

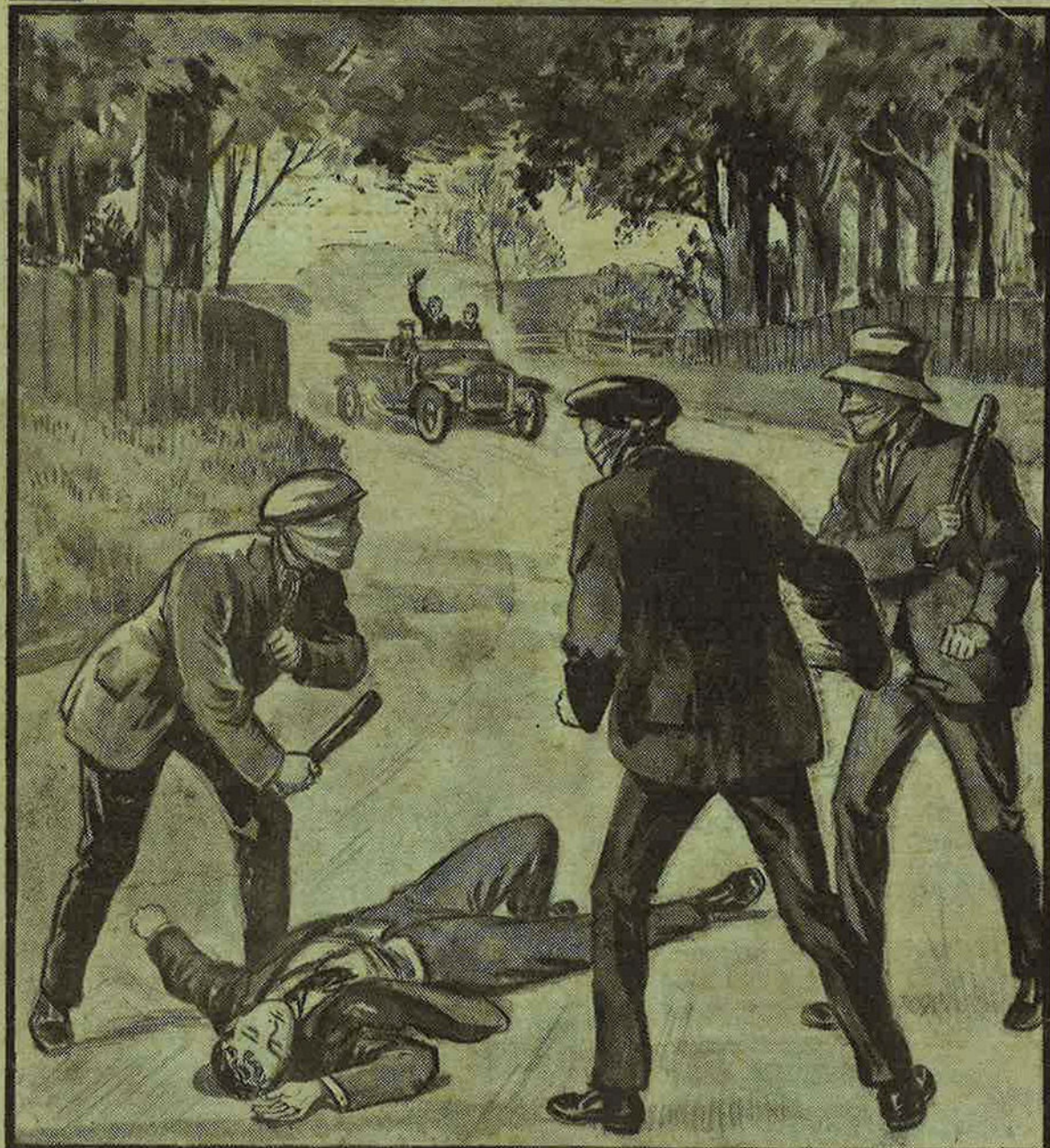
# 'DESPERATE MEASURES!'

A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale, by Martin Clifford, in this issue.

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The sudden hoot of a motor-horn warned Lasker & Co. that they were not alone upon the road, and just as they reached Kildare's fallen form they paused to look along the road. The juniors' motor-car was sweeping down upon them, Tom Merry and D'Arcy standing up in it, with blazing eyes. "Faster!" shrieked Tom Merry to the chauffeur. "Faster, for Heaven's sake!" (An exciting incident from the complete school story inside.)

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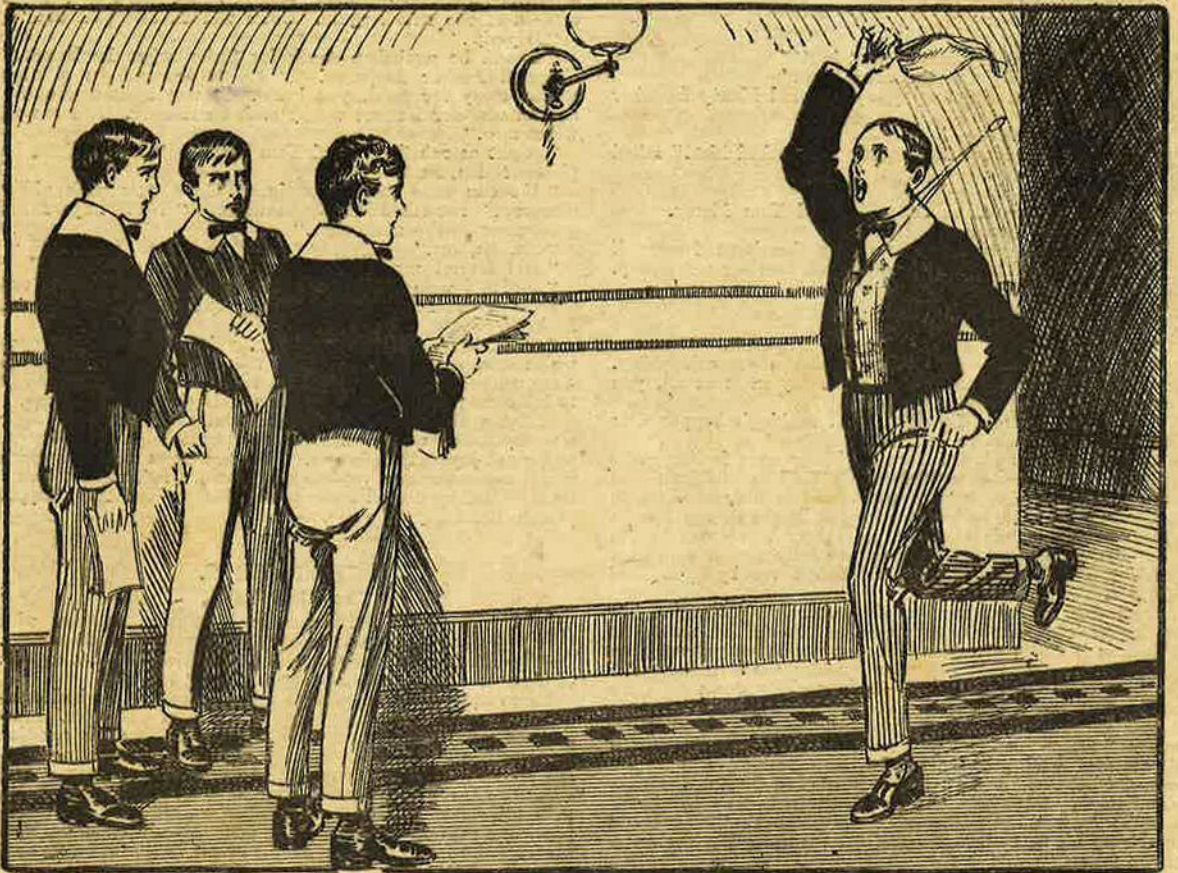


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# DESPERATE MEASURES!

A Splendid New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Tom Merry and Co. stared at D'Arcy as he came tearing along the passage. "Have you heard?" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Good news, deah boys—the vewy best!" See Chapter 1.)

## CHAPTER 1.

### Tidings of Great Joy.

**A**RTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY heard the news first. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, was usually distinguished for a lofty repose of manner. He cultivated carefully the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But when he heard the news his noble visage was irradiated with joy, and his manners quite lost their aristocratic repose. His monocle dropped from his eye as he rushed upstairs to the junior quarters, with a wild and excited haste that bore no resemblance whatever to the repose of Vere de Vere.

He was scudding along the Fourth Form passage to Study No. 6 when he met the Terrible Three—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell.

The Terrible Three were laden with lines, and their faces wore glum expressions. Each of them had a sheaf of impot paper in his hand, and a frown on his brow.

They were taking their lines to the captain of St. Jim's—after an hour's hard grind in their study to get them done. Hence their glumness. For evil days had fallen upon the chums of St. Jim's. Cuts of the Fifth, their old enemy, had become captain of the school, and lines were falling upon Tom Merry & Co. as thickly as the leaves in the celebrated Vallambrosa. Under the circumstances, the joy irradiating the noble countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had an exasperating effect upon the Terrible Three. They felt a great desire to bump him on the floor of the passage, and thus reduce him to a frame of mind corresponding to their own.

So they lined up across the passage, and Arthur Augustus, who was going at too great a speed to stop himself, rushed into their arms.

"Collar him!" said Tom Merry.

"Bump him!" growled Manners. "What does he mean by looking so chippy when we're down on our luck?"

"Weally, you fellows— Oh!"

Bump!

Next Wednesday

"TROUBLE FOR TOM!" AND "PLAYING THE GAME!"

Arthur Augustus, swept off his feet in the powerful grasp of the Terrible Three, descended upon the floor and gasped. "Oh—ow! You silly asses!"

"Now, don't look so jolly joyful!" said Monty Lowther severely. "What do you mean by it? We don't feel joyful!"

"Ow!"

"Sit there, and reflect upon the error of your ways!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps; we're only just in time with these lines, and Cutts will make us do them over again if we're late. Come on; it doesn't matter if you tread on Gussy!"

But Arthur Augustus jumped up like a Jack-in-the-box. At any other time Arthur Augustus would probably have been wrathful at being so unceremoniously handled. But just now he was too joyful to be wrathful about anything. He grasped Tom Merry excitedly by the arm.

"Have you heard?" he gasped.

"Heard what, ass?"

"The news, deah boy!"

"I haven't heard any news—what is it?"

"Good news, old chap—the vevy best!"

"Cutts had a stroke of apoplexy?" asked Monty Lowther hopefully.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Has the Head found him squiffy and sacked him?" asked Manners.

"Certainly not, it—"

"Nothing happened to Cutts?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothin' that I know of. But—"

"Then what do you mean by saying there's good news, if nothing's happened to Cutts?" demanded Lowther wrathfully.

"Bump him again for raising our hopes!"

"Weally, you know—yawoooh!"

Bump!

"You uttah asses!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You are wumin' my twousahs, as well as hurtin' me considewably. I have a gweat mind not to tell you my news at all, you fwabjous asses!"

"Oh, keep it!" said Lowther. "If nothing's happened to Cutts, we don't want to hear it."

As a matter of fact, the Terrible Three were feeling quite ferocious towards Cutts. Since old Kildare had left, and Cutts had become captain of the school in his place, things had gone from bad to worse. Indeed, Blake of the Fourth had averred solemnly that the old school was going to the giddy bow-wows, and the other fellows fully agreed with him. Certainly Gerald Cutts's hand had fallen heavily upon Tom Merry & Co.

From day to day they hoped to hear that Kildare was coming back to take his old place, but he did not come. It looked as if Cutts was installed as a permanency; and Tom Merry & Co. felt that life wasn't really worth living with Cutts as captain of St. Jim's—and specially down on their noble selves.

And an exasperating feature of the case was that Cutts was a "rotter" of the first water—that he was guilty of all sorts of wild proceedings, in secret, which would have earned him the "sack" if the Head had known anything about them. But Cutts was far too deep to be bowled out, and the juniors had given up hoping that the Head would tumble to his real character and bestow upon him the order of the "boot."

"I won't tell you silly asses a word now," gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "afteh the wotten way you have tweeked me. I refuse to tell you a word. You can find it out for yourselves, you boundahs, but if you knew that I was goin' to tell you that old Kildare was comin' back at last—"

The Terrible Three jumped.

"Kildare!"

"Coming back!"

"Hurrah!"

They looked now as joyful as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had looked before the bumping process. Tom Merry caught hold of the swell of St. Jim's and helped him to his feet.

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*See column 2, page 26, of this issue.*

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**OUR COMPANION PAPERS:** "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday.

"Is it true?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite sure!"

"Yaas. Dawwel of the Sixth has quite received a lettah fivom him—"

"And he told you?"

"He told Langton, in my hearin'."

"Hurrah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dusted down his elegant trousers.

"You uttah asses, you—"

"Gussy," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "we take back that bumping. You may consider that it hasn't happened."

"We withdraw it entirely," said Manners.

"Yaas, that's all vevy well, but my bags are feahfully wumped all the same!" said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, an apology is quite suffish, fivom one gentleman to another. I ovahlook your wotten conduct. But weally, isn't it wippin'—old Kildare is comin' back, and, of course, he's goin' to be captain of the school again. Cutts will be drowped out."

"Hip-hip!"

"It will be wathah a shock for Cutts, when he knows!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "He is countin' on Kildare stayin' away for good, you know. It was wathah doubtful at first whether Kildare would evah come back. But it's all wight now."

"Right as rain!" grinned Tom Merry. "Won't Cutts be pleased? Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can take these lines in to Cutts now with giddy pleasure!" remarked Monty Lowther. "We'll impart the good news at the same time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did Darrel say when Kildare was coming, Gussy?"

"I didn't wait to heah, deah boy. I wushed off to tell the chaps the news at once. Pway excuse me—I must tell Blake!"

And Arthur Augustus, still sadly lacking in the repose which stamps, or should stamp, the noble caste of Vere de Vere, rushed on to Study No. 6, to impart the joyful tidings to his chums Blake and Herries and Digby of the Fourth.

And the Shell fellows, with cheerful grins, went on their way to Cutts's study, with their impositions in their hands, and great joy in their hearts. They had news for Cutts which would make the new captain of St. Jim's feel more "sick" than he had ever been made to feel before—and the prospect pleased them highly.

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Blow Falls.

CUTTS of the Fifth was in his study chatting with Knox. Cutts was looking quite pleased and cheerful. His long ambition had been gratified—he was captain of the school, and seemed likely to remain so.

There had been many things against him, but he had overcome them all, by cunning and by force of character. Now he was fairly established, and he was making his position more firm and secure every day. He was ingratiating himself with the Head and with the Housemaster by very careful conduct. He made himself acceptable to the Sixth Form, who had been a little sore at first about a Fifth-Former becoming captain of the school. Only his old enemies, Tom Merry & Co., had felt the weight of his hand—but they had felt it very heavily.

Kildare had been called away to the bedside of his uncle, who was very ill, in Kildare's native land. Whether old Kildare would ever come back from Ireland was doubtful. If he did return, it was understood that he would resume his old place as captain of St. Jim's. In that case, Cutts was simply keeping his piece warm, as it were.

But Cutts hoped that he would not come back. And if his return was long delayed, Cutts hoped to have established himself so firmly by that time that he could not be displaced, even by Kildare.

To that end he was exerting himself in every way to make his rule popular, and he was succeeding. Only with Tom Merry and Co. he made no effort of that kind—he knew that it would be useless. They were irreconcilable.

It was upon the subject of Kildare's possible return that he was chatting now with Knox of the Sixth. Under Cutts's rule the "fast set" of St. Jim's had had a very good time. Cutts and Knox, and Gilmore and Sefton, and the rest were making hay while the sun shone.

Little bridge-parties in Cutts's study, with cigarettes and cigars, and refreshments that were much stronger than lemonade, took place now without interruption or fear of trouble to follow. And Cutts's influence was drawing a good many fellows into his own path.

Kildare had always been sternly down on that kind of thing, and his authority and his personal influence had



Tom Merry & Co. handed their lines to Cutts, and made for the door. On the threshold Tom Merry turned round, smiling. "Have you heard the news, Cutts?" he asked sweetly. "Kildare's coming back!" "You lying hound!" roared Cutts, springing to his feet, his face glowing crimson with anger. (See Chapter 2.)

always been for good. Cutts's influence was wholly for bad, and his strong and determined character caused many fellows with weaker natures to follow his lead.

Fellows who had money were specially welcome in Cutts's study for those little card-parties. Cutts was very lucky at cards—so lucky that suspicious persons might have surmised that he had ways of assisting chance. Certainly it was very rare for Cutts to be any the poorer after an evening at bridge.

There was only one cloud on the horizon of the smart set at St. Jim's—the possible return of Kildare to take his old place.

But the longer he stayed in Ireland, the less likely his return seemed to be, and they grew easier in their minds from day to day.

"The fellow can't be coming back now," Cutts was saying to Knox, in confident tones. "He simply can't be. The last I heard, his blessed uncle was as scedy as ever, and it seems that Kildare is to be his heir, so he's bound to stay there and look after the loaves and fishes, you know."

"I don't fancy Kildare would think of that kind of thing," said Knox. "He's fond of his uncle, I believe."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders. "I shouldn't wonder; he was that kind of an ass. All the better for us. It makes him less likely to come back. And a few more weeks, and then I think I could hold my own, even if he did come back. If I could remain captain for a whole term, they couldn't push me out, even for him, I think. And I'm popular, too."

Knox nodded. "Looks like a good prospect," he agreed. "It would be pretty rotten for us if Kildare did drop in suddenly. A good many things would have to be stopped. If we hear that he's coming—"

He paused, and looked at Cutts.

"You'd have to put up with it if he came now!" he finished.

The smile faded from Cutts's face; his expression changed, hardened, till his face looked as if it were moulded in iron. A gleam came into his eyes that made the Sixth-Former start.

"Cutts, what are you thinking of?" exclaimed Knox, and there was a tone almost of alarm in his voice.

Cutts set his teeth hard. "If I heard that he was coming back now, I'd stop him, somehow," he said, in a low and bitter voice. "I wouldn't have everything mucked up at this stage of the game. I've got too far to allow myself to be stopped now. If the fool comes back—if I hear of it in time I shall—!" He paused.

"You'll what?" said Knox uneasily. Sometimes he was a little afraid of Cutts. There was a glimmering suspicion in his mind that Gerald Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, the sportsman, the gambler, the black-guard, had the makings of a pretty complete criminal in him.

"I'd find a way to stop him, I think," said Cutts.

"How could you?" "I don't know, but I think I'd find a way. I know I wouldn't give up all I've won without a fight for it; and I shouldn't be particular what kind of weapons I used, either. I tell you—"

Knock! Cutts paused suddenly as the knock came at his door. His customary manner, cool and rather lazy, returned to him at once.

"Come in!" he said. The door opened, and Tom Merry and Manners and

Lowther came into the study. They laid their impositions upon the table.

