and whiskers if he don't like the nat'ral shade. They was both his own. Black was his fancy. He was going in for mourning for the cuttlefish. Why not, pretty pet, why not?"

He hammered the fish to pulp and rebaited his line, while Tooter was clearing his eyes, whiskers and hair. Morgan's eyes twinkled, and Lance roared. The moment he could see Tooter rushed at the heap of battered jelly and kicked it viciously. It shot into the air and struck one of the screws, skinned off, with a tremendous circular movement, like a top, and wrapped itself round the neck of Crooks, who was looking the other way.

"Why not?" howled Tooter, imitating Crooks' voice. "He can wear whatever kind of collar he likes. England was a free country!"

Then he dived behind the bath just in time to avoid the unpleasant, clammy mass which went overboard. Try as he would, Tooter could not remove the stain. He was quite piebald, and presented such an extraordinary appearance that they found it quite impossible to look at him without grinning.

"Isn't it a bit extraordinary to find those chaps here, sir?" asked Morgan. "I thought they were quite modern brutes."

"Not a bit," said Lance. "There were billions of them in the pre-Adamite seas. That beggar was quite a baby. There are some big ones knocking about now in some parts of the world, if the yarns are true. I saw the beak of one in the professor's museum, and it was two feet long. How are you getting on?"

"Finished, sir."

"That's good. You work too hard, Teddy; but I don't see how we can stop you, unless we put you in irons."

"We must appeal to his feelings," said Fordham, smiling.

"I don't think the rascal has got any."

"Oh, yes, he has!" said Maurice. "Teddy, old chap, I'm going to appeal. Don't work so hard. It may sound a bit selfish, but what will become of us if you knuckle under, or knock yourself up? You must want a jolly good rest. Do be sensible and take things easy! You worry us!"

Morgan only laughed and promised. It was easy enough to promise now that he had Crooks to fall back on.

"I'll look after myself, no fear!" he said. "How's the glass?"

"Steady enough," said Maurice.

They caught sight of the fat figure of the professor. Von Haegel was watching the shore pathetically, and longing to be there. Von Haegel was suffering more than any of them dreamed of. He was thirsting for knowledge as a shipwrecked mariner, clinging to a spar under the burning sun,

thirsts for water. The agonies of Tantalus were nothing to his. Around him lay the land of wonders, but he was forbidden to set a foot on it. Barely a specimen had been obtained. There were treasures everywhere, but he was not permitted to put out his hand and take them. It was cruel.

His woebegone face touched Lance. He put his arm affectionately across the professor's shoulders.

"You don't look up to the mark, dad," he said.

"No, dear lad, I am not happy!" sighed Von Haegel. "I am like der ragged starving man wid his nose pressed against der window of ein shop full of good things to eat. Ach, it is dreadful. I starve and I starve! Der vood is dere, but I gannod touch id. Ho, they shall laugh at us! They shall say dot we were gowards and afraid. Dear lads, let me go but for yun single ten minutes!"

"I wish I dare, dad! I will go with you if the others will let us. I'll go and ask."

Again Teddy Morgan said "No!" and Maurice sided with him.

"It's no use, dad," said Lance. "They won't hear of it."

"Oh, der tyrants!" moaned the professor. "Ach, no! Not tyrants! They are dear, brave fellows! Ach, but it is sad!"

Lance sympathised with the great scholar, and Von Haegel shook his head wearily and applied his eye to the great telescope.

"Puh!" he gasped. "Der air is so damp, dot when I haf looked for ein second der lens is all steamy, and I haf to rub and rub and rub. Himmel! Shaf! Am I mad? What?"

He was trembling. Once more he put his eye to the instrument, and then in a hoarse, strained voice, he called:

"Lance, you shall come here!"

"You bet!" cried Lance. "What have you spotted?"

"Shaf! I gannod tell or belief!" puffed Von Haegel.

"Do not put your hand on him, but choost peep!"

"I can't see a silly bit," said Lance. "Your focus doesn't suit my eyesight."

"Den I screw, and you say when it is proper."

"Right!" said Lance. "Whew!"

The telescope was piled and pointed high up one of the wooded slopes. Lance was pretty well started enough to have jumped out of his boots. What riveted his attention was a long, steep wall of great boulders, and a whiter streak above that looked like a paved road.

Could the wall be one of Nature's freaks—one of her grotesque efforts as it were to imitate the handiwork of man? It must be that. He screwed the telescope up till the picture became sharp and clear, the professor puffing and snorting behind with impatience.

"By Jove!" muttered Lance. "That wall is fifty feet high. My stars, if—"

"Let me again look, dear lad!"

Lance turned and swept the perspiration from his brow.

"A freak of Nature, dad?" he asked.

"Nefer! Nature can build, for she is der greatest builder of all, but Nature lofe ein variety. She nefer bullded dot wall—nefer—nefer! I swear dot!"

"Then," gasped Lance, "the place is inhabited?"

"Phut! Dot need not be so. It has been inhabited, for walls did not come mit our hands. Dot wall may be thousand of years old, and der race dot build dot may be extinct. Ach, vunderful, beautiful, suplime! Professor Sadfern and der rest laugh at me when I say dot primitive man lived mit ichtyosaurus and der pterodactyl. Shaf! Dey shall eat their words! Oh, beautiful, glorious!"