"Our lines, Cutts!" said Tom Merry suavely.

"Leave them there!" said Cutts sharply. "I'll look over them presently."

"Yes, Cutts."

"And now get out!"

"Certainly, Cutts."

The three juniors turned towards the door again, Cutts's eye watching them with a lowering expression. His dislike of the three chums of the Shell was intense and bitter. Their frankness, their honesty, their decency seemed to him a perpetual rebuke to his own cunning and tortuous nature.

Tom Merry turned back suddenly, smiling.

"By the way, have you heard the news, Cutts?" he asked.

Cutts gave him a sharp and searching look.

"The news! Anything to do with me?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"What is it?"

"Only that Kildare's coming back!" said Tom Merry sweetly.

Cutts's eyes seemed to become fixed upon the junior's smiling face. For a moment the coolness of the Fifth-Former deserted him, and his face went quite pale. The blow was too sudden for him to guard it. But the next moment he sprang to his feet, his face growing crimson with anger.

"You lying young hound!"

"But it's true!" said Tom Merry calmly.

"How—how do you know?"

"Darrel's just had a letter from him, saying so."

Cutts knew that it was true then. His hands clenched so hard that the nails dug into his palms.

"Get out of my study!" he breathed.

"Yes, Cutts."

The door closed behind the Terrible Three. Cutts heard a suppressed chuckle outside in the passage. He knew that the chums of the Shell were rejoicing, and a sudden gust of rage came over him. He gripped a cane, and started towards the door, his face flaming with fury.

"Don't you give yourself away!" said Knox warningly.

Cutts paused.

He had certainly come very near to giving himself away. Certainly nothing would have amused and delighted his enemies more than to see him break out into a rage at the mere idea of Kildare returning to the school. He tossed the cane upon the table.

"You're right," he muttered thickly. "I—I mustn't give myself away. If I'm going to do anything, I've got to keep up appearances. I must be careful of that."

They exchanged a long glance.

"If you do anything," repeated Knox, after a lengthy pause—"if you do anything! What can you do, Cutts?"

"I don't know."

"But—but—"

"But I'm going to think of something—I'm going to do something. I'm not going to give up everything without a fight."

"But I—I say!" stammered Knox, scared by the expression that had come over Gerald Cutts's face. "You—you're not thinking of—of anything—anything rotten—anything violent! Don't be an idiot!"

"Leave me alone, now," said Cutts. "I've got to think it out."

Knox, his face pale and troubled, left the study. He was afraid to think of what might be passing in Cutts's desperate mind—and he was afraid to think of what it might mean for him too. For whatever Cutts did, Knox knew very well that he would be dragged into it—that they would sink or swim together. What was Cutts thinking of doing?

Left alone in his study, Cutts sat down to think it out. And the expression that grew upon his face, hardening and sharpening it, and making it look years older, would fully have justified Knox's alarm if he could have seen it then.

### CHAPTER 3. Two Telegrams.

"HURRAH!"  
"Hip-pip!"

The juniors were rejoicing. Faintly, from afar, the sounds reached Gerald Cutts in his study. Tom Merry & Co. were in high feather.

Kildare was coming back.

The reign of their old enemy, Cutts of the Fifth, was coming to an end. No wonder the heroes of the Lower School rejoiced.

And their satisfaction was shared by most of the school when the news spread. Cutts had succeeded in making himself popular to a certain extent, but most of the fellows

would be glad to have Kildare back again. Only Cutts's own particular set, the black sheep of the school, looked forward with uneasiness to Kildare's return.

Figgins & Co., of the New House, were rejoicing too. Figgins & Co. had hoped to get a New House candidate elected when Kildare vacated the captaincy. Cutts had outwitted them in that matter. And so the New House fellows looked forward keenly to the coming downfall of Cutts—especially Monteith, the prefect, who would have been captain if Cutts had not outplayed him.

The general satisfaction was not very complimentary to Cutts.

\* Many of the fellows wondered how he would take it. That he would be pleased to step down from his high estate was, of course, impossible. He could not be pleased by Kildare's return. Would he cut up rusty, some of the fellows wondered. If he did, it would not help him in any way. He had to get out when Kildare came. Knowing Cutts's suave coolness and self-control, most of the fellows surmised that he would take it with perfect calmness. But there was no telling.

No one dreamed that Cutts could be entertaining any idea of opposing Kildare's return—of preventing the old captain of St. Jim's from resuming his rightful place.

The thoughts that were passing through Gerald Cutts's mind would have astonished the St. Jim's fellows, if they could have guessed them. But they could not.

Tom Merry & Co. certainly did not suspect anything of the sort. And they were in high feather.

"It's ripping!" Tom Merry said to his rejoicing chums.

"Simply ripping! Old Kildare is a brick—a regular brick."

"A weal bwick, deah boy," agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I have been thinkin' that we ought to have a celebration when Kildare comes back."

"Hear, hear!" said a dozen voices heartily.

"We ought to give him a stunnin' welcome, you know," pursued Arthur Augustus, encouraged by the general approval. "What do you fellows say to a bwass band?"

"Oh!"

"And a twiumpthal arch!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Our own band will do," said Monty Lowther. "What price the Lowther Ragtime Band, you know. We'll meet Kildare at the station, and march him home with musical honours."

"Wats!"

"Why, you ass—"

"Blow the wagtime band! We want a weal bwass band, to do the thing in style. We can hire a bwass band in Wayland, and this isn't a time to be thinkin' of the expense. I will w'ite to my patah for a fivah."

"When is he coming, though?" asked Jack Blake.

"Nobody seems to know," said Tom Merry. "Darrel knows, I suppose. Let's ask Darrel."

"Yaas, wathah. We must have time to make the pwe-pawations."

And a crowd of juniors marched away in search of Darrel of the Sixth. They found Darrel in the gymnasium. Darrel was looking very cheerful. He was Kildare's best chum, and naturally delighted by the news he had received. Also, he did not approve of the way things were going under Cutts's captaincy. He was as glad as the juniors to hear that the old captain of St. Jim's was coming back.

"Dawwel, deah boy—"

"I say, Darrel—"

The big Sixth-Former gave the juniors a good-humoured glance.

"Well, what do you young sweeps want?" he asked.

"About Kildare," said Tom Merry. "When is he coming?"

"You see, we want to give him a welcome."

"Sure we want to paint the town red intirely!" said Reilly of the Fourth.

"We are goin' to ewect a twiumpthal arch—"

"And get a band—"

"When is he coming, Darrel? We want to know."

Darrel laughed.

"I think I should draw the line at triumphal arches and brass bands," he said. "But there is no harm in giving him a welcome. He said in his letter that he would be here on Wednesday."

"And to-day's Monday!" said Tom Merry. "Lots of time to make preparations."

"Yaas, wathah."

"And Wednesday, being a half-holiday, we shall be free to celebrate," said Blake, with much satisfaction. "That's toppin'!"

"Weally toppin', deah boy!"

"Has he started yet?" asked Tom Merry. "We should like to send him a telegram of—of welcome, you know."

"Yes," said Darrel, laughing. "He leaves Ireland to-day. But he is going to stay a bit with his people in Lan- chester before he comes on to St. Jim's. His mater and

pater live there, you know. He's coming on here on Wednesday."

"Lanchester!" said Blake. "That's about fifty miles from here."

"Yes."

"Good! We'll wire him there," said Tom Merry. "He'll find the wire waiting for him when he gets there, and that will be all right."

"Come on," said Blake. "Let's get down to the post-office and send it. I suppose he won't get to Lanchester until to-morrow; but there's nothing like being in time."

And the Co. walked down into Rylcombe to the post-office to despatch that telegram of welcome to Kildare. They all gathered round the desk to write the telegram.

"Pway don't think of the halfpennies now, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "We want old Kildare to undahstand how much we want him back. Bettah leave the telegram to me."

"Good egg!" said Blake, with a wink at the others. "We'll leave it entirely in Gussy's hands. Gussy will do the thing in style."

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors.

Arthur Augustus smiled with satisfaction.

"All sewene, deah boys. You can't do bettah than wely on a fellow of tact and judgment at a time like this. Heah goes!"

Arthur Augustus filled up the form, and held it up for the juniors to read. It was quite a long message, considering that it cost a halfpenny a word.

"Dear old Kildare.—We are delighted to hear that you are coming back. The school has been going to the bow-wows while you have been away. Cutts is a rotter. When you come back we are going to rally round you, and back you up like anything. Signed—D'Arcy, Blake, Merry, Lowther, Manners, Digby, Herries, Noble, Reilly, Kerr, Wynn, Figgins."

"Is that all wight, deah boys?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to cacklegat. By the way, is bow-wows one word or two?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Countin' it as two, there are sixty-one words, I think," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "That will only be two-and-sixpence-halfpenny. Then there is the address—five words more. Two-and-ninepence, deah boys! Who's got two-and-ninepence?"

"We're leaving this entirely in your hands, Gussy!" said Blake blandly.

"Yaas; but—"

"See to it, Tigellinus!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

And the juniors chuckled.

"The fact is, deah boys, I haven't had a wemittance lately, and—"

"We'll wait for you outside," said Blake, apparently not hearing. "If you think of anything else to shove into the telegram, shove it in, and don't mind us."

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "It's in your hands, Gussy."

"Yaas, but—"

"Don't keep us waiting too long."

And the juniors streamed out of the post-office, grinning.

Arthur Augustus looked after them, with his eyeglass jammed in his eye, and shook his head in a doubtful sort of way. Then he went through his pockets. Funds were low in Study No. 6 just then. There was a dearth of cash. Arthur Augustus discovered a sixpence in one pocket, and a shilling in another, and a penny in a third.

"Bai Jove! Only one-and-sevenpence," he murmured. "I say, you chaps—"

But the chaps were gone.

"I shall have to cut it down a bit!" murmured D'Arcy.

"Aftah all, I needn't mention that Cutts is a wottah. Kildare knows that already. That's four words out. Then I will put in dogs instead of bow-wows—it isn't quite so expressive, but it saves a word. And, bai Jove, I'll cut out the signatures of all those boundahs, if they're not goin' to pay for them to be put in. Yaas, wathah!"

And at the cost of a great deal of mental labour, Arthur Augustus cut down the telegram to the exact value of one-and-sevenpence, and despatched it triumphantly. Then he walked out of the post-office, and rejoined his chums.

"Has it gone?" asked Blake, with a grin.

"Yaas, I had to cut it down a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right. So long as you left all our names down," said Tom Merry. "That was the really important point."

"Bai Jove! You see, I had to sewatch all your names!"

"What?"

"I left my own signature, as wepwesentin' the whole of the Lowah School, you know," explained Arthur Augustus. "That will be all wight."

"You ass!" roared Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let's go in and send another," growled Figgins. "Might have known what would happen if we trusted it to Gussy."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Oh, scat!"

And the juniors invaded the post-office again, and a second telegram was despatched. This time it was shorter, if not sweeter.

"Welcome home! Merry, Manners, Lowther, Blake, Herries, Digby, Noble, Reilly, Kerr, Wynn, Figgins."

And this time the noble name of D'Arcy was conspicuous by its absence.

## CHAPTER 4.

### A Little Late!

THE dusk was falling as Tom Merry & Co. left the post-office to walk back to St. Jim's. In their enthusiasm over Kildare's return, and their eagerness to send him a message of welcome, they had overlooked the fact that they had no time to get back from the village before locking-up. That thought came into their minds now—rather late!

"By gum!" said Noble, otherwise known as Kangaroo. "We shall be late, you chaps. Taggles will be shutting the gates."

"And Cutts will be down on us again!" granted Blake. "What asses we are to give him another chance! He's bound to make the most of it, as he won't be captain of the school for more than two days longer."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Never mind. We've only got to stand him till Wednesday," said Tom Merry comfortingly. "We can put up with lines and lickings till then. Cutts is coming down off his perch with a big bump on Wednesday."

"Hurray!"

"All the same, we may as well hurry up!" said Figgins.

"Let's take the cut through the wood, and trot."

"Yaas, wathah."

The party of juniors plunged into the footpath through the wood, which saved a considerable distance in returning to the school, as the high-road was by no means direct. Under the trees it was much darker than in the road. The juniors broke into a trot, covering the ground quickly, their footfalls soft and inaudible on the grass.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly.

"Pway stop a minute, deah boys!"

"What's the matter?" asked Blake, without stopping.

"I've dropped my eyeglass."

"Blow your eyeglass!"

"Wats! Pway wait for me while I find it," said Arthur Augustus, stooping and groping in the shadowy grass. "I shall find it in a minute. How beastly dark it is heah!"

The juniors halted impatiently. By keeping on the run they had a chance of getting in before locking-up, and so avoiding punishment. But they knew that Cutts would make the most of it. He knew that they were rejoicing over his coming discomfiture, and he would not let slip an opportunity of making his power felt while it yet lasted.

"Found it yet?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Not yet, deah boy. Pway be patient."

"Leave it there, can't you?" growled Herries.

"Weally Hewwies—"

"Look here, we're jolly well not going to be licked for the sake of your silly eyeglass!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Let it stay there, and come on!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Kangawooh. Suppose you fellows all stand wound and stwike matches while I look for it."

"Yes; while Taggles is locking us out, and Cutts getting his cane ready for us," exclaimed Digby. "Come on!"

"Come on, you ass!"

"I wufuse to be called an ass. And I decline to come on till I have discovered my monocle," said D'Arcy firmly.

"Fathead!"

"Duffer!"

"Come on!"

"Look here! If you don't come on we'll go on without you!" roared Blake, exasperated.

"I wufuse to come until—"

"Let's get on," said Kerr. "Gussy will follow. You can put on a spurt after you've found your giddy monocle, Gussy."

"Vewy well, deah boys; I will ovahtake you. But—"

"Come now, idiot!" said Blake.

"I wufuse to be called an idiot."

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "There's no need for us all to be caned because Gussy wants to play the giddy ox. Get a move on!"

The juniors were all of the same opinion. They certainly

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—

"TROUBLE FOR TOM!"

did not consider Arthur Augustus's eyeglass of sufficient importance to be caned for. They broke into a run again, and disappeared along the footpath, leaving the swell of St. Jim's groping desperately in the thick grass for the lost monocle.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, after a few minutes of frantic search. "I weally cannot find the beastly thing. I wondah exactly where I drowped it? It is weally most annoyin'. I certainly cannot go on and leave it heah!"

And Arthur Augustus searched on determinedly, striking match after match. The glimmer of the glass caught his eye at last, and he caught it up, with an exclamation of relief. It was found at last.

"Bai Jove, that was lucky!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "I suppose the fellows are at the school by this time. It was wathah wotten of them to go on and leave me. Howevah, I shall soon be there, and blow Cutts!"

And Arthur Augustus, jamming the precious monocle firmly in his eye, resumed his way.

He did not know how far ahead his friends were, and he hurried to overtake them. It was intensely dark on the footpath now, and on the grass his boots made no sound. There was a sudden shock in the darkness as Arthur Augustus, going at a good speed, ran into somebody's back.

Bump!  
Arthur Augustus staggered back from the shock, but the individual he had run into, quite upset by the sudden attack in the rear, went sprawling forward on his hands and knees, with a bump and a loud grunt.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! Who's that? Is that you, Blake?"

"Ugh! Grugh!"  
"Bai Jove! It's not one of the chaps," ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as he caught a whiff of mingled tobacco and spirits. "I say, whoever you are, I'm sowwy! I didn't see you in the dark, you know. Pway allow me to assist you."

Arthur Augustus struck a match, and looked down at the fallen man, who was just rising to his feet.

Then he uttered another exclamation.

He knew the man by sight.  
The flicker of the match disclosed a hard, coarse face with a ragged moustache, and two little eyes set close together. D'Arcy knew the face well enough. It was that of a disreputable character well known in Rylecombe. His name was Lasker, and he turned a more or less honest penny by playing billiards with less skilful players at the Green Man, and by "making a book" on the races. He generally made one at the little card-parties at the Green Man, to which the "blades" of St. Jim's resorted after lights out—Cutts and his set.

However, blackguard as the man was, D'Arcy had bumped him over, and he owed him an apology, and he never failed in politeness.

"I am weally sowwy, Mr. Lasker," he said, as the match went out. "You see, it is so dark that I did not observe you, and I was in wathah a huwwy."

"You clumsy young idiot!" growled Mr. Lasker.

"Sir!"

"I've a good mind to wring your neck."

"I have made my apology for knockin' you ovah," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "If you were a decent chap you would regard that as quite suffish. I have nothin' more to say to you. I wogard you as an outsidersah."

And Arthur Augustus walked on, leaving Mr. Lasker growling to himself, and using some lurid expressions that were very shocking indeed to the fastidious ears of the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy broke into a run again, but his luck was out. Two minutes had not elapsed, when there was another bump in the darkness of the footpath, as D'Arcy ran into some unseen person. This time it was D'Arcy who fell. He staggered back, and bumped into the grass with a gasp.

"Is that you, Lasker?"

Arthur Augustus sat up quickly as he heard that sharp voice from the person he had run into. For it was the voice of Cutts of the Fifth, the captain of St. Jim's.

Dazed as he was by the collision and the fall, D'Arcy could not help grinning.

He understood now that he had chanced upon one of Cutts's secret meetings with one of his disreputable associates.

"No, I am not Laskah," said Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled up. "I'm sowwy, Cutts, but I am not Laskah. I'm D'Arcy of the Fourth."

Cutts uttered an exclamation, sharp and startled, and

it seemed to D'Arcy that there was a note of fear in his voice.

"D'Arcy! You young hound, you're spying on me, are you?"

"You uttah wottah, you know I am quite incapable of spyin' on anybody!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly.

"What are you doing here?"

"I am goin' back to the school."

"You're out after locking-up," said Cutts harshly. "You'll take five hundred lines, and come to my study to be caned before bedtime."

Arthur Augustus set his lips hard. Fifty lines or a hundred would have been a fully adequate punishment for being out after locking-up. Five hundred lines and a caning were a little too "thick."

"I suppose you are jokin', Cutts," said D'Arcy quietly.

"You'll find I'm not, you young hound!"

"Pway don't call me names, Cutts! I don't like it."

"Why, you—you—"

Cutts came groping towards the junior in the darkness, guided by the sound of his voice. Arthur Augustus stepped back and eluded him.

"Keep your paws off me, Cutts!" he said, in the same quiet tone. "You are not goin' to handle me, you wottah! And I am not goin' to do any lines, and I am not comin' to your studay to be caned."

"What!"

"Mr. Laskah is quite neah, if you want him," pursued D'Arcy imperturbably. "One good turn deserves another, Cutts. Pewwaps, howevah, you would like me to mention to Mr. Waitton that you have come here to meet that blackguard Laskah."

He heard Cutts draw a sharp, hissing breath.