Fordham, Morgan, and Crooks had been attracted by the long grey streak, and glasses were up. As they came closer their wonder increased. It was certainly a wall, and each stone of it weighed tons. The stones were neatly cemented together with great skill. Here and there were signs of decay, some of the masses had slipped, leaving gaping holes. A touch sent the aeronef soaring up.

"By thunder, an aqueduct!" cried Morgan.

The Handiwork of Man—Down the Great Aqueduct—The First Mastodon—In a Tight Corner—The Denizen of the Dark Tunnel—Man or Monkey?

It had been an aqueduct once, and water still lay in pools and ponds along its great course. The mud was puddled by vast footprints where great monsters had come down to drink. Breathless with astonishment, they gazed at this relic of civilisation.

"This means a town somewhere," said Fordham. "By Jove, what grand work! How did they get those stones up there?"

"How did they get those big bricks to the tops of the pyramids?" said Lance. "Nobody knows."

"Pyramids!" shouted Von Haegel. "Phut! Der pyramids, they are children in short frocks; no, they are

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babies mit long frocks. Ach, peautiful—peautiful! Hoch! I cheer! Hooray!"

Then he kicked down the telescope accidentally, but nobody grumbled. The twin walls of the mighty aqueduct stretched straight away for miles. Lost in wonder, they skimmed along. In places dust lay deep on crumbling masses of masonry that had crashed inwards years before, and then they reached a gap where more than a thousand yards were missing.

"Der earthquake," said Von Haagel, "or der volcano. Ach, what builders—what builders! They were giants then. Stop! Whoa, Morgan, you shall stop. Oh der long pillar!"

"Pull her up, Teddy!" shouted Maurice, as excited as the professor.

Both driving-screws were reversed. Tooter and Crooks pushed out a couple of poles, to keep the gallant little aeronef clear of the wall in case a puff of wind should cause her to sway.

"Grab the madman!" shouted Maurice, as Von Haagel flopped down on his knees and thrust his head under the rail. "We don't want a case of accidental suicide."

Lance seized the professor. Sunk flush with the wall, but towering high above it, was a smooth pillar, overgrown with greyish fungus. Von Haagel's eyes almost started out of his head.

"There was an inscription!" he roared. "Ah, but I cannot see!"

"There's something on it, by Jove! It's a fact," said Lance.

"So there is."

Von Haagel would have torn away the fungus with his nails had he been near enough. Morgan spoke to Tooter, and William ran the hose along.

"Stand clear, sir—stand clear, please!"

Under the steady stream from the hose the fungus peeled away from the dripping stone, and Van Haagel's eyes stood out more prominently.

"Mammoths' heads!" said Maurice.

There was no inscription on the pillar, but a perpendicular row of cleverly-executed designs. Though somewhat weather-worn, the lines showing the curved tusks and shaggy manes were perfectly distinct. Von Haagel sighed deeply.

"Ach, it is no good!" he said, shaking his fist at the pillar. "Pig, you do not tell the truth!"

"What has it done to ruffle you, dad?"

"The thing ought to be ashamed of itself," said Lance, winking at Maurice. "You see, it gives dad's theories a mighty smite right on the head. Everybody knows that primitive man used to treat his wives and kids to rides on the mammoth for four chunks of rock a time. But everybody knows ditto that the gay and giddy mammoth didn't show its great hoofs until the ichthyosaurus had cleared off the map for good; and, therefore, that little bit of carving makes this whole building some million years younger than dad wanted it to be."

"Pig, you have made me ein liar!" said the professor.

"Call him names and heave a brick at him," grinned Lance. "He can't hit you back."

"Never mind, dad!" said Fordham. "We'll try and find a man just to prove your theory."

Von Haagel was bitterly disappointed. The mammoth, grand sire of the elephant tribe, did not make his appearance until quite a recent date in the history of this planet. Bits of slate and shell containing drawings of the brutes scratched on them have been found in many caves, and vast quantities of its tusks and bones are constantly being unearthed. The professor's whole interest had vanished.

"I shall go to mine bed and read mine 'Shagsbeare,'" he said disgustedly. "Ach, you are ein untruthful pig!"

Wings of Gold went gliding gently along the aqueduct.

"This is a marvellous thing, Morry," said Lance, with increasing wonder. "They must have employed scores of thousands of men to build that, and used some first-class machinery. Can you imagine it full of water? The Oceanic could sail down it without scraping its paint."

"Yes, and two more ships abreast. It's a staggerer, and it must have been a wopping great city to need an aqueduct the size of this. Jove, if ever we get home, won't these make the people stare!" he added, levelling his camera.

"My stars! See that?"

Lance shivered and pointed to the left wall. A shining, wriggling thing was crawling over one of the boulders—a centipede as long as his leg. It dived into a crevice with a hiss and a rattle as the aeronef glided past.

"A fifty-legged 'un, why not?" growled Crooks. "I was glad I had not to keep him in boots. Ha, ha!"

"It's a pity you can't keep yourself in brains," said Mr. Tooter.

The aqueduct curved in among the towering trees that

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met overhead in a green, feathery arch. The cautious engineer slowed down at once.

"I don't care for it, by thunder!" he said.

"Go through, Teddy!" said Fordham. "There's lots of room, and nothing to hurt us."

"I'll take your word for it, sir," said the engineer; "but they do things in too big a style for my tastes. If the monkeys are in proportion to other things, the cocoanuts ought to be the size of eighteen-gallon casks. Suppose they shied one at us. By thunder, we'd be scuttled as badly as if we bumped into a torpedo!"

"I was fond of cocoanuts if they were milky," growled Mr. Crooks; "but was not fond of having them chucked at me. It will be all right. The monkeys will be pals. Why? They will see Tooter, and recognise their brother. Perhaps they will make him their king. Ha, ha!"

"You lean, elongated, wall-eyed penn'orth of bootlace!" spluttered Tooter.

"Order, there!" said Maurice. "You two are always at it, and it's getting tiring. Drive ahead, Teddy!"

Lance shouldered the big elephant-gun as the aeronef glided under the trees. If men had inhabited, or did inhabit, this strange country, why not monkeys? The same idea seemed to strike Maurice, for he took his rifle from the rack, and Mr. Crooks sat down and searched the foliage with his big, keen eye.

"There was nuts and no bird-nests," he growled; "and there was no monkeys, barring William, who was tame. Why not?"

There was a crackling and rending sound that made Morgan dash to the levers. A shower of fronds and twigs came pouring down, and one of the trees lashed, swayed, and toppled as if some giant had snapped it in halves. It dropped behind the aeronef into the aqueduct. A trunk, a massive head, and two curved tusks appeared in the gap, and a shrill trumpeting came shooting down the tunnel.

"A mastodon!" shouted Lance, firing hurriedly.

Whether he missed or hit he could not tell, for the aeronef drove round another curve, and they saw a sheer grey wall ahead, and a black, yawning circle.

It was too late to stop her.

"Lights! Lights!" yelled the engineer, reversing the screws and clutching the wheel.

All was dark. The builders of the aqueduct had carried it clean through the heart of the cliff.

It was as black as the pit, and the suspensory screws roared deafeningly. Would they strike? It seemed an eternity before the searchlight sent a silver beam into the gloom and the hissing arc-lamps were flashing on the flinty walls and towering roof. Below them was water.

"That was a bad corner, Teddy, but your driving was good," growled the voice of Crooks.

Slowly the rear screw began to churn. Lance caught at the rail. He saw a black wave, its crest tipped with silver, heave itself and roll across. Then a roar thundered through the tunnel, and it was flung back, multiplied by the echoes, and a smother of spray lashed the aeronef's keel.

"We'll have to go on," groaned Morgan, through his teeth. "I can't turn her, and I daren't reverse her without a light aft."

Swish! A second wave licked her plates. Tooter was white. Even above the bellowing of the dreadful thing they had invaded, Crooks heard the engineer shout, and rushed to the searchlight.

"Get behind and shoot! Scare it! There's no room! We'll be swamped!"

Lance and Maurice slid through the uprights in the bright glare. The water boiled and rose in a black ridge, and the ridge swept towards them. The awful denizen of the tunnel was in pursuit. Two luminous circles shone through the ridge of water; they were the creature's great, glaring eyes.

The water was flung up, and a long snout, gnarled and knotted, broke through the spray. The elephant-gun flashed and hurled its heavy bullet. The next instant there was a deluge of spray that drenched the decks, and a wave surged down out of the gloom and struck the aeronef astern.

They felt her rock and shiver, and her stern rose. She dropped back evenly, and Crooks blew his nose.

"There was just four inches between them screws and the roof," he growled. "Why not? Four inches is a lot."

Wails and hisses and the sound of water being beaten to a froth rang loud above the shrieking of the screws.

Lance had checked the horrible monster; but the horror of those moments was never forgotten. Had the fierce brute of the darkness a mate? How long was the tunnel? Had it an outlet at all, or had its roof caved in and blocked up the way? The thought of attempting to return was more hideous than going on. They could not hope that horrible brute was dead, and they dare not face it again.

Morgan had not flinched; but if Crooks had felt the

engineer's pulse just then, he would have found it rather more unsteady than usual.

"Shaf!" puffed a voice. "What ein old sleepy head I shall be. I sleep und I sleep until id is dark, and mine vatch he tell me it is but vive o'clock. But he lie to me, like dot teufel of ein stone!"

Von Haegel imagined, on seeing the lights, that he had been asleep for hours. He was always a remarkably heavy sleeper.

"Oh, we're only taking a run through the tunnel of the aqueduct, dad," said Lance. "It was Teddy's idea; quite an inspiration. He did it quite on the spur of the moment."

"What? Himmel! You are mean rascals!" cried the professor. "Ach, you are most mean! You fly through der tunnel in der dark to try to break der necks of you, and you not let me go ashore in der daylight. Ach, it is too much of ein choke!"

"But dad—"

"Easy, easy—very easy! Why not?" growled Crooks. "There was a twist."

Morgan stole round the curve as cautiously as a cat picks her way over a puddly road. A big white eye stared at them. They were through, and cheering, with the two walls of the aqueduct trending their way before them, and the blue lake shimmering thousands of feet below.

"A monkey—a g'riller! Why not?" shouted Crooks.

A figure went up the wall like a squirrel and dived into the trees. Only Morgan and Crooks had seen it. The engineer rapped the ashes out of his pipe. The creature was a long way off.