"You are goin' to excuse me for bein' late," said D'Arcy calmly. "I have already wemarked that one good turn deserves another. Don't you think so?"

Cutts clicked his teeth. His incautious exclamation when he had bumped D'Arcy over had certainly given him away to the junior.

"I—I excuse you!" he muttered thickly.

"Can I tell Taggles so, so that I shall not be weported for comin' in late?"

"Yes," muttered Cutts.

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

And he dodged past Cutts of the Fifth and ran on towards the school, feeling very elated. He was certainly late for locking-up, but his meeting with Cutts had stood him in good stead—for once the peculiar manners and customs of Cutts of the Fifth had proved a boon and a blessing. One good turn deserved another.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Desperate Measures.

GERALD CUTTS stood in the darkness of the footpath for a full five minutes after D'Arcy had gone without moving.

He was breathing hard, and his face was pale under the dark shadow of the trees. Not until it was quite certain that the junior was at a distance did the captain of St. Jim's move from the spot.

A red spark appeared in the distance down the long, dark path under the hanging branches, and Cutts knew that it was the glowing of a cigar.

He moved towards it.

"Is that you?" he called out, as soon as he came close to the red glow of the cigar, and this time he did not add the name. He had learned caution.

"It's me," came back Lasker's voice.

"Good!"

Cutts joined the man under the trees.

Dimly he made out the dingy, blackguardly face behind the red glow of the cigar-end.

"Did you meet anybody on the path, Lasker?" he asked.

Lasker muttered an oath.

"A kid run into me, and knocked me over," he said—

"one of the kids at your school, Master Cutts."

"He recognised you?"

"Yes."

Cutts clicked his teeth.

"But—he didn't know you were coming—well, he knows it now, I suppose. Still, he can't guess why—he can't guess that. Hang him!" muttered Cutts. "What rotten luck that he should be late out this very evening."

Lasker peered at him curiously.

"Wot's the matter?" he asked. "Wot's the 'arm?"

# ANSWERS

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You're captain of the school, ain't you, and you can keep a kid in order, I s'pose? You think he'll tell about you?"

"No, but—well, it can't be helped. Come into the trees here, I've got to speak to you, Lasker!"

"Tain't a little game down there, then?" asked Lasker, indicating the distant Green Man with a backward movement of his head.

"No, no; I've no time for that now, nor inclination, either. It's something important," said Cutts, leading the way from the footpath. "Come with me!"

Lasker, wonderingly, followed the Fifth-Former of St. Jim's under the trees. Cutts did not pause till they were some distance from the footpath, and safe from all possible eavesdroppers.

Then he stopped, and Lasker stopped, too, under an old oak, where it was so dark that they could hardly discern one another.

"Well, wot's the game?" asked Lasker, at last.

"I want you to do something for me—to help me, Lasker," said Cutts, sinking his voice to a low tone. "I'm in a rotten fix!"

Lasker's face set hard in the dark.

"I'm afraid I haven't any tin to lend, Master Cutts. If I had—"

Cutts broke into a scornful laugh.

"You idiot! Do you think I'm trying to borrow money of you?" he exclaimed contemptuously.

"Then it ain't that?"

"Of course not!"

"I'm quite at your service, Master Cutts!" said Lasker, his wonder increasing. "I'm ready to do anything I can to 'elp a generous young gent like you."

"I'll make it worth your while," said Cutts. "I'm in funds now—I've had a lot of luck with cards lately. I've got plenty of money, as far as that goes."

"It generally goes pretty fur," said Mr. Lasker sententially.

"You know I'm captain of the school," pursued Cutts. "Kildare cleared off some time ago, and I got in in his place. It's the place I want, and I'm making a good thing out of it, too, in many ways."

Lasker chuckled.

"I understand," he said.

"Well, I've suddenly heard to-day that Kildare is coming back."

"Oh, that's bad!"

"He will be at St. Jim's on Wednesday, and then I've got to step out and make room for him—he becomes captain of the school again."

"And then certain little games will have to stop," Lasker remarked. "It will mean money out of your pocket, Master Cutts."

"Yes—if he comes!"

"Didn't you say he was coming?" said Lasker, in surprise.

"Yes, he's coming—unless—unless—"

"Unless—" repeated Lasker, as Cutts paused.

"Unless he's stopped!" said Cutts, at last.

"Stopped?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence.

"I don't quite catch on, Master Cutts," said Lasker, at length. "'Ow is he going to be stopped? He can't be stopped, can he?"

"You see," said Cutts, without answering the question, "if I could keep the place, say, for the rest of the term, I could make myself safe in it. I'm getting to be popular—I'm getting more of the fellows into my own set—and a good many of the seniors owe me money, and have to dance to my tune. By the end of the term I think I should be able to defy Kildare—to keep the captaincy, although he was back—you see? It's a question of preventing him from coming back now—or for a few weeks."

"But—but—"

"That's where I want you to help me," said Cutts, almost in a whisper. "Kildare is not to reach the school on Wednesday."

Lasker started violently.

"Master Cutts, you don't mean—"

"Well?"

"You—you don't mean anything—violent?" muttered Lasker, his face very pale, and his eyes staring wide in the gloom.

Cutts gave a savage laugh.

"Is that anything new to you?" he demanded cuttingly. "I seem to remember that you were sent away to the stone jug for three months once for being concerned in a case of robbery with violence."

Lasker scowled.

"I don't say I haven't had a 'and in some things," he

said. "But—but this is serious. What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing serious. You don't suppose I'm idiot enough to want to hurt the chap, do you?" snapped Cutts. "I'm not quite a fool. I want him kept away from St. Jim's for the rest of the term. Suppose he were ill—"

"Ill!" said Lasker.

"Or—or crooked—"

"He arrives in Lanchester to-morrow. His people live there—he's been away in Ireland at his uncle's place, you know. Well, if he were laid up when he arrives in Lanchester, he would naturally be taken home to his pater, and he would stay there till he was well—see?"

"I see."

"I tell you I'm desperate," Cutts went on, in a low voice. "I won't lose what I've won—for the sake of a few weeks. And—and I'm making a splendid thing out of it. I've got half the Sixth and the Fifth to come to my bridge parties already—and you know I'm no fool with the cards. Can't you see what it means? Next term I shall have such a backing in the school that Kildare couldn't touch me. If he comes on Wednesday I lose at one blow all I've gained. He can't come."

"If he was laid up!" Lasker repeated reflectively. "Laid up in wot way, Master Cutts?"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know—that's more in your line than mine. I've learned just when he's coming—he will be at Lanchester by the twelve o'clock express to-morrow morning. You've been in Lanchester—you know the station is half a mile outside the town, and a lonely road."

"I know."

"It will be in broad daylight, of course; but—but you know your own business better than I do, Lasker."

"An accident—" muttered Lasker.

"Suppose a motor-car ran into his trap when he's driving from the station, or something of that kind? Suppose—"

"You ain't particular wot 'appens, so long as he's laid up for a few weeks?"

"Exactly!"

"And what's it worth to you?" asked Mr. Lasker, in a business-like tone.

"Five quid down, and fifteen more to follow if he doesn't arrive at the school before the end of the term."

"And expenses?" said Mr. Lasker. "It may be expensive."

"And expenses," said Cutts.

"You must be making a good thing out of the young gents who think they know how to play bridge, Master Cutts," said Lasker, with a chuckle.

"Never mind that," said Cutts, sharply. "I can afford to pay for what I want done, and that's all that concerns you."

"Quite so," said Lasker calmly. "Five down, you said. Where's the five?"

"Can I rely on you?"

"You bet!"

"There you are, then!"

A five-pound note changed hands. The day before that banknote had belonged to Smith major, of the Sixth Form; but in the evening Smith major had played bridge with Cutts, and the banknote had changed hands. Mr. Lasker tucked away the banknote into his pocket with great satisfaction.

"It's a go, sir," he said. "You rely on me!"

"Mind," said Cutts hastily, and his voice was a little husky, "only—only what is necessary to keep him at his father's house for a few weeks. Don't—don't do anything idiotic!"

"I know how much my neck is worth, thank you!" said Lasker, with a grin. "You're goin' to 'ave your money's-worth, sir, and nothin' more!"

"That's right!"

"Good-night, Master Cutts! See you again to-morrow?"

"Same time and place," said Cutts.

"Good!"

They parted.

Cutts of the Fifth walked back to St. Jim's with a hard, set face, his eyes glinting.

His heart was beating rather faster than usual. He knew and fully understood what a desperate step he was taking, and what terrible punishment it might bring upon him if it should become known. But how could it become known? Even if Lasker failed, if he even betrayed him, he had only to deny all knowledge of the man. A lie would cost Cutts very little. And with his own conscience Cutts could settle matters very easily; his conscience was a remarkably elastic one.

Not for one moment did he relent.

He was captain of St. Jim's, and he meant to remain captain of St. Jim's—even at the cost of a crime!

CHAPTER 6.  
Gussy's Idea!

TOM MERRY & CO. had succeeded in getting in just before the school gates were locked.

Figgins & Co. went to their own House, and the other fellows to the School House, where they waited for the return of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"The silly ass will get into trouble, of course," Blake growled, feeling angry with his chum, because he was concerned about him. "Taggles will report him, and Cutts will be down on him. There goes the bell for call-over, and Gussy will miss it!"

The juniors went into hall for calling-over, and certainly Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did miss it, and he was marked down as absent by Mr. Railton, who was taking the names.

"Where has the duffer got to?" said Monty Lowther, as they came out of hall. "By the way, Cutts wasn't at calling-over, either. If he's out, he mayn't drop on Gussy, after all. Taggles will report him to Railton!"

"Let's go down to the gates," said Blake.

They strolled out into the dusky quadrangle. The bell was ringing at the gate, and Taggles, the crusty old porter, came grumbling out of his lodge. The light above the gate glimmered upon the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, visible through the metal bars.

"Here he is!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, deah boy, heah I am!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Pway hawwy up, Taggles, old man. I want to come in!"

"Which I shall report yer!" growled Taggles, as he inserted the key into the lock.

The big bronze gate swung open.

Arthur Augustus walked in calmly.

"Pway don't twouble to wopert me, Taggles," he remarked.

"I have permish fwom the captain of the school to wemain out affah lockin' up!"

"If you got a pass, you got to show it, Master D'Arcy!"

"I haven't a pass, Taggay; it was a verbal permish. But you know vewy well that you can take my word," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Howevah, I wefere you to Cutts when he comes in!"

Taggles grunted, and relocked the gates; and the swell of St. Jim's walked away with his chums. They were distinctly puzzled by his statement to Taggles.

"Do you mean to say that you've met Cutts?" asked Blake.

"Yaas."

"And he excused you for being late?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Cutts must have been drunk or dreaming, then," said Manners. "What's the meaning of it? What happened?"

"I wan into him," explained D'Arcy.

"You—you ran into him?"

"Pweicisely."

"And he excused you for being late because you ran into him!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Yaas."

"Oh, don't play the giddy goat!" said Blake crossly.

"Stop talking out of the back of your silly neck, and tell us what's happened!"

"You see, I wan into anothah chap, too—that blackguard Laskah, the billiard sharpah. And I found that Cutts was goin' to meet him."

"Oh!"

"So Cutts excused me for bein' late, on my undahtakin' not to mention that meetin' to the Housemastah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Of course, I shouldn't have mentioned it anyway, as I am not a sneak; but I thought that one good turn deserved anothah, you know, so I put it to Cutts."

"Meeting Laskah, is he?" growled Tom Merry. "Pretty sort of thing for the captain of St. Jim's! But we always knew that Cutts was a blackguard!"

"He won't be captain of St. Jim's much longer, that's one comfort!" said Digby.

"Bai Jove, I'm hungry, you know!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "We haven't had tea yet, you know. I twust some of you fellows have got some tin; I am stonay bwok!"

"There's a registered letter for you," said Herries.

"Oh, good! That's my fivah at last!"

The registered letter proved to contain the long-expected fiver from D'Arcy's "pater," and the whole crowd of juniors proceeded to the tuckshop to change it. They returned to Study No. 6 laden with good things, and crowded round the table to a late but unusually plentiful tea.

"I've got wathah a good ideah, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as they disposed of the tea in rapid order.

"Boil it!" said Blake lazily.

"It's a wathah wippin' ideah, you know!"

"Keep it dark," said Monty Lowther.

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"Ferrers Locke, Detective," is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1d.

"I wefuse to keep it dark. I have ovah four pounds left out of my fivah. Do you know what you can do with four soveweigns?"

"Stand half a dozen feeds," said Manners.

"Wats!"

"Make a handsome contribution to the cricket fund," suggested Tom Merry.

"Wubbish!"

"Take us all on a giddy excursion in a motor-car next half-holiday!" said Kangaroo. "We will all come!"

"Wot?"

"Well, what do you want to do with the four quids, anyway?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Soveweigns, deah boy," corrected Arthur Augustus, gently but firmly.

"Quids!" said Lowther.

"Soveweigns—"

"Quids!"

"Pass the jam!" said Tom Merry. "Now, Gussy, having finished talking—"

"But I haven't finished talkin', deah boy. I—"

"You never have!" remarked Blake. "Can't it be continued in our next, like the serial stories? You've had your innings!"

"Wecally, Blake—"

"Talking of cricket—" resumed Tom Merry.

"I was not talking of ewicket, deah boy. I—"

"But I was. Now, talking of cricket—"

"I have already wemarked that I have a wippin' ideah, now that I am wollin' in money again. You fellows are aware that old Kildare awwives at Lanchester to-morrow by the midday expwess?"

"Darrel said so," agreed Blake. "What about it?"

"Lanchester isn't such a feahful distance fwom heah, you know. It is wathah unfortunate that to-morrow isn't a half-holiday, but I was thinkin' of puttin' it to Mr. Waitton, as an old sport—"

"Puttin' what?" roared Blake.

"Askin' him for permish for some of us to have a little wun to-morrow. Now that I have four soveweigns to spare—"

"They've got to last till Saturday," said Blake. "We're all nearly on the rocks."

"The futuah can take care of itself, deah boy. Besides, we can bowwow some money fwom Tom Mewwy, if necessary. That's all wight. Now, what I was thinkin' of is this—if two or three of us could get permish to take a little wun to-morrow, how wippin' it would be to have a cah out, and wun ovah to Lanchester to meet Kildare at the station!"

"My hat!"

"Take a motor-car fifty miles to meet a chap at a station!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegah that as a vewy pwetty compliment to Kildare, and it will show him how awf'ly keen we are to have him back. And in this wippin' weathah it will be a vewy enjoyable wun—if we can get leave!"

"If!" said Herries.

"Well, Waitton is wathah an old sport, you know, and he's as pleased as Punch at Kildare comin' home again. I wathah think that he will give us leave, if I put it to him vewy nicely. Of course, I shall have to do the talkin'. You know that in a delicate mattah like this, it requires a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"It would be a jolly nice run-out, if Gussy wants to wasto his filthy lucre in that way," Blake remarked thoughtfully; "and it would make Cutts waxy too. I know it gets on his nerves frightfully to see us so keen about Kildare coming back."

"Yaas; I was thinkin' of that too. The fact is," said Arthur Augustus, with a beatific smile, "I'm thinkin' of this as a first-wate joke on Cutts. I'm goin' to ask him to put in a word with the Housemastah for me."

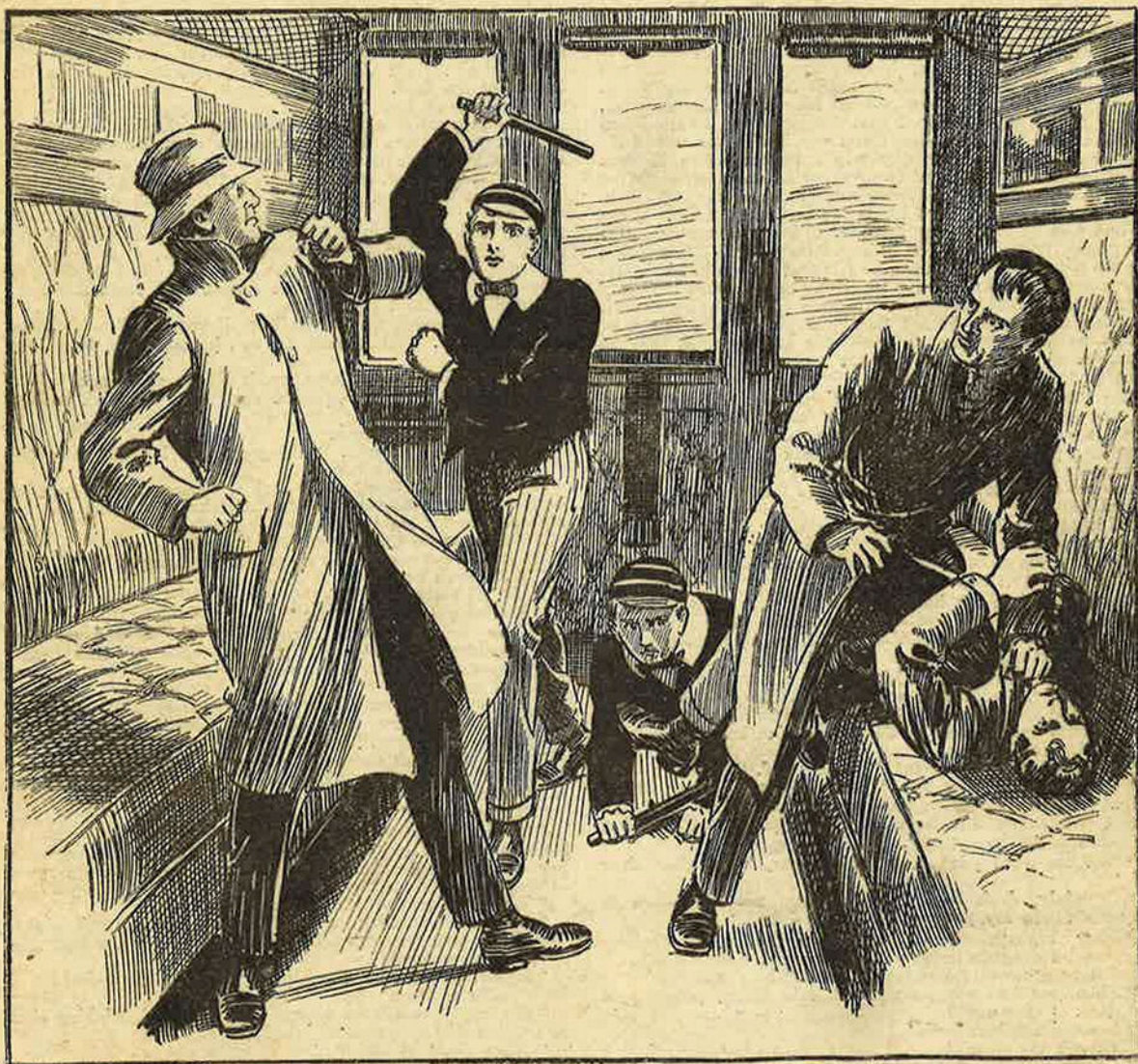
"He won't!"

"Yaas, he will, because he will be afwaid that I shall put in a word with the Housemastah for him—about Laskah, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He ought to be punished, you know, for thinkin' I could possibly sneak about him," the swell of St. Jim's went on. "Of course, he ought to know that a D'Arcy would be uttally incapable of sneakin', undah any possible cires. But he is a suspicious beast, and he judges othahs by himself. He is f'wightfully uneasy about it, I could see that. And, of course, it would be vewy bad for him if I was wotthah enough to mention to Mr. Waitton that he was out there meetin' that blackguard Laskah. It would be uttally impos for me to act like a sneak, but Cutts doesn't know that, so I weally think I shall be able to make him ask Mr. Waitton to give us leave to-morrow."

The juniors burst into a roar of laughter.



"You scoundrels!" said Kildare hotly, as the two men, their cudgels in their hands, sprang towards him. At the same moment two juniors scrambled breathlessly from under the seats. They were Tom Merry and Manners, and in their hands they grasped thick ebony rulers. (See Chapter 16.)

To make use of Cutts in that way tickled their sense of humour very highly.

"But if he knows we are going to meet Kildare he won't get us leave," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "That's the one thing that will make him risk anything rather than let us out."

"But I sha'n't tell him that, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus, with a sage nod of the head. "I'm only goin' to tell him that we want leave to go for a wun in the mornin', that's all. That's enough for Cutts. I shall tell Mr. Waitton it is to meet Kildare, you see, but not Cutts. We'll tell him aftahwards. And watch his face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake gave Arthur Augustus a sounding slap on the shoulder.

"Gussy, old man—"

"Ow! Yawoooh!"

"Hallo, what's the matter?"

"You uttah ass! You've vevy neahly dislocated my shouldah, and thwown me into quite a fluttah."

"Never mind!" said Blake cheerily. "That's only my way of expressing admiration."

"Pway express it some othah way next time, you wuff ass!" said D'Arcy, ruefully rubbing his shoulder. "I wogard you as a wuff beast!"

"Gussy, old man, you're a genius!" said Tom Merry. "It will be worth tons of toffee to see Cutts's face when we tell

him afterwards that we went to meet Kildare! But, I say, how many of us are going?"

"We'll have a four-seatah."

"That's you and us!" remarked Monty Lowther.

Blake sniffed.

"It's Gussy, and us!" he said warmly. "Dash it all, the motor-car belongs to this study, doesn't it? You Shell chaps can keep off the grass."

"Now, look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Don't be an ass—"

"Don't be a chump—"

"Peace, my infants!" said Arthur Augustus. "You can toss up for it, you know. That's the weally best way to settle it. Thwee of you can come with me."

And the juniors settled it that way, and chance favoured Tom Merry, Lowther, and Jack Blake. So the party that was to meet Kildare at Lanchester Station was constituted, if they could get leave. And that depended upon their old enemy, Cutts of the Fifth.

## CHAPTER 7.

Cutts is Very Useful.

THERE was no little party in Cutts's study in the Fifth-Form passage that evening. Cutts had more serious things to think about than auction-bridge and relieving his friends of their superfluous cash.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—"TROUBLE FOR TOM!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale at Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

His arrangement with Mr. Lasker gave him plenty of food for thought. He had done his best now—or his worst—to make his position secure, but he knew that he had not covered every chance. Lasker might fail, something might go wrong, he might have had all his trouble for nothing. But if Eric Kildare escaped that danger which awaited him on his arrival in Lanchester, Cutts was not at the end of his resources. Still, another day would elapse before Kildare came to St. Jim's, and in twenty-four hours much could be done. Cutts meant to fight the matter out to the last ditch, as it were. There was no hesitation in Cutts's mind. What he had won by cunning he intended to keep by any means in his power, fair or foul. If he could only retain his position for the remainder of the term he felt that he would be secure. His corrupting influence was spreading on all sides. Already there was a great change in the tone of the senior Forms. In a few more weeks he felt that he would be safe. Then he would be in a position of power for all the time that he remained at St. Jim's, and power was what he loved more than anything else.

But there were other considerations, too. As captain of St. Jim's he had perfect freedom to follow his peculiar inclinations without let or hindrance, and by means of the gambling parties in his study he made a regular income out of simpler fellows, a very great advantage for Cutts, who had expensive tastes, and sometimes came a "mucker" in racing speculations.

All that would have to cease instantly if Kildare came back and resumed his old position. It was no wonder that the black sheep of St. Jim's was prepared to contest Kildare's return by every means in his power.

But although Cutts had no little party in his study that evening, he was not left unvisited. Soon after his return from the meeting with Mr. Lasker there was a tap at his door, and Arthur Augustus of the Fourth came in.

Gerald Cutts scowled at him; he was not pleased to see the junior. Taggles had mentioned D'Arcy's late return to him, and Cutts had told him that it was all right, but he was bitterly exasperated by the necessity of letting the swell of St. Jim's go scot-free.

"Well, what do you want?" he snapped.  
 "Good-evenin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. Arthur Augustus did not like Cutts, and made no secret of the fact that he strongly disapproved of him, but he never failed in courtesy.

"Tell me what you want," said Cutts, "and then clear off."

"Certainly, deah boy. I twust I am not the fellow to intvude where my pvesence is not desiahed."

Arthur Augustus closed the door of the study, carefully adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and turned it upon Cutts.

"I have come to ask a favah, Cutts," he remarked.

"Then you can ask elsewhere!" said Cutts, pointing to the door. "Get out!"

"I wequire permish—"

"There's the door!"

"I wequire permish to take a little wun to-morrow with some of my fwinds in the mornin'. In this bwight spwing weathah, you know, it is weally enjoyabale to get a wun in the mornin's, instead of turnin' up in the beastly Form-wooms, you know. I dare say you have wemarked that yourself, Cutts."

"I haven't thought about it. Get out!"

"No; pewwaps not. You genevally take your little wuns of a night, don't you?" Arthur Augustus remarked innocently.

Cutts set his teeth.

"Howevah, I weally want permish for a wun to-morrow mornin', you know. I twust you are got goin' to be a beast about it, Cutts."

"You know I can't excuse you from lessons," said Cutts, eyeing him savagely. "You will have to ask the House-master."

"Yaas, I am quite awah of that; but I thought you might put in a word for me, you know."

"Well, I won't!"

"If you speak to Mr. Waitton, and ask him to give leave for four of us to take a little wun in the mornin', I'm suah he'll say all wight. You have been gettin' on wippingly with Mr. Waitton. Of course, he doesn't know you as we do."

Cutts's scowl became almost ferocious.

"Will you get out of my study, or are you waiting to be pitched out?" he demanded, rising to his feet.

"I will wetire, if you wequest it, Cutts. I suppose I shall have to go to Mr. Waitton myself!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"If I should happen to mention anythin' about Mr. Laskah—"

"What!"

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday.

"THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday.

"CHUCKLES," 1D. Every Saturday, 2

"Are you getting deaf, deah boy? I wemarked that if I should happen to mention anythin' about Mr. Laskah—"

"Hold on!" said Cutts, as D'Arcy laid his fingers on the handle of the door.

"Yaas, deah boy?"

Cutts thought quickly. His meeting with Mr. Lasker had to be kept a secret, for more reasons than the simple swell of St. Jim's thought of. If anything went wrong in the affair at Lanchester, and it came out that Lasker had assailed Kildare, it must not be known that the man had been in conference with Cutts the very night before the attack took place. Arthur Augustus knew that in his knowledge of the meeting he had a powerful weapon in his hand, but he little dreamed how powerful a weapon it was. The anxiety in Cutts's face surprised him as he turned back from the door.

"Well?" he said politely.

"I—I will speak to Mr. Railton, if you like," said Cutts, with an effort. "Of course, I don't promise that it will be any good."

"I twust it will be some good, Cutts, as if you fail to obtain the permish I wequire I shall have to speak to Mr. Waitton myself."

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll go to Mr. Railton at once."

"Thank you, deah boy!"

Cutts left the study, and Arthur Augustus reposed his elegant form gracefully in the armchair, to wait for his return. He had not long to wait.

In ten minutes Cutts re-entered the study.

D'Arcy's eyeglass turned upon him inquiringly.

"Well, deah boy?"

"It's all right," said Cutts.

"You've got the permish?"

"Yes. I—I put it to Mr. Railton the best I could—a little holiday as a reward for good conduct," said Cutts.

"You can go to-morrow morning."

"And my fwinds?"

"You can take one fellow with you; I couldn't get leave for more than once. You didn't want me to make Railton suspicious, I suppose?" said Cutts, savagely.

"That is wathah unforoh. However, I suppose I must be satisfied!" said Arthur Augustus, rising. "Thank you vevy much, Cutts!"

"Now get out," said Cutts, between his teeth.

"Good-night, deah boy!"

Cutts did not reply to that salutation. Arthur Augustus sauntered from the study, and returned to his own quarters. His chums met him there eagerly.

"Well?" asked half a dozen voices at once.

"It's all wight, deah boys. Cutts has played up all wight. But I can only take one fellow with me—that's the best that could be awwanged."

"H'm!" said Blake thoughtfully. "The Shell chaps will have to stand down then."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry. "I was just thinking that you would like to stand out, Blake."

"Now, don't be funny!"

"Twy the penny again," suggested Arthur Augustus.

The penny was tried again, and the lot fell upon Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell smiled a satisfied smile.

"Good egg!" he said. "I'll look after you, Gussy. And we'll give old Kildare a stunning welcome."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm sowwy we can't take the bwass band in the cah," said Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully. "But—"

"But I'll take Blake's bugle," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And so it was settled. Tom Merry and D'Arcy were to go to meet Kildare at Lanchester Station the next day. It would be a pleasant surprise for Kildare, and a pleasant run for the two juniors; but the cream of the affair was, that it had been arranged by means of Cutts, and that Cutts would be in a towering rage when he learned for what object his influence had been used. That Cutts would be enraged when he knew, they were assured; but they little thought how enraged he would be, and what excellent reasons he would have.

## CHAPTER 8.

### On the Road.

TOM MERRY and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were looking particularly cheerful the next morning. They were free after morning chapel, and it was very pleasant to be free on that sunny and fresh spring morning, when their less fortunate schoolfellows were going into the form-rooms for lessons as usual.

They saw Cutts that morning, but did not speak to him, Cutts passing them by quickly, with a scowling brow.

Cutts knew nothing of the intended trip in the motor-car. If he had known that they intended to have a car out, he

might have thought of Lanchester, but they had been very careful to keep that dark.

Indeed, on second thoughts, Arthur Augustus had decided not to tell even Mr. Railton that they were going to Lanchester, in case the Housemaster should mention it casually to Cutts.

They had the required permission, and it was not really necessary to tell the Housemaster anything; and, as D'Arcy sagely observed, Cutts was a very sharp beast, and under the circumstances a still tongue showed a wise head.

The two juniors were to cycle over to Wayland, where the car could be hired at the garage. Arthur Augustus, who generally did things in style when he was in funds, had often had a car out from the Wayland garage, and he was well known there.

So while the rest of the Fourth Form and the Shell were marching into their respective Form-rooms, Tom Merry and D'Arcy were as free as air, and enjoying their unaccustomed freedom immensely.

"Bai Jove, this is all wight, you know!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as they walked round to the bike-shed. "Cutts is wathah a usefule beast after all, isn't he?"

"Quite usefule!" grinned Tom Merry. "Buck up with that bike! We haven't any time to waste. It's a jolly long run over to Lanchester, you know, and we've got to get to Wayland first."

"Yaas, wathah! We'll scotch like anythin'!" They wheeled their machines out of the shed, and down to the gates, kissed their hands to Taggles, who frowned portentously in response, and mounted, and rode away to Wayland town.

The two cyclists covered the ground quickly. It did not take them long to arrive at Wayland town, and they jumped off their machines at the garage.

"Heah we are, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, wheeling his machine into the building. "Now we sha'n't be long!" They were indeed not long.

Arthur Augustus very quickly arranged for a car, and it was not long in getting ready; and, leaving their bicycles in the garage till they should return, the two juniors mounted in the car, and the chauffeur "tooled" it out of the garage, and they went buzzing away down the old High Street of Wayland.

Out of the old market-town the car sped along through leafy lanes, bright and fresh in the green of spring.

"Bai Jove, this is wathah bettah than the Form-room, I considah," Arthur Augustus remarked, with great satisfaction.

"And better than construing Cæsar!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"Yaas, wathah! If I were headmastah in a school," said D'Arcy, sagely, "I should awwange for the chaps to have little wuns in a cah evowry mornin', you know. I think that would be a distinct improvement!"

"Go hon! Won't old Kildare be surprised to see us?" said Tom Merry, with gleeful anticipation. "We can pick him up at the station, you know, and run him home—rather better than taking one of the old hacks they keep at Lanchester—what?"

"Yaas, deah boy, that's what I was thinkin'. And we can have a little talk to him in the cah, you know, and explain to him how we've been twyin' to keep Cutts in ordah, and to save St. Jim's fwom goin' to the beastly bow-wows, you know!"

There was no doubt that Kildare would be glad to see them, not only on account of their noble selves, but on account of the car. Lanchester Station was a good distance from the town, and being a very quiet and unimportant place, the means of transit were decidedly out of date. When Kildare found a handsome motor-car ready to convey him and his belongings to his home, instead of having to take a slow and rickety hack, he was bound to be pleased. So the juniors anticipated, at all events.

Hoot-toot!  
Arthur Augustus glanced carelessly back along the lane at the sound of a motor-horn behind them.

A taxi-cab was speeding after them from the direction of Wayland.

It was only of late that Wayland had been able to boast such modern improvements as taxi-cabs, and there were only two or three in the town. The taxi was coming on at top speed, in a cloud of dust.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, a little indignantly. "They're twyin' to pass us—a blessed taxi-cab, you know, and we're in a cah! Can't possibly allow that!"

"No fear!" said Tom Merry promptly. "We'll race them!"

"Yaas, wathah! Let her wip!" And D'Arcy directed the chauffeur to put on speed. The car increased its pace, but the taxi was evidently a good one,

and it came racing on, overwhelming the car ahead. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon it curiously.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

"It's that wascal, Laskah!"

"Lasker?" said Tom Merry, looking back at the taxi.

The taxi was closed; but the man inside was looking out of the window just then, and the two juniors saw his face clearly. It was the billiard-sharper of Rylcombe. He was calling out to the driver. He drew his head back and disappeared from view.

"Must have done pretty well out of some mug at the Green Man, I should say," Tom Merry remarked. "It will run him into a pretty penny, a run like that in a taxi, with the twopences going up as fast as you can wink."

"Yaas, wathah! It's wathah odd, too!" D'Arcy remarked, in a thoughtful way. "I've often used the taxis in Wayland, and there are only three, and I know all the dwivahs. I know that cab, but the dwivah must be a new man; I haven't seen him befoah. Powwaps our fwiedn Laskah has it out for the day, and has a fwiedn dwivin'. Anyway, he's not going to pass us; that's too much cheek! Let her wip, chauffeur!"

The chauffeur let her rip. The car was buzzing along now considerably in excess of the speed limit, but as the road was open and clear that did not matter very much.

The taxi-cab hung on, outdistanced, but still going strong. "Beatin' them!" said D'Arcy, with a satisfied glance backwards.

"Yes, rather!"

"We're half-way to Lanchester now," the swell of St. Jim's remarked. "I suppose that wothah Laskah is goin' there. Wathah surpwisin' that he didn't take the twain—that wide may wun him into pounds, you know."

Hoot-toot!

The car slackened down.

"Keep it up!" called out Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't let that cheeky cab ovahtake us, dwivah!"

"Right, sir!"

The excitement of the race was affecting the chauffeur too. He had a natural motorist's dislike for being passed on the road. The car sped on as fast as before, though the road was now full of sharp turns, and followed a somewhat steep incline. The juniors looked back—they were dropping the taxi-cab at last, and they felt an exultant sense of victory.

"Beaten hollow!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yaas, Laskah won't be able to keep his end up with us!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally considah—Oh, my hat! Gweat Scott!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

There was a sudden terrific jarring of brakes, and the car rocked and reeled. Round the bend in the road in advance came lumbering a huge, heavy market-cart, in the middle of the road, of course, with two sleepy horses plodding on, and a sleepy driver nodding above them. The chauffeur had taken too many chances. He jammed on the brakes and turned the car into the high, grassy bank beside the road just in time.

Bump, bump, bump!

For a moment it was like an earthquake to the juniors. Then the car stopped halfway up the sloping, grassy bank, with one wheel in the air; and the carter looked sleepily at them, and plodded on with the market-cart, perhaps under the impression that motor-cars always did that kind of thing.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, springing out of the car. "What wotten bad luck! No bones bwoken, howevah. Is there any damage done, chauffeur?"

The chauffeur jumped down.

"I'll see, sir!"

"Don't blame yourself; it was weally my fault," added D'Arcy graciously. "It is wathah unforch, as we are pweessed for time, but it can't be helped. We were takin' wathah too many wisks, I suppose. Nevah mind! See if we can get on."

"Here comes the taxi," said Tom Merry, as the chauffeur proceeded to examine the car.

"Oh, wotten!"

The taxi-cab from Wayland came whisking along the road. Lasker's face could be seen looking from the window, and he grinned at the sight of the car stranded on the grassy bank. That grin had a most exasperating effect upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he so far forgot the repose of Vera de Vere as to shake his fist at the grinning billiard-sharper.

The taxi vanished in a cloud of dust towards Lanchester.

"Well, what's the damage, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus. "Don't say we're stwanded."

"I can put it right in twenty minutes, sir."

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"Twenty wats!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "We shall be late for Kildare's twain, I'm afraid. Pway buck up!"

The chauffeur bucked up.

But the twenty minutes was too narrow an estimate. It was well over half an hour before the chauffeur, dirty and oily, announced that all was finished. Then the car was gently persuaded back to the road again.

"Looks as if we shall miss Kildare," said Arthur Augustus gloomily, as they stepped in again. "Still, it's a long woad from the station to Lanchester town, and we have to pass through Lanchester to get to the station, so we may pick Kildare up on the woad. He will be goin' slow in one of their old one-horse wattletwaps."

Tom Merry nodded.

After taking so much trouble, it would be cruel luck to miss Kildare at the station after all; and they could only hope for the best as they sped onwards, having learned once more the truth of the old adage—"More haste, less speed."

## CHAPTER 9.

### A Sudden Attack.

KILDARE stepped out of the train.

The big, handsome Sixth-Former of St. Jim's was looking quite fit and well after his long journey. He had a travelling-bag in his hand; it was large, and it was heavy, but he carried it without an effort, declining the services of a porter.