"By thunder," said the steersman, "if I was ass 'enough to bet, I'd lay fifty pounds it was a man!"

"And I wouldn't take," said Crooks. "Why not? There was no need. I'll take it on, Tooter, afore a select committee, and bet he was a monkey. Haw, haw!"

Tooter was too scared to retaliate. But a sound rose from the earth that made them all start.

It was the unmistakable deep-throated baying of a dog.

A Strange Dwelling-Place and an Ugly Weapon—The First Man.

That rich, sonorous bark could not have been made by a wolf. The two sounds are absolutely different. Even a wild dog could not have produced it, for wild dogs can only yelp, snarl, and howl, like their cousins the wolves. And the dog has been the friend of man for countless ages.

"You were right, Teddy," said Fordham, with a gasp of surprise. "That's a tame tyke; and when you see a tame tyke you can look round for its master. I'm like you, getting so fed up with wonders that I couldn't even stare if I met a fellow with nineteen legs, and his head stuck on upside down."

The dog was still baying.

"Well," said Morgan, "as animals aren't in it for nastiness, we'll shift a bit higher. You're always a lot safer when nastiness is intended with a thing that has only teeth and claws than one that has brains."

Wings of Gold whirred up level with the tree-tops. There was a yelp, and then silence.

"That dog has got kicked," growled the cook. "Why not?"

The yelp and the cessation of baying could only be translated as Crooks had translated it. Von Haegel, his eyes once more big and round, rubbed his big head.

"Ach," he said, "if it was not for dot teufel of ein mammoth, I should chust be most happy," he said; "but der mammoth, he shoil all der bleasure. I hate him! Der whole place is no goot! We have der ichtyosaurus, der plesiosaurus, der pterodactyl, un der labyrinthodon. Shaf! Dot was good. We have also der gannoid fish, der ammonite, und—phut! They are right, and lif at der right time. But der teufel of ein mammoth! How dare he lif yet, der great hairy beast! He must not lif so soon for thousands and thousands of years. He has cropped up and ruined all my science. Ach, der ugly, nasty, wicked beast! How dare he!"

Von Haegel had his prejudices. He wanted the fauna, the beasts, reptiles, fishes, and insects to fit in with his science, instead of making his theories fit in with them. Everything was topsy-turvy. He wanted man to be there, but not mammoth. The mammoth was in the way.

"Perhaps those johnnies drew 'em out of their heads, dad," said Lance chaffingly—"I mean the pictures on the stone."

"If you would draw der nonsense out of your own head, dear lad," said Von Haegel, "it would be better."

"Haw, haw!" sniggered Crooks.

With keen interest they watched for a glimpse of the first inhabitant of the land farthest south. It was not very probable that he would show himself.

"The beggar will be scared to death," said Lance—"and small blame to him."

They left the dog and his master behind.

"The Arabian Nights," and 'Grimm's Fairy Tales' are right out of the running, hanged if they aren't!" said Fordham. "It reminds me of the nursery rhyme."

And Lance promptly quoted:

"In the downside upland of Bagoes

The people all walk on their noses.

They wear hats on their feet,

And get nothing to eat,

Unless they catch fish with their noses."

Lance was not quite in such a merry mood as he pretended to be. All round rose flinty peaks—a mighty prison wall, doorless and windowless and unscalable. On foot perhaps they might have found some narrow outlet wide enough to crawl through.

And beyond that?

The everlasting ice, if they ever reached it—and death!

"Ach!" puffed the professor. "These granite walls do a story tell. Every stone is a monument of der great dead! Once upon a time a great nation here did lif, but they are now noding but dust. Himmel! What men to build this great aqueduct! They were engineers! How did they hew those stones? How did they pring them here? Und how did they lift each into its proper place? They are dust, and their secret die mit them. Der aqueduct is ruined, and none can repair it. Why?"

"He's beginning to get the mammoth off his chest," said Lance to Maurice. "It was a nasty pill for him. Is that smoke I can smell?"

"Down there, sir, on the left. Why not?" growled the cook in one breath.

The stones had slipped, forming a circular barricade at the foot of the left-hand wall. The aeroplane responded to the touch and glided over the spot.

"Settled!" said Lance. "That's the clincher!"

A fire of wood burned within the barricade, its thin blue smoke ascending in a straight column.

But who had built the fire?

"Gone to ground," said Tooter. "Blackbirds, he's slithered into that hole at the back!"

"I wonder if we could bolt him, Morry? I'm awfully keen on seeing one of them," said Lance.

They made out a rough earthen pot lying close to the fire. Stakes, with pointed, blackened ends were driven into the ground at a slant in a fivefold row. Their ends pointed outwards and upwards. Above the entrance were other stakes, as if to guard the place from above. There was another object that puzzled them. Two saplings, firmly rooted in the ground, were bent until their ends almost met. They appeared to be fastened there. Behind was another object, resembling an enormous grindstone. A stake passed through a loophole in the wall and sloped up to meet the bent sapling.

There was a barrier, too, across the aqueduct, with one six-foot hole in the centre, and beside the hole masses of brushwood were piled.

"Hallo! Hallo! Come out, you rascal!" cried Fordham.

"He'll come out in a month of blue moons!" said Lance.

"What the dickens is that arrangement?"

"It is—it is—Ach! I know!" spluttered the professor.

"It's ein ballista!"