Kildare was looking very cheerful that sunny spring morning.

His uncle, of whom he was very fond, was recovering fast now from a long illness, and Kildare had left him convalescent. That was enough to make him cheerful. And he was coming to St. Jim's again—back to the old school, and his old chums—ready for the beginning of the cricket season, when great things were to happen. He was to pass the rest of that day and the night at his parents' home—and the next day he would be amid his old surroundings at St. Jim's. No wonder his handsome face was as bright as the sunshine itself.

He walked out of the station with his quick, elastic step. Outside the station were the three or four old hacks, with a tumbledown horses he had often seen before. But there was a new addition he had never noted on a previous occasion.

It was a taxi-cab.

Sleepy old Lanchester did not boast any taxi-cab, and Kildare was surprised to see one there. He was also pleased. He was naturally anxious to get home as quickly as possible, and he was not inclined for a mile walk with a heavy bag, and still less inclined for a drive in an old hack at a funeral pace.

The taxi-driver was standing beside his cab, and he came towards Kildare at once and touched his cap. He was a powerfully-built man, with a thick beard, and he wore motor-goggles. Of his face little was to be seen. But Kildare did not specially notice that fact just then.

"Taxi, sir?"

Two or three of the hack-drivers had a hungry eye upon their possible prey, but they knew they had no chance in a competition with a taxi. The taxi-man had it all his own way.

"Yes," said Kildare. "Abbey Road, Lanchester, as fast as you can."

"Yes, sir."

The bag was tossed into the taxi, and Kildare followed it. The driver took his seat, and the cab spun away from the station.

It was an unfrequented road, shaded on both sides by lines of big elms.

Kildare leaned back in the cab, and looked about him with great satisfaction as the cab sped on. The countryside looked fresh and sunny, and his heart was very light.

But halfway from the station to the town, in the loneliest part of the road, there was a sudden sound of jarring and rattling, and the cab stopped.

Kildare half rose.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as the driver jumped down.

"I'm sorry, sir; I can't go on!" said the driver, after a few minutes.

Kildare frowned a little.

"How far are we from Lanchester?" he asked, glancing round him. "About halfway, I think."

"Less than that, sir; it's only a short walk now," said the driver. "Will you leave your bag with me, and I'll bring it on afterwards, if you don't care to carry it?"

"No, I'll take it," said Kildare. "It's all right."

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"I'm very sorry——"

"Oh, that's all right; it can't be helped."

Kildare jumped out of the cab and took his bag. He glanced at the taxi-meter, and paid the amount due, with a tip in addition, and then walked on with long, springy strides in the direction of the town.

The taxi-man looked after him with a very peculiar expression.

Kildare turned a bend in the road, and then the chauffeur remounted into the cab, and, apparently without any difficulty whatever, drove into a side lane and stopped his cab there out of sight.

The breakdown had been a pretence; and Kildare, utterly unsuspecting, was stranded, on foot and alone, on the country road, far from help.

Not the slightest suspicion that he had been tricked entered Kildare's mind as he strode on.

The pretended accident had seemed natural enough, and he could not dream for a moment that the taxi had been waiting specially for him at the station, and that the whole incident had been planned in advance by Mr. Lasker of Rylcombe. He was thinking of anything but Mr. Lasker just then.

He strode on rapidly towards Lanchester.

In one place the lane narrowed, and passed under a thick clump of elms and oaks, of which the branches met over the road, making it dusky even in the morning sunshine.

Kildare plunged out of the bright sunshine into the shade of the thick trees, and for a moment his eyes were dimmed by the change.

It was in that moment that there came a sudden rush of feet, and three figures leaped out from among the trees beside the road.

Three men, each with a handkerchief tied across his face to conceal it, and each with a heavy cudgel in his hand, rushed straight at Kildare.

The attack was so sudden, and so utterly unlooked-for, that it was no wonder that Kildare was taken by surprise.

The three scoundrels were almost upon him when he realised that he was being attacked.

It was then that the quickness of thought and the agility of body that he had learned in the footer-field stood him in good stead.

The nearest ruffian was delivering a sweeping blow when the captain of St. Jim's leaped back just in time.

His backward spring carried him six feet—the blow missed its mark, and the ruffian, overbalancing himself, staggered forward and fell on one knee.

One of the men behind him bumped into him and staggered. The third ran straight on at Kildare, striking out with his cudgel.

But the Sixth-Former of St. Jim's had his wits about him now.

The meaning of that lawless ambush he did not know—his assumption was that he was attacked by a common gang of footpads—but whatever it might mean, there was no doubt that the scoundrels meant mischief, and that he had to fight for his skin.

The sunny, good-humoured expression was gone from Kildare's face in a second. His look hardened, his eyes gleamed like blue stones, his teeth came tight together.

With tiger-like agility he dodged the sweeping blow of the cudgel, closed on the man, and drove his right fist home on the heavy jaw.

The ruffian dropped like a log, with a gasp of anguish.

But the other two were coming on fast now, and Kildare knew that bare fists were no use against heavy bludgeons wielded by unscrupulous hands. With three to one against him, and the three armed, there was no shame in running, and it was his only chance of escaping serious bodily injury.

He sprang out into the road and ran.

"After him!" panted one of the rascals, and if Kildare had been nearer he might have recognised the voice of Mr. Lasker.

Kildare dashed down the road, and in a few seconds he was out of the shadows of the trees, and in the broad, open sunlight again.

That the footpads would dare to follow him far at midday on the high-road was not likely. He dashed on at top speed, not even dropping his bag. He did not intend to leave that as a booty for the supposed thieves.

Lasker and his companion dashed after him, and the third man, whom Kildare had knocked down, scrambled to his feet, and followed as fast as he could.

But in half a minute or less Lasker saw that the St. Jim's senior would beat them easily in a foot-race. They had no chance whatever with him there. But Lasker was desperate.

He paused, and swung his bludgeon into the air, and took aim, and the heavy weapon flew through the air.

It caught Kildare behind the knee, and he staggered forward, his right leg numbed by the shock, and fell upon his hands.

"Pile on him!" muttered Lasker, between his teeth. And the three ruffians closed in on their dazed victim before he had a chance to rise. At that moment there came a sudden sound on the lonely road.

Zip, zip!

Toot!

Down the road, from the direction of Lanchester, a motor-car came tearing.

## CHAPTER 10.

### A Scoundrel Well Punished!

**T**OM MERRY and his companion were feeling anxious as they passed through Lanchester after their long delay on the road.

They had none too much time for the journey from Wayland, and the delay had made it impossible for them to get to the station in time to meet Kildare.

Their only hope now was to meet him on the road. But the car had to slacken speed in passing through the town, and their hopes sank to zero.

"We sha'n't catch him," said Tom Merry, looking at his watch. "It's nearly half-past twelve now, Gussy. Unless he walks from the station—"

"He may do that, deah boy."

"Then we shall spot him on the road. But, otherwise—"

"We'll keep on as fast as the station, anyway; and if we don't pick him up we'll wun wound to his house aftahwards and see him," said D'Arcy. "Aftah comin' all this way we are bound to speak to the old chap, you know."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Of course, he may have walked. If he has he can hardly be in Lanchester yet, and we shall meet him on the road."

"I twust so."

The car passed out of Lanchester, and buzzed along the road towards the station at an accelerated speed.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy watched the road ahead, hoping to catch sight of Kildare. If he had walked from the station they were sure of him.

Tom uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Kildare!"

Then he gave a yell.

"Look at that!"

For a moment the juniors could scarcely believe their eyes. The well-known form of Kildare of the Sixth had suddenly appeared from under the trees overhanging the road, far ahead of the car, running.

Why he was running had puzzled Tom for a moment, till he saw three figures, three men with handkerchiefs tied across their faces, burst from the trees in pursuit.

What happened next passed in a flash.

Lasker & Co. had no eyes for the distant car. They were thinking only of their victim.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy saw the bludgeon hurled, saw Kildare fall in the road, and saw the three ruffians rushing to pile on him.

"Footpads, bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Faster!" shrieked Tom Merry. "Faster, for Heaven's sake!"

The car simply leaped forward.

And the chauffeur, with quick intuition, sounded his horn loudly.

The sudden blasts of the motor-horn warned Lasker & Co. that they were not alone upon the road, and just as they reached Kildare's fallen form they paused to look along the road.

The motor-car was sweeping down upon them, Tom Merry and D'Arcy standing up in it, with blazing eyes.

Another few seconds and the brutal work would have been done. But at the sight of the oncoming car Lasker's companions weakened. To attack Kildare alone under the shadow of the trees was one thing. To carry out the attack in broad daylight, with the eyes of three witnesses upon them, was quite another.

For a second there was a tense pause.

Then two of the rascals bolted for the trees beside the road, scrambled over the palings, and disappeared.

Only one hesitated, and that was Lasker.

He was on the very edge of success when this interruption came. But he was more "game," or a more thorough rascal, than his companions. He did not run. Quickly he calculated the distance of the car, and the time it must take to reach him, and then he hurried himself at Kildare. One savage blow, and his work would be done. Mr. Lasker had "outed" more than one person in his chequered career, and he knew just where to hit, and with precisely how much force, to do

the required amount of injury, without entailing too serious consequences for himself.

But that pause, when the motor-horn was heard, was enough for Kildare. The St. Jim's fellow was already on his knees to rise.

Lasker came rushing upon him, with bludgeon sweeping the air, and Kildare watched for the coming blow.

It came, and Kildare threw himself aside, and the blow grazed his shoulder instead of crashing upon his head. The bludgeon came down with such force that it struck the ground, and the concussion jarred Mr. Lasker's wrist painfully.

Kildare was on his feet the next second, but his leg was numbed, and it gave way under him, and he sank down on one knee again.

Lasker had backed away; but as Kildare sank helplessly on his knee he came on again savagely.

With a whirl of brakes the car stopped, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy leaped out, without waiting for it to come to a standstill.

Arthur Augustus lost his footing, and rolled in the road, gasping. But Tom Merry ran on like a deer.

He ran right into Mr. Lasker as he was hitting out, and clawed him, and dragged at him, and the rascal had to turn his attention to Tom Merry instead of Kildare.

He muttered a savage curse as he shortened his arm to bring the bludgeon down upon Tom Merry's head.

But he had no time for that.

Tom's clenched fist came up, hard as iron, and seemingly as heavy as a hammer, and caught Mr. Lasker fairly under his fat chin.

The rascal reeled back with a gasp, and fell, and before he had a chance of recovering Tom Merry was upon him. The cudgel had fallen from Lasker's hand, and he was down upon his back, and Tom's knee was on his chest.

Arthur Augustus and the chauffeur were upon the scene the next moment, and three pairs of hands were grasping Lasker at once.

He struggled fiercely.

"Collar the wotah!" panted Arthur Augustus.

"Got him, sir!" said the chauffeur, fastening his grasp upon Mr. Lasker's collar. "He won't get away."

"Hold him!" said Tom, and he sprang to help Kildare.

Kildare rose painfully to his feet, with the junior's assistance. He leaned heavily upon Tom Merry's shoulder.

"Thank you, kid!" he said, breathing hard. "You came along in the nick of time. But how on earth do you happen to be here? You ought to be at the school!"

"We came to meet you, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"We were going to pick you up at the station," explained Tom Merry. "Only we had bad luck on the road, and we were late."

"It was jolly good of you to come," said Kildare, "and jolly lucky for me. My hat! My leg hurts. Keep that rotter tight. The others have got away."

"We've got this cad all right, deah boy. He won't get away in a huwvy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll see who he is, too."

He jerked the handkerchief from the face of the helpless rascal. Then he uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"Laskah, bai Jove!"

Mr. Lasker scowled furiously. He was a helpless prisoner now, and he had ceased to struggle. His scheme had failed, and he had the pleasant prospect before him of being taken in charge, and prosecuted for attempted robbery with violence. It was a decidedly bad ending to his little scheme.

"Lasker!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The chap who passed us on the road in a taxi-cab. Why, he must have come over especially for this Kildare, to lay for you!"

Kildare looked puzzled.

"Blessed if I see why," he said. "I've got nothing special about me that's worth stealing. He wouldn't get much more than enough to pay the taxi fare from Wayland, I fancy."

"Well, that's what he did, anyway. He passed us on the road," said Tom.

"In a taxi, you say?"

"Yes."

"I found a taxi at the station here," said Kildare. "I've never seen one here before. I took it, and it broke down half-way, and I had to walk."

"My hat!"

The St. Jim's fellows looked at one another in astonishment. It was pretty clear now that the attack on Kildare was not a footpad affair, but a planned scheme from the beginning. Why had Lasker come over in a taxi to ambush Kildare? What could his possible object have been? Robbery? The proceeds of a robbery could hardly have paid for the expense he had been put to, and there would have been four to divide the loot, including the man who had driven the cab.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Tom Merry. "The fellow must be dotty!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kildare sat down on the bank and rolled back his trouser-leg to examine the injury he had received. There was a huge bruise behind his knee, but no worse damage was done. The timely arrival of the juniors had saved him from serious hurt.

"Bad?" asked Tom anxiously.  
Kildare shook his head.  
"No; only a bump, though a pretty bad one. I shan't be able to walk for a bit."  
"That's all right. We're going to take you home in the car. That's what we've come for," said Tom Merry. "Shall we take this scoundrel in the car, too, and hand him over to the police? He ought to be locked up!"

Mr. Lasker turned very pale.  
"Ave mercy on a pore chap, young gentlemen!" he whined. "I—I was 'ard up, and I wasn't goin' to 'urt the young gent, that I swear to!"  
"You lying cad!" said Tom. "You were piling on him with that cudgel when we came up!"  
"I swear—"

"Chuck that!" said Kildare curtly. "I don't want to be bothered with prosecuting you. But you ought to be punished. What did you do this for?"

"I—I've 'ad bad luck. I was 'ard up!" whined Mr. Lasker. "I've 'ad cruel luck on 'osses, and—and I was led into this. A pal of mine, he says, he's got a good thing on, and would I take a 'and. I didn't know wot it was till I got over 'ere this mornin'."

"I don't believe that!" said Tom Merry. "I believe you were the leader!"

"Which I swear as how I wasn't!" protested Mr. Lasker. "I'm a poor man. I ain't got the dibs to 'ire a taxi-cab for 'arf a day for a game of this sort. Why, even if we'd got Master Kildare's bag and his watch we shouldn't 'ave made much out of the job, arter payin' so much for that there cab."

"So you were going to rob me?" said Kildare.  
"We was 'ard up!" pleaded Mr. Lasker.

"Then how did you know Kildare would be here to-day at this time?" asked Tom Merry very quietly. "He's been away for weeks! Who told you that he was coming back to-day?"

Mr. Lasker's jaw dropped for a moment, but he recovered himself quickly.

"I—I didn't know," he said. "You see, it was a game of my pal's. It was only by chance that we 'appened to drop on Master Kildare. The idea was to drop on some passenger walkin' 'ome from the station—one of the rich gents wot comes down from the City. But Mister Kildare was the only passenger wot come, so it 'appened to be 'im."

The St. Jim's fellows regarded him doubtfully. His explanation sounded lame, and yet it seemed impossible that he could have known that Kildare was coming by that train, and that he could have had any special object in waylaying the Sixth-Former of St. Jim's. Why should he have taken so much trouble to injure a fellow whom he barely knew by sight, and with whom he had never had any connection? Probably his explanation was true—that the whole affair was a clumsy attempt at highway-robbery, a clumsy and inept imitation of the methods of the Paris motor-bandits.

"Well, what are you going to do with him?" said Tom Merry. "He ought to be put in prison!"

"Yaas, wathah! Thweo yeahs penal servitude, or somethin' like that!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"Don't be 'ard on a pore chap! I'll—I'll never 'ave a 'and in nothing of the kind kind again!" groaned Mr. Lasker. "I've 'ad a lesson, THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 321.

I 'ave. I won't never try this 'ere game agin, you take my word!"

Kildare hesitated.  
The rascal had failed, after all, and, according to his own account, he was not the worst of the gang. And Kildare did not want his home-coming to be clouded by the trouble of a prosecution, even of a rascal like Mr. Lasker.

"I'll leave it to you, you scoundrel," he said, after a pause. "You can be taken to Lanchester and handed over to the police, or you take a thorough hiding now. Which do you want?"

Mr. Lasker wriggled painfully. He did not want either, as a matter of fact. But as he had to have one or the other, he chose the lesser evil.

"I—I'll 'ave the 'iding, and thank you kindly, sir," he muttered. "But don't be too 'ard on a pore chap."

"Roll him over!" said Kildare. "I'll give him such a walloping that he won't want to play this game again!"

"Yaas, pewwaps that is the best way, deah boy," agreed Arthur Augustus. "Ovah with him, Tom Mewwy, and sit on his beastly head!"

Mr. Lasker was rolled over in the grass beside the road, and Tom Merry held his collar, and D'Arcy stood on his legs. In that position Lasker was very favourably placed for the "walloping" that was to be his punishment. Kildare had noticed D'Arcy's gold-headed cane in the car; he picked it up, and came limping towards the outstretched Lasker.

Then the cane rose and fell with rapidity and force, and clouds of dust rose from Mr. Lasker's garments, and yells of anguish from Mr. Lasker himself.

Thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack!  
"Oh! Ow! Yow! Ow!"

"Go it, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pile in! Give him a couple of hundwed!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack!

Mr. Lasker yelled wildly, partly with the pain of the castigation, partly with apprehension at the idea of having a couple of hundred of the heavy thwacks.

After the cane had fallen twenty times or so, Mr. Lasker began to feel that he would have preferred, after all, to be locked up.

"Stoppit!" he shrieked, writhing frantically in the grasp

of the juniors. "Chuck it! I'll have the law of yer! 'And me over to the perlice if you like—ow! I won't 'ave any more of it—yow!—leggo!—stoppit!—yaroooh!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack, thwack!

"'Elp! Murder! 'Elp!"

Fifty heavy cuts were Mr. Lasker's portion. He would probably have received more, but Kildare's arm was getting tired.

The St. Jim's senior ceased at last, breathing hard. Mr. Lasker was by this time in a state of weeping anguish and misery.

"I think that will do!" gasped Kildare.

"Betth make it a couple of hundwed, deah boy. I'll take a turn with the cane, if you like, if you're tiahd."

"Ow!" roared Mr. Lasker. "Don't give me no more! Yow-ow!"

"And then Tom Mewwy can take a turn—"

"You—you ferocious young yammint!" gasped Lasker.


"Ow, ow, ow! I've 'ad enough, young gents! I won't never do nothing of the kind no more. Ow!"

Kildare laughed.

"I think he's had enough," he remarked. "Let him go. Now scoot, you scoundrel, and you'd better keep out of arm's length of me in the future!"