"You've got it first shot, dad. It is a ballista; but not very much like those the Roman johnnies used."

"What was he? Why not?" inquired Crooks.

"Only a whacking great catapult, cooky," explained Lance.

"Don't you see where those trees are pulled back? They form the spring, and that whopping stake is what they shoot. The thing is loaded up."

Crooks's eye roved downwards and examined the machine.

"If that was in your ribs it would tickle," he said. "Why not? So does fleas."

Then they crowded forward.

A gigantic figure bounded from the cave and gazed up at them fearlessly, his arms folded across his naked breast.

It was no ape, but a man, and his skin was as black as ebony. His arms were crossed, and the great muscles twinkled and shivered. There was a girdle of tattered skins round his waist, and masses of thick, shaggy hair fell back over his shining shoulders. His face was beardless, massive, but not ugly. There was nothing of the flatness of nose and thickness of lips that at once stamps the negro. His strength must have been enormous, for he stood nine feet high; and the sinews of his calves stood out like ropes. He was a majestic figure—a jet-black Hercules—a splendid, awe-inspiring, living Goliath.

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A Grand, New
Series of
Short, Complete
Stories,
introducing
**FRANK
KINGSTON,**
DETECTIVE, and
DOLORES—
His Pretty Lady
Assistant.

Next Thursday:

**"THE
CRIMSON
THREAD."**

CHAPTER 1.

A Curious Story—Frank Kingston Goes to Cragness.

FRANK KINGSTON, the celebrated detective, stepped out of his front door at No. 100, Charing Cross, and paused for a moment to look across Trafalgar Square. The morning seemed to be brighter than usual, and people passed to and fro with smiling faces and merry laughs.

The fact of the matter was, the sun had condescended, after a week's retirement, to shine once again in all its glory. For March the day was simply glorious, and Londoners were, in consequence, in the very best of spirits.

"Upon my word, London looks another place on a day like this," murmured Kingston to himself. "People talk a lot of Paris, but I'll wager—"

Kingston's train of thought was suddenly interrupted; a hand had grasped his arm, and the detective found himself looking down upon a curious character. It was a small, thick-set man, with brawny arms and brown hands and wrists. His face, too, was weather-beaten and sunburned, and adorned with thick, iron-grey whiskers.

"Beg pardon, mister, but do you happen to be Mr. Frank Kingston?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, that is my name.

"Good luck to it!" cried the stranger. "I thought I recognised you, guv'nor. But you ain't goin' out, are you? I came up this side o' London specially to see you."

Kingston turned and entered the house again. A few minutes later he was standing on his hearthrug listening to what Mr. Joseph Fulton had to say. The thick-set little man proved to be the keeper of the Cragness Lighthouse, on the South Coast, and, having the day off, had visited London to see his wife and children, who were staying with friends.

"An' while I was up here I thought I'd jest run in an' see you, sir," went on Fulton, "knowin' as you're kinder fond of out-of-the-way things, like. I've read a heap about you, Mr. Kingston, while on the lighthouse—how you collared—"

"Never mind that," smiled Kingston. "What is the out-of-the-way thing?"

"Oh, ah! Well, you see, guv'nor, it's this way: Me and my mate—Jim Reed—has to look after the light, an' see that all's well, an' on fine nights we have a pipe on the balcony, like as not. The Cragness Light, you know, is three miles from shore, an' surrounded by deep water. No boat ever comes out there after dark, an' the larger craft always give us a wide berth, yet Jim an' I have seen something that don't seem natural—something that neither on us can explain."

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Fulton looked up, and saw that Kingston was languidly sitting in his chair, with his eyes closed.

"Go on," he murmured.

"Pr'aps you'll say as I oughtn't to have bothered you, sir," continued Fulton, "because I can't exactly put what I want to say into the right words. Half a dozen times, I should think, Jim an' I have seen a rum sort of light slowly flashin' about in the water close to the tower. It's a funny light, sir, that can't be likened to anything, and after a bit it disappears. Six times we've seen it during the last month, and I thought, mebbe, if you wasn't extr' busy, you'd run down an' see what you could make of it."

"Well, I don't know," said Kingston musingly. "Your story is extremely bare, although, at the same time, interesting. You say no boats ever venture out so far at night?"

"Oh, no, sir! The rocks is dangerous enough in the daylight, when folks can see. At night it ain't possible. Besides," added the lighthouse-keeper decidedly, "me an' Jim wouldn't ha' been took in like that."

"Very well, Fulton," exclaimed Kingston quietly. "I'll run down to-night."

"To-night, sir?" echoed the man in surprise.

"Yes. I have no engagements, and can easily spare the time. I don't know what time I shall arrive, but it will be before seven."

When Fulton had gone Frank Kingston sat for a moment thinking.

"Well, if it ends in nothing I shall get a breath of sea air," he told himself; "and that's practically worth the journey. I don't suppose for a moment Fulton's story will expand into anything, but there's a chance."

Shortly afterwards Kingston was in a taxi bound for the Hotel Cyril. Having spent a few minutes with Miss Dolores O'Brien—his fiancee and frequent assistant—he made several inquiries at Scotland Yard, the Admiralty, Lloyd's, etc. When he finally returned to his rooms he had changed his opinion about Fulton's story.