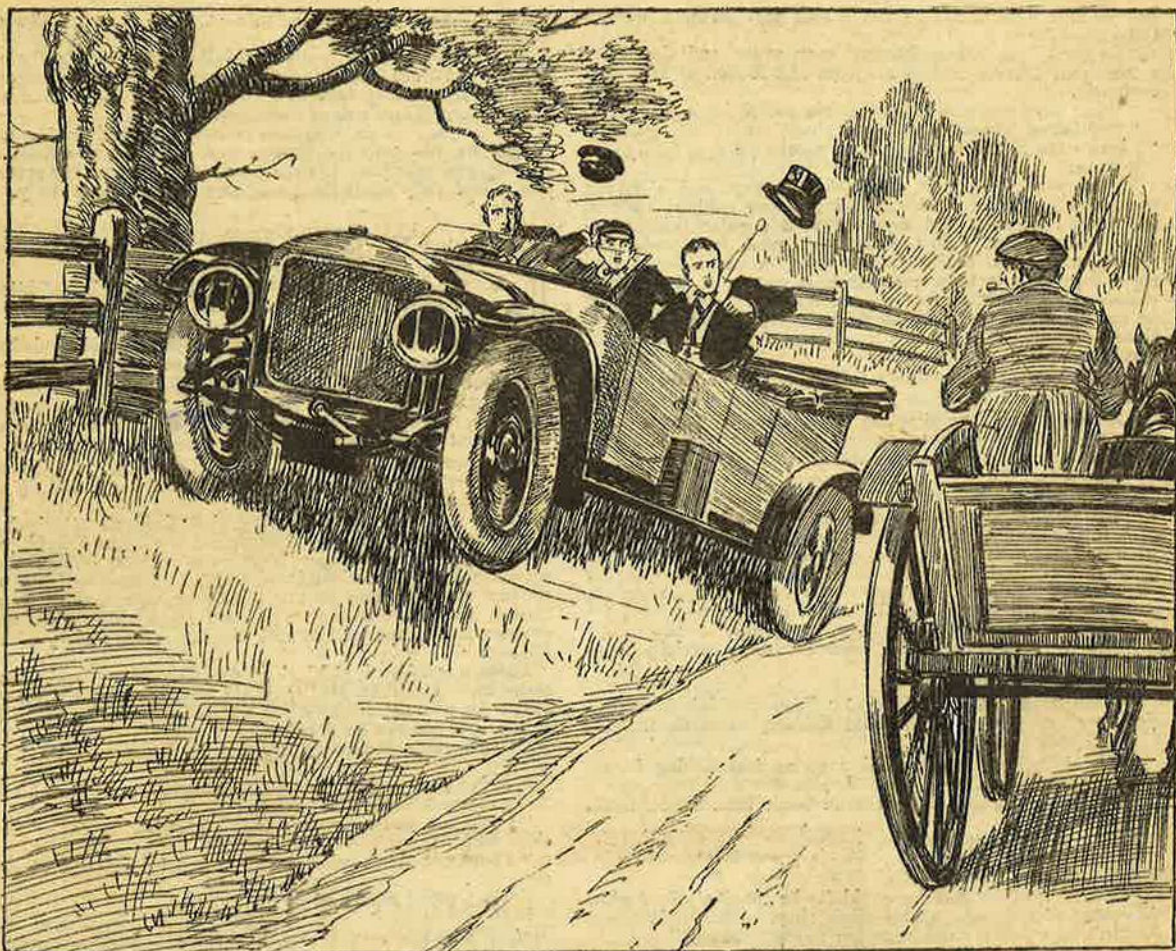
Mr. Lasker was allowed to rise. He staggered to his feet, and limped away down the road, groaning.

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The chauffeur jammed on the brakes, and turned the car into the high, grassy bank beside the road, only just in time to avoid collision with the cart. The carter looked sleepily at them, but did not stop. "But jove!" gasped D'Arcy, "what a nawwow escape!" (See Chapter 8.)

## CHAPTER 11.

### Tom Merry Sees Light.

"NOW we'll take you home, Kildare, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Thanks!"

Kildare and the two juniors took their seats in the car, and the chauffeur drove away.

Mr Lasker had disappeared up the road towards the station, in the direction of the waiting taxi. He was not likely to enjoy his run back to Wayland, especially if he sat down in the taxi.

But the St. Jim's fellows gave no further thought to Mr. Lasker.

He had been baffled in his rascally attempt upon Kildare, and he had been soundly thrashed as a punishment, and they dismissed him from their minds.

It was a very agreeable run in the car to Lanchester.

Kildare's leg was still painful, but he bore that quietly, only too glad that the arrival of the juniors had saved him from more serious injury.

He asked them many questions about St. Jim's as the car buzzed on, and the juniors explained how anxious they were to have him back, to save the whole school from completely going to the bow-wows, a fate that threatened St. Jim's—according to Tom Merry and D'Arcy—under the Cutts' regime.

As Kildare was to become captain of St. Jim's again on the morrow, and as Cutts would then be under his authority, the juniors did not say much about Cutts himself; they would have considered that in the light of "sneaking." Kildare could find out Cutts's little ways himself, if he wanted to.

But they explained with great eloquence that matters were really in a very bad state, and that St. Jim's wasn't what it had been, and that the only thing that could prevent the

school from sliding away to the aforesaid bow-wows was the prompt return of Kildare, and his resuming his place as captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare listened to all they said attentively, and though perhaps he did not fully agree with all their views, he probably realised as clearly as they did that his presence was really wanted at the school.

The car stopped outside Kildare's home at last, and the Sixth-Former took the juniors in with him, and they stayed there to lunch. Kildare grinned as he opened the two telegrams that were waiting for him. Tom Merry and D'Arcy spent a very pleasant couple of hours with Kildare's people, and then the car bore them away from Lanchester once more in the bright spring afternoon.

"I wathah wegard our little twip as a success, deah boy," Arthur Augustus remarked as the car ran on swiftly towards Wayland.

Tom Merry nodded.

"A bigger success than we expected," he said. "If we hadn't come up when we did, Kildare would have been badly hurt."

"And he wouldn't have been able to come on to St. Jim's to-morrow," said Arthur Augustus, with a sage shake of the head. "That would have been wotten. Why, the old chap might have been laid up for weeks if we hadn't awvived in time, you know!"

Tom Merry's brow was deeply wrinkled. He was thinking hard.

"It's jolly queer!" he said at last.

"What's queeah, deah boy?"

"About that attack on Kildare. What do you think Cutts would say if he knew about it?"

Arthur Augustus chuckled gleefully.

"He would be awf'ly wattay, I fancy. He would give a term's pocket-money for Kildare to be cwocked, so that

he couldn't come back to the school this term, I wathah think!"

"So do I," said Tom Merry, in so grave and significant a tone that D'Arcy turned his head and looked at him very curiously.

"What have you got in your bwain now?" he inquired. "I've been thinking, all the time," said Tom gravely. "There's more in this bizny than meets the eye, Gussy!"

"Yaas?"  
"That man Lasker is a billiard sharper and a racing tout, and that kind of thing; but highway robbery isn't in his line at all, I should say—not as a regular thing, anyway. It's queer. Just think. It must have cost them money to hire that taxi for pretty nearly a whole day. And there were four of them altogether, it seems, to divide what plunder they might have got from Kildare. Then, robbery on the high-road in the broad daylight—it's a risky business! Gussy, old man, I've thought it out, and I'm sure that Lasker was lying!"

"He would be more likely to lie than to tell the twuth, I suppose," agreed Arthur Augustus. "But what—"

"He said that they dropped on Kildare by chance—that they would have dropped on any passenger who had happened to come away from the station then—"

"That's so."  
"Well, I don't believe it. It's too thin. And it won't wash. Lasker is no fool; and if he was trying the business of a motor-bandit, like the chaps we read of in the papers, he would put a little more common-sense into it. It would be safer after dark, and he could have found a better-paying victim than Kildare. Kildare's only a schoolboy, after all, and not likely to have much tin about him!"

"Yaas; but they did go for him, you know."  
"Exactly; and I think they came over here specially to go for him," said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy shook his head.  
"Why should they, deah boy? They couldn't have had anything specially up against old Kildare, could they? He hardly knows Lasker."

"Somebody else has something up against Kildare," said Tom Merry quietly. "Somebody else would be jolly glad if Kildare were crocked, and couldn't come back to St. Jim's this term!"

Arthur Augustus started.  
"Do you mean Cutts?"  
"Yes, I mean Cutts."

"Gweat Scott! But he couldn't—he couldn't!" Arthur Augustus stammered. "My deah chap, a St. Jim's fellow couldn't have had a hand in such a wassally biznai!"

"One doesn't like to think so," said Tom. "But look at the facts. Don't you remember, Gussy—you found Cutts meeting Lasker secretly last night?"

"Bat Jove!"  
"Of course, he may have met him only about some of their rotten betting business—"

"That's what we thought, deah boy."

"Only it looks jolly suspicious! Cutts met Lasker last night, and Cutts is simply wild at the idea of Kildare coming back. To-day Lasker and a gang of roughs are all ready for Kildare here; and if they came over specially for him, as it seems, someone must have told them he would come by that train. Who could have told them excepting Cutts?"

"Bat Jove!"  
"I know it seems a pretty rotten thing to think of anybody," said Tom, colouring a little; "but it looks to me like a proved case. Cutts is rotter enough. We know the rotten trick he tried to play on Dig once, we know he's a gambler and a blackguard, and we know he's dead-set against Kildare coming back. We know he tried once to sell a First Elevation match because he had bets against the team. He's rotter enough for this, and it looks to me pretty clear against him!"

Arthur Augustus pursed his lips very thoughtfully.  
"It looks very cleah, the way you put it," he admitted. "But—but there isn't any pwoof, deah boy!"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of accusing him," said Tom. "It's no good trying to nail Cutts down; he's as slippery as an eel. But if we're satisfied that he put up this job on Kildare, we've got to keep our peepers open, to see that he doesn't play the same game again before old Kildare gets to St. Jim's to-morrow!"

"Oh, my hat! Kildare hasn't a single suspish, deah boy!"

"And he would laugh at the idea if we told him we suspected Cutts—if he didn't get waxy with us," said Tom. "Old Kildare is as unsuspecting as a baby. He can't look after himself, but we're going to look after him."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus heartily. "We'll look aftah the old boy, and see that he doesn't come to any

harm. And we'll fwustwate Cutts's knavish twicks, wathah!"

They discussed the matter at full length during the run back to St. Jim's, and as they discussed it little circumstances and incidents came into their minds which more than confirmed Tom Merry's dark suspicion.

The car arrived in Wayland at last, and Arthur Augustus settled the bill, and the juniors took their bicycles from the garage, and rode back to the school. And when they reached the school they made their way at once to Cutts's study.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Cutts Hears News.

LESSONS were over for the day at St. Jim's. Cutts of the Fifth was in his study, in a troubled and uneasy frame of mind.

He felt restless, and his usual calmness and cool-headedness seemed to have deserted him for the time.

He knew that long before this either Mr. Lasker had succeeded or that he had failed—either Kildare was laid up at home, unable to leave his bed, or else he was safe and sound, and booked to arrive at the school on the morrow.

Cutts would not know what had happened until he saw Mr. Lasker that evening, and the suspense was irritating and exasperating.

There was also the possibility that Kildare, attacked by the gang of roughs, might have put up a good fight, and in consequence might have been more severely injured than was intended by his rival at St. Jim's. That possibility was a very worrying one to Cutts, and he was anxious to see Lasker and learn exactly what had happened. But until evening it was not safe to seek the delectable society of Mr. Lasker.

There was a knock at his door, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy came in. Cutts scowled at them angrily. In his present mood he was not inclined for any company, least of all for that of the juniors he detested.

"Don't come bothering me now!" he growled. "Get out!"

"We've got to report to you, haven't we?" said Tom Merry. "We've come back, Cutts!"

"I can see you've come back!" growled Cutts. "Now clear off!"

"Then you don't want to know what happened at Lan- chester?"

Cutts jumped almost clear of the floor.

Both the juniors were watching him keenly, and Tom Merry's shot had been so sudden that Cutts could not possibly guard against it. His face went quite pale, and the startled look, almost of terror, that came into his eyes more than confirmed Tom Merry in his suspicion.

"Lanchester!" muttered Cutts.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"You—you've been to Lanchester?"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "That's where we were going, you know."

"I—I didn't know," muttered Cutts. "How could you go to Lanchester? It's a very great distance from here. Do you mean to say that you've biked fifty miles and back?"

"Oh, no! We left our jiggers in Wayland, and had a car out."

"A car!" murmured Cutts.

"Yes. You see, the idea was to meet Kildare at Lan- chester Station."

Cutts sank limply into a chair.

"To meet Kildare?" he stammered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You didn't tell me that!" said Cutts, between his teeth.

"You young hounds, why didn't you tell me you were going to meet Kildare? Not that it matters," he added hastily, realising his want of caution. "It doesn't matter to me where you went, or whom you met. However, you should have told me!"

"Well, we're telling you now," said Tom Merry blandly.

"Did you meet Kildare?"

"Yes."

"You—you met him!"

Cutts seemed scarcely able to speak the words. He knew now that his precious scheme with Mr. Lasker had "gone a-gley."

"Yes, we wan him home in the cah," said Arthur Augustus. "He is all wight, Cutts, exceptin' for the bump on his leg."

"A bump on his leg!" said Cutts, trying to speak calmly.

"Has he had an—an accident?"

"Not exactly an accident," said Tom Merry. "He was assaulted by a gang of roughs on the road from the station, and we came up just in time to prevent him from being badly hurt."

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"Oh!"

Cutts's eyes gleamed almost murderously for a moment. So the plan had failed, and these juniors were responsible for the failure. If looks could have slain, Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have come to a sudden termination of their careers there and then, on the carpet in Gerald Cutts's study.

"So—so Kildare was—was hurt?" gasped Cutts at last.

"Only a bruise on the leg, deah boy. We considahed that we ought to weport the occurence to you, as captain of St. Jim's—pwo tem!" Arthur Augustus explained politely.

The "pro tem." made Cutts snap his teeth. Certainly his captaincy would not last much longer, with Kildare unhurt, and returning to the school on the morrow.

His keen eyes searched the faces of the juniors. Did they suspect anything? Their looks were innocent and unconscious, however.

"Very well!" muttered Cutts. "That was quite right. By the way, what became of the—the rascals who assaunted Kildare? I hope they didn't get away."

"Unfortunately, deah boy, they all got away but one," said D'Arcy. "We managed to collah one of the wascals, the leadah of the gang."

Cutts's heart stood still.

"You—you captured one?"

"Yaas, wathah. A chap you know, deah boy, as it happens. Wathah a remarkable coincidence, isn't it?" said D'Arcy blandly.

"What nonsense!" said Cutts. "How could I know such a person?"

"But you do, deah boy."

"D'Arcy?"

"His name is Laskah!"

"Lasker?"

"Yaas: the chap you were meetin' last night, you know."

Cutts's face was white as chalk now.

"You—you're telling the truth?" he stammered blankly.

"I decline to answer that question," said Arthur Augustus jocosely. "I wegard it as an aspersion upon my personal honah."

"You say you caught Lasker among the gang?"

"Yaas."

"And—and handed him over to the police, I suppose?" said Cutts, articulating the words with difficulty.

His brain was in a whirl.

Lasker arrested. Charged with violent assault. What might he not say in the hands of the police? If he betrayed Cutts. If he did—The study seemed to swim round the head of the hapless plotter. Of course, he could not deny everything, deny all knowledge of Lasker; but—but—

"Where is Lasker now?" he stammered.

"I weally do not know, deah boy. I have not seen him for some hours."

"Did he—did he say anything?"

"What could he have said?" asked Tom Merry.

"I—I mean, about—about the reason why he attacked Kildare," muttered Cutts. "It—it was rather a queer thing for him to do, you know."

"Yes. He said he wanted to rob him."

"Oh!"

"Well, come on, Gussy," said Tom, turning towards the door. "We've reported the matter to Cutts, and we're finished here."

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Hold on!" said Cutts. "Did you say you had handed Lasker over to the police?"

"I didn't say so," said Tom.

"What did you do with him, then?"

"Oh, we gavo him a hiding, and let him go!"

Cutts drew a deep, deep breath. He was saved, then.

"You let him go?"

"Yes."

"That was rather a foolish thing to do," said Cutts, master of himself again at last. "I don't know whether it amounts to breaking the law, even. You should certainly have had him taken in charge by the police, and charged with what he had done."

"Yes; it's rather a pity when I think of it," agreed Tom Merry. "But it's too late now. Still, if you think it ought to be done, Cutts, I dare say you know where the man can be found, as he's an acquaintance of yours, and you could telephone to the police now in Rylcombe to look for him and arrest him. We'll leave it to you."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, with a smile. "We'll leave that mattah in your hands, Cutts, deah boy."

"I—I'll think about it," said Cutts. "You can leave it to me, as—as you say. Now buzz off! I'm busy."

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors left the study. Not till the door had closed behind them did Cutts give rein to the fury that was raging in his breast. Then the forced calmness dropped like a mask from his face, and he gnashed his teeth, and clenched his hands till the nails dug into the palms.

Leaving Cutts raging with impotent fury, guessing pretty accurately his state of mind, the two juniors walked away cheerfully down the Fifth-Form passage.

"I wathah think we have beaten Cutts this time," Arthur Augustus remarked, as they came into the juniors' quarters; "and we have bowled the wottah out, deah boy. He was in a blue funk when he thought that Laskah had been awwested."

"It's clear enough now," said Tom Merry.

"But we have put the stoppah on, deah boy."

"How do we know? Kildare won't be here till some time to-morrow, and Cutts may have another try!" said Tom abruptly.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"We've got to see that the cad doesn't do Kildare any harm till he's safe here," said Tom. "He seems to me to be desperate enough for anything. If he's gone so far he may go further. He's got to be watched."

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

"We'd better tell the fellows about it, and consult about what's to be done," said Tom Merry. "Bring Blake and Herries and Dig to my study, and we'll have a jaw over tea."

"Wight-o!"

Ten minutes later the chums of the School House were discussing tea, and Cutts's manifold sins, in Tom Merry's study, and holding a council of war.

And if Cutts could have heard the juniors in council he would have realised that the task he had set himself was harder than he had anticipated, and that the chances were now against him in his struggle to retain the captaincy of St. Jim's by desperate measures.

## CHAPTER 13.

### Knox Asks Questions.

**D**ARKNESS had fallen upon St. Jim's. Lights gleamed from the windows. Most of the fellows were in their studies, busy with their preparation.

The quadrangle was in deep gloom. All fellows were supposed to be in their Houses now—New House or School House.

But there were two juniors of the School House who were not indoors.

They were Tom Merry and Jack Blake. At the risk of trouble with their respective Form-masters in the morning, the two juniors were leaving their preparation undone that evening.