"It will materialise after all," he declared, as he looked up the trains. "At first I thought it to be a rather futile visit, but— Ah, this train will do!"

Accompanied by Tim Curtis, his young assistant, he left for the terminus shortly afterwards, and as the day was drawing to a close the pair were being whirled along to the South Coast—to Teymouth, the station for Cragness Rock.

"And are we goin' right on to the lighthouse itself, sir?" asked the boy eagerly.

"Yes, young 'un, right on to the lighthouse itself," smiled Kingston. "It will be a novel experience for both of us."

"THE SCHOOLBOY OUTCAST!" is the title of the splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Priced One Penny.

I've already telephoned to Teymouth, and a motor-boat will be ready to take us to Cragness."

But before going aboard the motor-boat Kingston made several inquiries in Teymouth. At last, however, he was ready. The evening was a delightful one, and the three-mile spin in the swiftly-travelling boat extremely pleasant. The sky was cloudless, and the sun, low in the west, made the sparkling water look like molten gold. Hardly a breath of wind stirred, and the sea was calm and peaceful.

The Cragness Lighthouse was a lofty structure, built on the solid rock. At present this latter was well out of the water, and Kingston and Tim had no difficulty in landing. The driver of the motor-boat went away with instructions to come in the morning to take the visitors away.

"Bless me, sir, if you ain't turned up to time!" cried Fulton in welcome as he opened the stout door. "I'm right glad to see you, sir! An' the nipper, too—the one what showed me out of your rooms in London."

Tim grinned, and looked about him interestedly. Kingston had brought him because he knew the lad would like the experience, and because he might prove useful. Very soon they were trudging up the many solid stone steps which led through store-rooms, etc., to the living quarters, near the top. Fulton had not been back long, but he had managed to prepare an appetising meal. Jim Reed proved to be a stolid, good-natured Devon man, as brawny as he was tall.

The meal over, Kingston was shown over the service-room, then, above, the wonderful lamp, which cast its powerful light miles out to sea. He was greatly interested and amused at Tim's numerous expressions of awe and astonishment.

The time Fulton had usually seen the mystic light was between eleven and twelve, so at about eleven o'clock Kingston strolled out on to the balcony, high above the water. Tim was with him, and they stood gazing at the twinkling lights of Teymouth. Nothing on the water was visible save the lights of a huge liner passing down Channel. Below, the sea broke gently against the immovable rocks.

"Of course, sir, it's just possible we sha'n't see it to-night," said the thick-set lighthouse-keeper as he lit his pipe. "It 'ud be a pity, too, seein' as you've come down specially to—Great gosh!" Fulton paused, and pointed excitedly downwards. "There it be, sir!" he cried. "Out yonder!"

Kingston was already looking in the direction of the pointing finger. Faintly, uncertainly, a weird, pale-greenish light appeared, went out, then came again. It was peculiar in the extreme, for everything was in darkness below, and the surface of the water could be plainly seen. Yet the light kept appearing to the watchers far above.

"What is it, sir?" breathed Tim, under his breath.

"What I expected—and knew—it to be," answered Frank Kingston quietly, "a submarine!"

CHAPTER 2.

Kingston Gets to Real Business.

"A SUBMARINE, sir!" exclaimed Fulton, who had heard Kingston's words. "Gosh, if that don't beat all! But it can't be a submarine," he added quickly.

"These rocks hereabouts are that treacherous it 'ud be suicide to venture near in one o' them things."

"Nevertheless, the light we saw was the searchlight of a submarine," declared the detective; "or, rather, the reflection far down in the water. In some strange manner the light is caught by the rocks as the vessel passes and reflected. To us up here it appears as something almost uncanny."

Fulton was amazed, and not a little sceptical. He had thought of a submarine-boat, he declared, but had dismissed the idea as impossible. When Kingston had a few moments with Tim he explained a few things.

"You see, young 'un, I expected this," he said. "The very instant Fulton told me the story I thought of a submarine. The question which first came to my mind was, why should a submarine go so near the Cragness Rock at night? Evidently some secret work was going on. In reality, the vessel passed well clear of the rock, but its searchlight was reflected up to us here. Those aboard, of course, knew nothing of this."

"But what are they doin', sir?" asked Tim eagerly.

"Before leaving London I made inquiries," continued Kingston, "and discovered that a new type of submarine-boat had been tested in these waters last month. It was highly successful—a great advance on all existing types—but, unfortunately, it struck a wreck on the ocean-bed and filled with water. The crew escaped, but the submarine remains on the sea-bottom; operations to raise it will commence in a few days."

"But what—"

"Wait a moment, Tim. This vessel is a new invention, and all connected with it has been kept as secret as possible. Therefore, no mention of the accident appeared in the newspapers. I also learnt that Julius Frateli, a well-known inter-

national spy, had been seen in London recently. Two and two make four, Tim, and it was child's play to come to the conclusion that Frateli is down here, at Teymouth, making plans of the sunken submarine."

"Crikey, sir," gasped Tim, "you didn't take a month to get on the scent! So that light we saw was Fra—what's-his-name's submarine passin' by on the way to the wreck? O' course, he's copyin' the design of it, so's he can sell the plans to another country?"