They had, as Blake said, something more important on hand than prep, though perhaps their Form-masters would not have agreed with them.

In the darkness that lay upon the school, the Shell fellow and the Fourth-Formier were in cover under the old trees near the school wall, where it bordered the high-road. They were on the watch.

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The council of war in Tom Merry's study had resulted in the decision that Cutts of the Fifth was to be kept under surveillance. All the Co. fully agreed with Tom Merry that the evidence against Cutts was conclusive; that he had had a hand in the attack upon Kildare on the Lanchester road. The evidence would not have satisfied the Head, and would probably not have convinced Kildare. But it was conclusive enough for Tom Merry & Co., knowing and distrusting Cutts as they did.

It was important, therefore, to know whether Cutts would be baffled by that failure and give up his scheme, or whether he would make another attempt.

That he could personally take part in any rascally attempt upon Kildare was scarcely possible. If he laid further plans it could only be through Mr. Lasker and his associates. He would meet Lasker again, and plot another scheme with him. And if he did the juniors meant to know all about it.

If Cutts left the school to meet Lasker the juniors intended to know it, and for that reason Tom Merry and Blake were keeping watch. Cutts, as captain of St. Jim's, had a key to the private gate, which was used by masters and prefects, and if he left the school that was the way he would go. There was no need for him to "break bounds" as the juniors did. He was free to come and go as he pleased. And Tom and Blake were keeping their eyes on that little gate, as they stood in the shadow of the trees near the wall.

Whether to follow Cutts or not, if they went out, they had not decided. The idea of playing the spy was very repugnant to them. But to save Kildare from a cowardly attack and possible injury it might be justifiable. But it would be very difficult. Cutts was a very wary bird, and not easily to be caught. If he were followed it was extremely probable that he would discover the fact, and the juniors would thus be betraying their knowledge to him, and putting him on his guard.

It was quite dark when Cutts came along to the gate. The juniors saw his well-known form cross the radius of light from the School House windows, and then he disappeared under the trees.

They kept back among the elms, almost holding their breath. Cutts of the Fifth passed within a couple of yards of them.

They heard the click of the key, and the gate opened. The Fifth-Former went out, and the gate closed and clicked behind him.

Cutts was gone.

"Gone to meet Lasker, of course," said Blake, in a tense whisper. "Of course, he would have arranged to see him again, to hear how he got on to-day. He didn't anticipate getting a report from you and Gussy first." And Blake chuckled.

Tom Merry chuckled too. That report of the happenings at Lanchester must certainly have come as a surprise to Gerald Cutts.

"The question is, are they going to fix up another scheme for getting at Kildare on his way here to-morrow?" said Tom.

"That's what we want to know. But—"

"It would be a bit difficult to shadow him, and hear what the rotters say to one another, but—and I don't like the idea—but—"

"I don't, either," said Blake. "But to help old Kildare—"

"Merry! Blake!"

It was a sharp, unpleasant voice ringing through the shadows of the quadrangle—the voice of Knox of the Sixth. The juniors started.

"The beast!" growled Blake. "He's spotted that we're out of the House, Tommy."

"Merry—Blake! Where are you?"

"That settles it!" said Tom. "We can't scud off now—we should be missed at once. I fancy Cutts has warned Knox to keep his eye open for us."

"Do you think he suspects that you know?"

"Well, no; only he never takes chances. He doesn't think we know; but he's just as cautious as if he knew we knew," said Tom ruefully. "That's Cutts all over."

"Merry—Blake!"

Knox was evidently determined to find the juniors.

And if he did not find them, he would at least advertise to all the school that they were out of bounds, and due punishment would be meted out to them when they turned up.

The idea of following Cutts had to be abandoned. Tom Merry and Blake circled away through the trees, and dodged into the School House, leaving Knox of the Sixth still seeking them in the dusky quadrangle.

Tom Merry was in his study with Lowther and Manners, hard at work upon his preparation, when Knox of the Sixth looked in. The Sixth-Former scowled at Tom.

"So you're here!" he said.

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"Here I am!" said Tom cheerily. "So glad to see you, Knox! If you knew what a pleasure it was to a chap to see your cheerful chivvy you'd often give us a look-in—I know you would."

"I'm sure of it," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You're such a kind chap, Knox—and so fond of us. We like to see your face—it's as good as going to Madame Tussaud's—and cheaper!"

"You've been out of the House, Merry!" said Knox savagely.

"Have I?" said Tom innocently.

"You know you have!" howled Knox.

"Well, if I know I have, then there's no use telling me," said Tom calmly. "It really seems to me a bit of superfluous information, Knox. You're taking a lot of trouble for nothing."

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, where and oh where have you been?" sang Manners softly.

"Find out!" said Tom. "You're not a prefect now, Knox, and the sooner you drop your prefecty manners the better. I'm not going to satisfy your curiosity. I don't approve of curiosity among Sixth-Form chaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox looked as if he would commit assault and battery upon the spot. But the Terrible Three were rather a tough handful to tackle, and Knox thought better of it. He went out and slammed the door instead. The Terrible Three smiled at one another.

"Knoxy seems rather ratty!" Manners remarked. "He can't get out of the habit of talking as if he were still a prefect. We shall educate him in time, I hope."

"Yes, rather! I suppose he's gone to call on Blake now, to ask him where he's been," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was indeed Knox's intention. He kicked open the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage without ceremony and stepped in. The four chums of the Fourth were sitting round their study table, solemnly preparing their next morning's lessons. They did not even look up as Knox came in, being apparently too deeply engrossed in their work to have heard the kick at the door.

"Blake!" rapped out Knox.

"Hallo!" said Blake affably, glancing round. "Welcome, little stranger!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the angry senior. "To what happy circumstance do we owe the honah of this visit, deah boy?"

"You were out after the House was closed, Blake."

"How do you know that, Knox?" asked Blake, with interest.

"I looked round the House for you, and you weren't indoors!" snapped Knox. "I want to know what you've been up to, you young scoundrel!"

"Isn't he a regular Sherlock Holmes?" exclaimed Blake, with enthusiastic admiration. "He knew I wasn't indoors, and so he deduced that I was out of doors. If he had known that I was indoors, he would have deduced the fact that I wasn't out of doors. Some chaps can do these things; you know, and Knox is one of them."

"I wogard it as a wondahful exhibish of unusual bwin powah," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Can you do any more things like that, Knox?"

"I shall report you to the Housemaster," said Knox.

"Go hon!" said Blake. "Are you taking up sneaking in your old age, Knox? As you're no longer a prefect, it will be sneaking, not reporting, you know. But I suppose you're built that way, and can't help it."

"Yaas, I feah that you are wathah a wottah, Knox," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Besides, you'll have to prove it," added Blake thoughtfully. "Report away—but you will look an ass if it turns out that I was in the box-room helping Manners to develop his blessed films."

"Were you in the box-room?"

"I didn't say so. I might have been—or I might have been on the roof, or up the chimney!" said Blake humorously. "If you want to sneak to Railton, go ahead, and I'll explain to him where I was. I'm not going to explain to you—sneak!"

"Sneak!" said Herries and D'Arcy and Digby in chorus.

To be called a sneak by a set of juniors was more than even Knox could stand. He charged at the chums of Study No. 6. They were on their feet in a twinkling, and Blake caught up a ruler, Herries a poker, and Digby an inkpot—and Knox paused just in time, scowling at them furiously.

"Well, what are you stopping for?" asked Blake sweetly.

"Come on! Don't be backward in coming forward, you know!"

"Pway come on, deah boy, we're weady for you!" said Arthur Augustus, taking his gold-headed cane out of a corner. "Don't mind us, you know!"

Slam!

Knox was gone.

Blake stepped to the door of the study and opened it, and looked out, and called after the furious senior:

"You've forgotten something, Knox!"

Knox turned back in the passage, under the impression that he had left something or other behind in the study.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Your manners!" said Blake blandly.

Then he closed the door of the study, and returned contentedly to his preparation. As for Knox, he strode away, with feelings that could not be expressed in words—and he found some slight solace and satisfaction in cuffing Levison of the Fourth as he passed him in the passage.

## CHAPTER 14.

### The Last Chance.

"It wasn't my fault; you can bet on that!" said Mr. Lasker. "I did my best. If them kids hadn't come along jest at the wrong time, it would 'ave been done!"

Cutts gritted his teeth.

Mr. Lasker was at the meeting-place, under the trees by the footpath in Rylcombe Wood, waiting for Cutts when he arrived there.

Lasker was in an anxious mood.

He had failed, though, as he tried to explain, by no fault of his own. But he did not want to offend Cutts. Cutts was too valuable an acquaintance for Mr. Lasker to want to offend him. He was desperately anxious to make Cutts of the Fifth understand that he really had done his best, and had only been defeated by untoward circumstances.

"Course, I didn't know that they were coming there," said Mr. Lasker defensively. "Ow was I to know? You didn't warn me that they was going to meet him!"

"I didn't know myself!" said Cutts savagely. "If I'd known anything about their intentions, I'd have taken good care they didn't leave the school."

"It was jest bad luck, then," said Mr. Lasker. "I 'ad the plan all cut and dried. We took a taxi over to Lanchester Station. Master Kildare he comes out; naturally he takes a taxi—I counted on that—and the taxi breaks down 'arfway to Lanchester, and leaves him to walk the rest—alone. There was three of us, hidin' ahead of him on the road—ready to pounce on him. I had Jerry Baker and Bill Wylie with me—both good boys at that kind of game. He was quick, and he managed to run; but we was right on to him agin, when the car came teavin' up. Then it was all over. Jerry and Bill cut and run, I put up a fight, and they laid me by the 'eels!"

"Lucky they didn't hand you over to the police!" growled Cutts.

Mr. Lasker drew a deep breath.

"It was lucky," he admitted. "I might 'ave got a good stretch. 'Course, I shouldn't 'ave said a word about you, Master Cutts!"

Cutts was not quite so sure about that, but he did not say so. Fortunately for both of them, Mr. Lasker had escaped any personal dealings with the police.

"You see, it wasn't my fault, sir."

"Never mind whose fault it was," snapped Cutts—"that doesn't matter much now. The trouble is, you've failed, and Kildare is coming on to the school to-morrow just the same!"

"I s'pose so!" agreed Mr. Lasker.

"Then how is he going to be stopped?"

Mr. Lasker coughed.

"You ain't chuckin' the game at this stage, then, Master Cutts?"

"Of course not. I'm going to fight to the finish. It will be time enough to get out of the captaincy when I'm shoved out. There's still a chance. I've asked Darrel about Kildare's plans—he's had another letter from him to-day. Kildare is coming on by train from Lanchester to-morrow afternoon."

"The local train?" said Mr. Lasker thoughtfully.

"Yes, of course."

"Ain't many passengers in that, as a rule," said Lasker.

"I know!" said Cutts irritably.

"Generally one first-class carriage, and a second, and a couple of thirds," resumed Mr. Lasker, very thoughtfully indeed. "People in the thirds, and some in the second, but, as a rule, only one or two in the first-class."

"What do you mean?"

"I've travelled on the line pretty often," explained Mr.

Lasker. "I've noticed that, sir. And in the early afternoon the train's generally emptied of all. I suppose Master Kildare will travel first-class?"

"I suppose so," said Cutts. "Why?"

"Then the chances are that he'll be alone in the carriage."

"Well?"

"Almost certain to be alone in the carriage—first-class, early afternoon, on the local line," said Mr. Lasker, still more meditatively. "Looks like our chance, sir. It's easier to deal with a chap in an empty railway-carriage than on a public 'ighway."

"Oh!" said Cutts.

"S'pose a couple of fellers get into the carriage at the last moment along with our young gentleman?" said Mr. Lasker, in a low voice. "It's a good run between the stations—we have twenty minutes arter leaving Lanchester without a stop. Lots of things can 'appen in twenty minutes."

Cutts breathed hard.

"A lick over the 'ead with a life-preserver, f'instance," said Mr. Lasker cheerfully. "Quite an easy thing to do, you know. Takes the young gentleman quite by surprise, too. Don't know wot's 'appened to him till he wakes up hours arterwards. The train slows down at the Beechfield level crossing. Sometimes waits there. Chaps can slip out of the carriage and walk away. Passengers sometimes get down there, you know. Master Kildare stays in the train, laid out. They find him at the next station. Discover his name and address on him and send him home."

"It sounds all right," said Cutts. "But after what's happened to-day, Lasker, you'll be suspected of having a hand in it."

Mr. Lasker grinned.

"I sha'n't have a hand in it," he said. "I'll instruct Jerry Baker and Wylie. They can do the trick, and I'll take care to show myself in public all the afternoon, so that my alibi will be all right."

"Can you rely on them?"

"You bet!"

"Kildare doesn't know them by sight?"

"No; they had hankies across their chivvies to-day when we laid for 'im. 'Sides, they can make up a bit—moustaches, you know, and different clothes."

"It seems all right. Mind, see that they don't do too much harm. You understand?"

"Bless your 'eart, they ain't the kind to risk their little necks," said Mr. Lasker, with a grin. "You leave it to them."

"If it's all right I'll make it a fiver each for them," said Cutts.

"They'd knock out their own blessed grandfathers for that, and willing," said Lasker. "What train does Mr. Kildare come by?"

"He leaves Lanchester at three."

"The regular local. That's all right. It's a go, Master Cutts!"

"It's the last chance," said Cutts. "The fellows have a scheme of meeting Kildare at Wayland Junction with a motor-car, and bringing him to St. Jim's in a sort of triumphal procession. So he won't come on by the local from Wayland to Rylcombe. He's got to be tackled between Lanchester and Wayland, if at all."

"And that's where we'll nail 'im," said Mr. Lasker.

"Well, I rely upon you," said Cutts. "The juniors can't interfere again to-morrow, at all events."

And they separated, after a little further talk.

Cutts's heart was lighter as he walked back to the school. The first blow had missed its mark, but the second should not miss. The attack in the railway-train was much safer and surer than Mr. Lasker's first plan. Shut up in a railway-carriage with a pair of ruffians, Kildare would have little chance of resistance, and no chance of escape. This time the plan can scarcely fail.

Cutts came back into the school and met Knox as he entered the School House.

"You kept an eye on the juniors?" he asked, as he met the Sixth-Former.

Knox nodded.

"That's all right," he said. "Two of them in the quad at the time you went out."

"When I went out?" Cutts exclaimed, with a start.

"Yes. Blake and Tom Merry."

Cutts gnawed his lip anxiously.

"You didn't give them a chance to follow me?"

"No fear. I called for them, and looked for them, and found them in their studies. They may have been going to follow you, but I nipped that in the bud."

The Fifth-Former drew a deep breath of relief.

"Good!" he said. "You don't know whether they were watching for me out there?"

"No—anyway, I stopped them if they were. But what's

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on?" asked Knox. "Have you been fixing up a new scheme?"

"Yes; and this time I think it will be all right," said Cutts, lowering his voice. "To-morrow, when Kildare comes—"

"Hold on! Don't tell me anything about it!" said Knox hurriedly. "I'd rather not know any of the details. I'd rather know nothing, thanks."

Cutts's lips curled contemptuously. "That's as you like," he said. "Anyway, I think it will be all right. I don't think there's much danger of Kildare shifting me out of the captaincy this term."

"Oh, good!" said Knox. And he walked quickly away, nervously anxious to know nothing of the details of Cutts's scheme. Cutts shrugged his shoulders and went to his study. There was a bridge party in Cutts's quarters that evening—the "smart set" of St. Jim's having quite a gathering, as it was the last night before Kildare's return, after which their peculiar little games would have to come to an end. And at the end of the play Cutts of the Fifth had made enough out of his visitors to pay the expenses of the peculiar methods he was adopting for retaining the captaincy of St. Jim's, which was a source of considerable satisfaction to Cutts of the Fifth.

## CHAPTER 15.

### Looking After Kildare.

"A B WASS band is my idea," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"The School House Ragtime Band is my idea," said Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

"Same to you!"

Morning lessons were over on Wednesday, and the St. Jim's fellows were extremely agog for the arrival of their old captain, Eric Kildare.

All sorts of schemes had been mooted for giving Kildare a rousing welcome. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had reluctantly abandoned the scheme of a triumphal arch, but he stuck to the idea of a brass band. A brass band playing "See the Conquering Hero Comes," and things like that, would be very effective, according to Arthur Augustus.

Darrel of the Sixth and several other seniors were to meet Kildare at Wayland and bring him to the school in a hired car. All St. Jim's, from Sixth Form down to the littlest fags, wanted to celebrate the great occasion.

Only Cutts and Cutts's friends failed to partake of the general satisfaction.

Cutts, however, was keeping a smiling face to outsiders. He professed to be awfully pleased at Kildare's return, and he said he was quite ready to hand over the captaincy to the old skipper of St. Jim's. He said he had done his best to fill Kildare's place, according to his ability, but he knew that old Kildare was a better man for the job, and he was glad that he was coming back. And Cutts played his part so well that most of the fellows pronounced him a regular brick, and said that he was acting most handsomely. In Cutts's place, a good many fellows would have been annoyed by Kildare's home-coming, and would have shown it. There was no doubt that Cutts was taking it like a real sportsman.

Of the rage and anxiety gnawing in his breast Cutts gave no outward sign.

Of all the St. Jim's fellows only Tom Merry & Co. guessed what his real thoughts were like.

While most of the Saints discussed the reception to be accorded to Kildare, Tom Merry and his chums were thinking of the more serious matter of Kildare's personal safety.

The fact that Cutts had gone out the previous evening, presumably to meet Mr. Lasker, seemed to indicate that the Fifth-Former had not struck his last blow. Did some fresh danger await old Kildare on his journey to St. Jim's on the morrow? That was the question that troubled the Terrible Three.

Certainly any attack would be a risky proceeding in broad daylight; but then, that was what had happened on the Lanchester road.

After reaching Wayland Kildare would be safe enough. If there was an attack it would take place between Lanchester and Wayland Town.

That was to say, it would take place on the railway. There was nowhere else that Kildare could be got at. He would drive from his home at Lanchester to the station, and he would be accompanied at least by his driver, and probably by his father too. Another highway attack was not probable, but on a little-frequented local train the rascals might make another attempt.

"We've got to see old Kildare through," Tom Merry said.

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determinedly. "I suppose it's not really likely they'll try again; but they might, and we can't afford to leave anything to chance."

"Rather not!" agreed Lowther.

"The trouble is, that if we told Kildare his danger, he would only laugh. He wouldn't believe for a second that Cutts was rotter enough to scheme such a thing."

"That's pretty certain," said Manners.

"So it's no good warning Kildare. I suppose a crowd of us might go over to Lanchester and come with him in the train?" Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "But—ahem!—the Head might not feel exactly pleased to be accompanied by a crowd of junior kids—fags he would call us."