"Precisely, Tim, and had it not been for this little freak of the rocks in reflecting the searchlight his plans would have been entirely successful. The vessel passes at night because there is less chance of it being seen as it leaves Teymouth. The inquiries I made after leaving the train resulted in the information that Mr. Silas P. Booker, an American gentleman of wealth, was in Teymouth experimenting with a submarine. Needless to say, Mr. Silas is merely another name for our friend Frateli. To-morrow, Tim, we shall have him by the heels.

Tim was eager and excited, and the next morning, as he and his master were borne shorewards, he wondered what steps Kingston would take. The sun was shining brilliantly, and Teymouth was soon reached by the swift motor-boat. Kingston and Tim were walking along the promenade when the former uttered an exclamation. Hurrying towards them was Dolores herself.

"Oh, Frank, I couldn't resist it!" she exclaimed smilingly. "I know it was an escapade, but at the last moment I rang up Fraser and told him I would go with him."

"What, in the Dart?" asked Kingston, surprised.

"Yes, Frank, and the journey was just lovely!"

Before leaving London, Kingston had made arrangements with Fraser, his man, to take the Dart—Kingston's little submarine, which had been of such value in his campaign against the Brotherhood of Iron—and journey with it to Teymouth. He had told Dolores of this, and she had, on the spur of the moment, decided to take the journey, too.

"Well," laughed Kingston, "now that you are here, I shall make use of you."

"That's better still!" cried the girl. And she listened interestedly as he told her what was in the wind. The Dart was moored just out of the town, and not a soul knew of its arrival. Fraser was aboard.

"Now, Fraser," Kingston told him, "I want you and Tim to go to the police-station, and then to the house of Mr. 'Booker,' accompanied by a constable. If your man is not there himself, search the place and obtain possession of all his papers."

"And you, sir?" asked Fraser, "what are you going to do?"

"I am going out in the Dart. Our bird might be out to sea, and if so, I mean to capture him red-handed. By making the two visits simultaneously, we shall not be leaving much to chance."

Fifteen minutes later the little submarine was cutting its way through the water, fifty feet below the surface. Kingston was at the levers, as languid-looking and sleepy as ever. Dolores stood by his side, greatly interested. She wondered whether Kingston would succeed in his project. Frateli had not the slightest suspicion that his game was "tumbled," and would be totally unprepared.

"And are you going to leave the boat in that diving-suit, Frank?" asked the girl, rather apprehensively, looking at the thick rubber suit in one corner.

"I am," smiled Kingston, without taking his eyes from the little window, where he could see the water, dimly green. "Don't you worry yourself, little girl; I sha'n't run my head into danger!"

Recently Kingston had some alterations made to the Dart. In the bows was a little watertight chamber, just large enough to accommodate a man, which could be shut off and filled with water. Then an outer-door could be opened, and it was possible to step out on to the ocean bed. The lever, which pumped the water out again was inside this little chamber, so it was possible for one man to get in and out without any assistance in the submarine.

The little vessel passed Cragness Lighthouse to the left. It was a mile further on that the Naval submarine had met with an accident, and after a while, Kingston slowed down the engine, and allowed the Dart to rest easily on the sandy bottom.

"This is about the spot," he exclaimed briskly.

In a few minutes Kingston had donned the diving-suit; it was self-contained, and no air-pipe or life-line was necessary. He cut a queer figure, and Dolores laughed light-heartedly. Then he stepped into the little chamber, closed the door securely, and allowed it to fill with water.

Dolores heard him open the outer door and step out, and watched him walk away into the greeny gloom from the little window. Three minutes later the lumbering figure returned, boarded the submarine, and pumped the water out of the

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compartment. Then he stepped in, dripping wet, and removed his helmet.

"Why, Frank, why have you come back so— Oh!"

Dolores ceased speaking suddenly, and caught her breath in with a gasp. The man who had just entered was not Frank Kingston—it was Julius Frateli!

CHAPTER 3.

A Terrible Predicament.

"BY Jove—a woman!" exclaimed the spy in surprise. "This is unexpected. My task will be easier than I anticipated!"

He spoke in perfect English, and looked at Dolores in triumph. The girl was as brave as any in the land, but Frateli was a large man, heavy-limbed and muscular. She could see he was furious, and dreaded what would happen. Quietly, she slid her hand down to a little pocket in her belt, where she always kept a tiny revolver, but Frateli was too quick.

In two strides he reached her. There was a short, sharp struggle, and then Dolores found herself bound securely to one of the iron girders of the submarine. Brave as she was, she could do nothing against her assailant. But she determined not to utter a word; she would not open her mouth to answer a single question.

"Hang you!" snarled the spy savagely. "Hang you, and that interfering fool who left here a few minutes ago. How did you find me out—eh? Who is he—who is the man I just saw? You won't answer—eh? By heavens, you have run your head into a noose!"

Dolores did not answer, but kept her lips tightly closed, and her eyes directed towards the floor. Her brain was working quickly. This man was desperate, and would probably go to any length to ensure his own freedom. Down here, on the sea-bed, who would know of what villainy took place? Surely Kingston would come back before Frateli could harm her?

"I must go!" exclaimed Frateli quickly. "Your companion, whoever he is, will never reach this vessel alive; and even if he does it will not matter. I have got you both at my mercy, and can laugh at your futile effort to entrap me. Do you know what I am going to do, my beautiful flower?"

Dolores did not look up.

"I am going to let the water into this boat," exclaimed the spy gratingly. "In my diving-suit I shall come to no harm, and you will be soon oblivious of your surroundings. And the man outside will be foiled, for he can never reach the surface again!"

Dolores tried hard to repress a shudder. The courageous girl pictured her lover reaching the helpless Dart and finding her there; pictured him wandering about helpless, only to perish at last on account of the air-supply giving out. Yet Dolores did not utter a sound.

"I am going to open the door," exclaimed Frateli, picking up his diving-helmet. "There will be a rush of water, and— Ah, an idea! Why not have the thing a little novel while I am about it?"

He chuckled. His glance had fallen upon a large Service revolver, and he picked it up. It was fully loaded, but he took the cartridges out, and examined the trigger. It was a hair trigger, and needed but a touch to fire the cartridge. He placed one of the latter in its slot again.

"Now to fix it up!" he murmured.

For a couple of minutes he worked at something, then stepped back with another chuckle.

"Now, Miss Sullen, what do you say to that?" he said. "Still obstinate? Ah, well, I suppose you will look quickly enough when I have gone!"

Frateli fitted on his helmet, and then left the submarine in the same manner as he had entered. Dolores was surprised, for she had expected him to carry out his word and flood the vessel. Then she caught sight of his handiwork, and a little gasp of horror escaped her white lips.

On the wall near the switchbox was a hanging clock. Frateli had removed the glass which covered its face, and to the minute-hand was tied an ordinary pencil. But above it was the revolver, and Dolores could see that when the pencil became upright, it would come in contact with the trigger. The pressure, slight as it was, would be quite sufficient to fire the revolver.

And the barrel of the weapon was pointed straight at the little window which served as a look-out! The time was just ten minutes to eleven, and exactly on the hour the pencil

would reach its mark. Then the bullet would crash through the glass, and allow the water to rush in and do its deadly work.

It was a diabolical scheme—a scheme which only a flint-hearted man could have devised. Dolores groaned aloud in her anguish. What could she do? Frateli would take Kingston by surprise and prevent him arriving at the Dart in time to rescue her. The thought entered her head that the glass would not smash, for it was of great thickness. But she dismissed the hope immediately, for the revolver was one of the most powerful made, and within three feet of the glass.

"What a devil the man is!" she cried aloud. "Oh, Frank, you must come, and—"

She pulled herself up sharply, and fought down the helpless feeling which was taking possession of her. She told herself that Kingston would turn up; that he would come back before the ten minutes had elapsed.

But what was the great detective doing? When he left the submarine he walked straight ahead, quite unaware of Frateli's presence. The latter had seen the submarine descend, and guessed immediately what its object was. Kingston walked onwards; nothing was before him but the semi-transparent ocean. Huge weeds grew everywhere, and fishes, little and big, constantly darted in front of him.

"No sign of—"

He broke off, for even as he muttered the words, the bulk of a large, Naval submarine loomed up in front of him. The water was not very deep here, and the ocean-bed, in consequence, was illuminated with a dim, greenish light. Kingston walked round the sunken vessel interestedly, never guessing the drama which was being enacted aboard the little Dart. He spent several minutes examining the submarine and an old iron hulk which had caused the accident.

"Now to find the vessel which Frateli is 'experimenting' with," murmured the detective. "Ten to one it is here—or, if it is not, it will be before long!"

He kept his bearings and walked away to the left. Then, just as he sighted a fairly large submarine—the third within a hundred or so yards—the figure of a man came towards him. Walking was, of course, a slow business, and Kingston stopped and waited for the other to draw near. It was Frateli, and in his hand he held a long knife.

He came close; then, with a quick lunge, plunged his knife at Kingston's chest. The spy only wanted to cut the rubber—the sea would do the rest. But the detective's right arm was out in a second, and the knife went flying through the water.

The scoundrel muttered a curse, stepped back a pace, and tripped on a boulder. The next moment he went over sideways; Kingston heard a muffled crack, and a gurgle of terror. Unable to keep his balance, Frateli had toppled on to a rock, and the glass of his helmet had smashed to atoms. His death was swift and terrible, and even Kingston was affected.

Then he realised that Frateli had been approaching from the direction of the Dart, and in a second the detective was hurrying, as fast as the water would allow, in the direction of the little submersible. A cold fear was at his heart, and he called himself a fool for leaving Dolores alone.

At last! He stepped into the watertight chamber and pumped frenziedly. It seemed to take hours for the water to be pumped out. But it was done at length, and he burst in. Then a cry left his lips as he saw Dolores, pale and helpless, before him.

"The window, Frank!" cried the girl quickly.

Kingston, still in his diving-suit turned to the little window. The time by the clock was half a minute to eleven! It was only a matter of seconds now; but the detective grasped the situation in a glance, and in one leap, had picked up a heavy piece of iron, and held it before the glass.

Crack!

The revolver exploded on the second. But the bullet had done no harm, beyond giving Kingston a painful jar on the hand; it lay on the floor flattened out of shape. Kingston had actually seen the trigger of the revolver being touched, and knew there was no time to grasp the weapon, for in doing so, he would have exploded it. By holding the iron before the glass, he had adopted the only course possible.

"Thank Heaven, Frank!" cried Dolores fervently. And, strong, self-reliant girl that she was, she actually fainted!

THE END.