And Lowther and Manners nodded assent. Kildare was very kind to the juniors, certainly; but it was not really likely that he would be specially keen to make one of a party otherwise composed wholly of Fourth-Formers and Shell kids.

And if he suspected that the fags had come to take care of him and look after him, it was highly probable that Kildare, with the dignity of the Head of the Sixth, would be considerably nettled. He might regard it, as Tom Merry sorrowfully remarked, as sheer "cheek."

"Only we can't leave him to be done in!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No fear! We're going to look after him! Look here. Suppose a couple of us cut across to Lanchester, in time to travel by the same train as Kildare."

"The fare's rather steep," Lowther remarked, "and all the cash seems to be going in celebrations. But never mind."

"Well, only two of us!" said Tom. "The others can take care of the celebrations while we're gone. You'll have to stay, Monty, if you're going to have the Rag-time band out to greet Kildare—you're the conductor. Manners and I will get over to Lanchester, and we'll travel back by the same train."

"Kildare mayn't like it," said Manners dubiously.

Tom grinned.

"I've got an idea about that," he said. "Kildare won't know."

"But if we're in the same carriage—"

"There's always only one first-class carriage on that train. We can get in the moment the local train comes into the station. It always stays there some time, you know. By the time Kildare gets to it, we can be out of sight."

"Out of sight?" repeated Manners.

"Yes; under the seat!" said Tom Merry coolly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"It won't be comfy, I know," admitted Tom. "But it's up to us to look after old Kildare till he's safe here, and we can't let him suspect we're looking after him, or he'll be ratty. That seems to me the only way."

"Oh crumbs!" said Manners, "a long run under the seat of a railway carriage—and it's going to be warm this afternoon, too."

"Yes; but—"

"And suppose Kildare spots you!" said Lowther,

"He won't!"

"Suppose you get some dust in your nose, and sneeze?" suggested Lowther cheerfully.

"Oh, rats! We sha'n't!" said Tom crossly.

"Suppose he drops his hanky, and stoops and sees you—"

"Bosh!"

"Suppose he puts his foot under the seat and biffs you on the crumplet—"

"Look here," roared Tom Merry. "Stop your idiotic supposings. I think it's a jolly good idea, anyway!"

"Oh, all right, I'm on!" said Manners reluctantly.

"Unless Monty would rather go, and leave me to conduct the band."

"Thanks, no!" said Lowther quickly. "I don't like travelling under seats. I—I mean, I'm really needed with the band, you know—I couldn't think of deserting them!"

"Well, I think—"

"Never mind what you think, Manners, old man," said Tom Merry briskly. "It's a go! We'll tell the other chaps, and I'll point out to them that we can't take a crowd—they'll all want to come, of course."

Curiously enough, Tom Merry had no difficulty on that point; the other fellows did not seem keen to come. Blake & Co. agreed that it was a good wheeze, and so did Figgins & Co. of the New House. Neither Blake & Co., nor Figgins & Co., seemed at all anxious for a railway journey under the seat, even in a first-class carriage. They agreed with wonderful unanimity that the matter couldn't be left in better hands than Tom Merry's. Arthur Augustus was a little doubtful whether they would do any good without his directing presence, but the thought of the damage to his clothes decided him, and he, too, agreed that Tom Merry and Manners were the very chaps for the job.



"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the "General." "Boys, you are now in a particularly awkward situation. Extricate yourselves if you can!" There was a roar of fury from the trussed-up Courtfielders, who struggled and strained at their bonds in vain! (An amusing scene from "Spoofing the Scouts!" the splendid complete school story, by Frank Richards, appearing in the current number of our latest companion paper "CHUCKLES." Get a copy of "Chuckles" to-day. On sale everywhere, price One Halfpenny.)

So, while the rest of the Co. were busy with preparations for the great reception, Tom Merry and his chums left the school immediately after dinner, and took the train for Lanchester.

Their train arrived at Lanchester a quarter of an hour before the "local" was booked to depart for Wayland. The local was already in the station, and the two Shell fellows immediately singled out the solitary first-class carriage and stepped into it.

"Did you bring your ruler?" asked Tom, feeling in his pocket for a thick ebony ruler he had placed there, in case a weapon should be wanted.

"Yes, rather!" yawned Manners.

Two men, wearing large overcoats, though the spring afternoon was by no means cold, came into the station, and glanced towards the train. Both of them had very thick, dark moustaches, and soft hats pulled well over their foreheads. One of them made a gesture towards the first-class carriage, and then they took up a position near it, and lighted cigarettes.

"Two passengers for this carriage, it looks like," Tom Merry remarked.

"Kildare would be safe enough with two more passengers in the carriage," said Manners. "Suppose we don't—"

"Rats! They may be the very johnnies who are going for him!"

"Ahem!"

"There's Kildare!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The well-known form of the old captain of St. Jim's appeared at the entrance to the platform. A white-whiskered

old gentleman was with him, and the juniors recognised Kildare's father. They came towards the train.

"Cover!" said Tom Merry.

Tom dived under one seat, and Manners under the other.

A few moments later the carriage door was opened, and Kildare stepped in. So far as he could see the carriage was empty. Kildare put his bag on the rack, and sat down; his father stood at the open door chatting with him. The guard came along to close the door; and then the two overcoated men on the platform made a sudden run for the carriage and jumped in. The door slammed; Mr. Kildare shook hands with his son through the window, and the train rolled out of the station.

Kildare sat down and drew a book from his pocket. The other two passengers sat opposite to him, the St. Jim's senior hardly glancing at them. Lanchester was left behind, and the local train rolled on through the fresh countryside—with two passengers, at least, in a state of extreme discomfort.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Friends in Need.

**T**OM MERRY and Manners had not expected to be comfortable in their peculiar position. But they had not expected to be quite so uncomfortable.

They were wedged under the seats at full length, with hardly room to breathe; and it was very dusty and warm.

And they had the agreeable prospect of an hour and a half

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NEXT  
WEDNESDAY—

"TROUBLE FOR TOM!"

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

in the same position, unless something happened, or unless they got "fed up" and showed themselves after all. They found themselves wishing that something would indeed happen.

And ere ten minutes had passed, the "something" happened—and with dramatic suddenness.

Kildare was reading his book, almost oblivious of the presence of the two men in overcoats and pulled down hats, when there was a sudden movement on the part of those two gentlemen.

They exchanged a quick glance, and each of them felt in his pocket, and they rose to their feet at the same instant.

Kildare noticed the movement, and glanced up from his book, with a vague idea that a station had been reached sooner than he had expected.

What he saw as he glanced up almost dazed him. The two rascals had jerked out short, thick cudgels from their overcoat pockets, and were throwing themselves towards him.

It was so sudden an attack, that Kildare was naturally taken by surprise; but he was by nature quick and alert. He leaped up, hitting out blindly with both fists.

One of his assailants fell back on his seat gasping; the other staggered in the carriage, and both the cudgels missed their mark.

"You scoundrels!" exclaimed Kildare hotly.

"By gum! At him, Jerry!"

Kildare was grasped by a pair of powerful arms, and forced down upon the seat. He struggled furiously, but the man who had seized him was more than a match for him, and he could not get loose. The other man recovered himself, and grasped his cudgel for a brutal blow.

Kildare's eyes swam for a second; he gave himself up for lost. The blow was coming, and he was held fast, and could not avert or elude it.

The outbreak had been so sudden that the two hidden juniors as well as Kildare had been taken by surprise.

But that was only for a moment.

Then they scrambled out, dusty and breathless, from under the seats, grasping the heavy ebony rulers with which they were armed.

Their sudden appearance was a complete surprise to the rascals.

Before the two scoundrels even knew that anyone else was in the carriage the man who was holding Kildare received a stunning blow across the head; and his grasp relaxed, and he dropped on the floor with a groan.

The other ruffian paused as if transfixed, his cudgel still in the air, his eyes simply glaring with amazement. He had no time to recover.

A ruler came across his face with a stunning blow, and he staggered back with a yell of agony, and as he staggered Tom Merry's clenched fist caught him under the chin, and he dropped across his comrade.

Kildare was on his feet now, panting.

"You—you kids!" he gasped, in utter amazement.

"Pile on them!" shouted Tom Merry.

The two rascals were struggling to their feet. It was no time for explanations. Kildare and Tom and Manners piled on the rascals at once, and they were jammed down on the floor of the carriage again.

Tom Merry and Manners knelt on them, keeping them down. In the struggle their moustaches had come off, and the faces disclosed were recognised by the juniors. They had seen the two rascals before, lounging about the Green Man in Rylcombe.

"Friends of Lasker's!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"My hat!" exclaimed Kildare. "What on earth does this mean? And how on earth did you two kids get here?"

"We came to look after you," said Tom Merry.

"You cheeky young beggar!" said Kildare, laughing. "It was jolly lucky you did, all the same. But how could you possibly have known that I should be in danger? It seems like a miracle."

"After what happened yesterday—"

"I suppose these are the two rotters who got away," said Kildare. "I don't see why they should go for me again, in this way. And how, in the name of all that's wonderful, did you fags know anything about it?"

"Fags!" said Manners indignantly. "I like that, when we've just saved you from being crooked."

Kildare laughed.

"Ahem! I mean you fellows," he said. "How did you know?"

"That's better," said Tom Merry. "Well, we knew. I suppose we'd better tell you. There's somebody at St. Jim's doesn't want you to come back and shift him out of the captaincy."

Kildare started.

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**FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,**

is the principal character in one of

**CHUCKLES, 1<sup>d</sup>.**

"Do you mean Cutts of the Fifth?"

"Yes."

"You can't mean that he had anything to do with this?"

"We jolly well do," said Tom.

"Cutts ought to be sacked," growled Manners.

"It can't be true," said Kildare. "These rotters have it up against me because they were beaten yesterday, that's all!"

"Well, we'll see what they saw when the police take them off, at the first station."

Kildare hesitated.

"If you and us over to the police, you'll get a pretty disgrace for your school, when we tell all we know," panted Jerry Baker defiantly.

"You hound!" said Kildare, between his teeth. "Do you mean to imply that—"

"You and us over to the police, and you'll see."

The train slackened down at the level crossing. Kildare seemed to make up his mind.

"Let them go. I give you one minute to clear off, you scoundrels," said Kildare sternly.

He opened the carriage door. Jerry Baker and Bill Wylie did not need bidding twice. The reluctant juniors released them, at Kildare's order, and they scudded out of the carriage, and darted away from the railway-track and disappeared. Kildare closed the carriage door, and turned to the two Shell fellows quietly when the train moved on again.

"You didn't like letting them go?" he asked.

"They ought to have been locked up!" growled Tom Merry. "Dash it all!"

"And Cutts ought to be shown up," said Manners bluntly.

"I can't believe it of Cutts," said Kildare slowly. "It's too rotten!"

"Then why did you let those rotters go?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I—I—well, it may be true—and it would be a fearful disgrace for the school," said Kildare. "If Cutts planned this, he failed—and I shall be safe at St. Jim's in an hour or two. Come, you kids—you fellows, I mean—you don't want to disgrace St. Jim's, with a rotten case in the papers, any more than I do."

"Well, there's something in that!" admitted Tom Merry.

"Mum's the word—to oblige me," said Kildare.

And the juniors, to whom Kildare's wish was law, agreed that "mum" should be the word.

There was a shout of welcome when the train stopped at Wayland Junction, and Kildare stepped from it. Darrel and a crowd of Sixth Form chaps rushed across the platform to greet him. They were surprised to see Tom Merry and Manners with Kildare, and still more surprised when Kildare asked leave to take the two juniors in the car that was waiting to bear him to St. Jim's. Tom Merry and Manners were in high feather now. They had brought the captain of St. Jim's safely through—they had frustrated Cutts's knavish tricks—and they were eminently satisfied with themselves. The big motor-car, crowded with Kildare and his friends, came up to the gates of St. Jim's in great style.

Nearly all the school had gathered there to greet the old captain of St. Jim's. The School House Ragtime Band burst into music, playing the "Conquering Hero" with great effect—though some of the auditors weren't quite sure whether it was the "Conquering Hero" or "Rule, Britannia." But there was plenty of noise, there was no doubt whatever about that, and amid a terrific blare of music and cheering, Kildare was escorted into his old school.

There was one heavy heart—one pale and enraged face that looked from a study-window, to see the triumphant return of the old captain of St. Jim's. Cutts of the Fifth, a prey to rage and desperation, remained in his study—knowing that his last chance had failed him, that his last rascally scheme had missed the mark—that his day of power had come to an end. But in the general rejoicing nobody wasted a thought upon Cutts of the Fifth.

All that evening there were great celebrations at St. Jim's: Kildare had come into his own again, and Tom Merry & Co. rejoiced greatly. And a crowd of fellows, School House and New House, in a state of wonderful friendship and cordiality, crammed Tom Merry's study at the great feed which took place there to celebrate the happy occasion, and the cheers that were given for old Kildare rang far across the quadrangle.

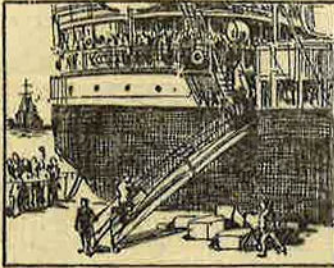
THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled: "TROUBLE FOR TOM!" by Martin Clifford. Order early. Price 1d.)



# HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA!

BY A SUCCESSFUL EMIGRANT.



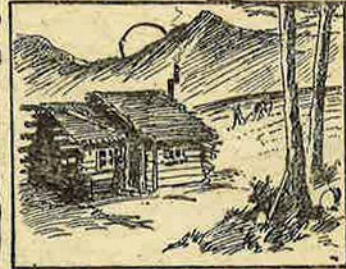
OFF TO CANADA

THIS WEEK:

Shopping in Quebec.

Across Canada in  
the "Colonist" Car.

Glimpses of the  
West.



A HOMESTEAD IN ALBERTA

IF there is one experience I trust will never fall to my lot to undergo again, it is that of travelling through the Canadian continent in a "Colonist" car. My first journey across the Dominion was undertaken in this manner, and those five days and nights on the train live in my memory as a period of extreme discomfort, during which I obtained very little sleep. Since that experience I have travelled many times on the Canadian Pacific Railway, but on these occasions I have preferred to pay extra and obtain better accommodation. "First-class" on the C.P.R. is almost the last word in luxurious railway travelling, and there is also a "Tourist" class, which is somewhat cheaper.

But, for the purpose of this article, I am going to take it that money is an important consideration with my chums, and so we will make the journey through Canada together in a "Colonist" car. We will go right through to Vancouver, British Columbia, the Pacific coast terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and thus be enabled to obtain glimpses of the whole intervening country.

But as we are having to spend money preparatory to taking our departure for the West, it would not be amiss at this juncture to make sure that we thoroughly understand the coinage we are using. The lowest currency in Eastern Canada is the cent, a copper coin of about the same value as our halfpenny. Then there is the five-cent piece, the "nickel" as it is often called, worth 2½d.; the ten-cent piece, or "dime," equivalent to about 5d.; twenty-five cents, about the size and value of a shilling; and fifty cents, or half-dollar, resembles our florin. These are silver coins. And then there is the dollar bill (4s. 2d.), and the five-dollar bill (£1 0s. 10d.). There are also higher denominations of "dollar bills," of course. The twenty-five cent piece is usually referred to as a "quarter." In British Columbia the lowest coin is the five-cent piece (2½d.). In this province the "quarter" is often called "two bits," and fifty cents and seventy-five cents "four bits" and "six bits" respectively.

In purchasing our food and other necessities we should be careful to guard against sharp practices. The Canadian five-cent piece resembles our threepenny bit, but the American five-cent piece, the real "nickel," is almost the size of a shilling. Now, all American money is currency in Canada, and I have known cases where new arrivals have accepted these large "nickels" in mistake for "quarters," purposely given by dishonest storekeepers. The "nickel" is easily recognised by the big V on it.

Now, the first thing we must do before boarding the train is to think about boarding ourselves, and get in a supply of food and the necessary knives, forks, spoons, and cups for the journey. A basket containing bread, butter, jam, tea, sugar, and some tinned meat can be purchased in Quebec for about two dollars (8s. 4d.), and this should last one person until Winnipeg is reached; that is, for about half the journey. This is easily

## THE MOST ECONOMICAL WAY

of boarding on the train, and there are many places en route at which the train stops a sufficient length of time to enable the passengers to make up any deficiency in supplies, and to purchase little luxuries such as fruit and cake. It may be mentioned that meals can be obtained on the train, but these cost from a dollar (4s. 2d.) upwards, and hot meals can also be obtained at some of the stopping-places from half-a-dollar (2s. 1d.).

For size, the Canadian train dwarfs the ones we have been used to seeing in the Old Country, in fact, it is a regular street on wheels. A large bell on the engine tolls

dismally as, after we have taken our seats in the "Colonist" car, the train moves slowly from the Quebec station. The "Colonist" car, we find, has an aisle running down the centre of it, and the seats are set at right-angles to this, facing one another. Each seat accommodates two passengers, and at night portions of two opposite seats can be slid out to furnish a sleeping couch for two. The other two passengers who occupy these seats during the day sleep on a shelf that hangs overhead, and which is dropped to a horizontal position for the purpose. These wooden beds are most uncomfortable, in my opinion, but some of our fellow passengers seem able to sleep well enough, using their overcoats as blankets and their boots as pillows. The chances are, however, that just as you get nicely off to sleep a conductor yells in your ear, "Tickets, please!" and your feelings are better imagined than described.

On my first journey through Canada I carried my dollar bills in a tubular money-belt which I wore next to my skin. But, should you be keeping money in your pockets, it is advisable to sleep head to feet with your bedfellow, unless you know him. He can't put his hand into your pockets so easily that way.

The "Colonist" car is supplied with a stove and the necessary fuel, and food may be cooked and water boiled by those who are able to secure the use of it. We have taken the precaution to bring a little kettle, and are able to indulge in many a refreshing cup of tea. The car is also provided with washing accommodation, towels and soap, and iced drinking-water can be obtained. The train travels at an average speed of twenty-five miles an hour, but it sometimes stops by the wayside, and we get out on to the line, and glad we are to give our legs a thorough stretching.

During the first portion of the journey we see many picturesque little French-Canadian towns. Then the train winds its way among the rocks and trees of a rugged stretch of Ontario. Skirting the great Lake Superior, we emerge into quieter woodland scenery until we reach Manitoba, where we get our first glimpse of the prairie, famous in song and story. And, after we have spent three nights on the train, we reach the wonderful prairie city of Winnipeg. From here the journey is through the prairies to Calgary, passing many smaller towns and some homesteads en route.

At Calgary we get our

## FIRST SIGHT OF THE ROCKIES,

eighty miles away, and soon we are on the up-grade among the foothills. The magnificence and solemn grandeur of the Canadian Rockies are beyond the power of the pen to describe; we can only gaze with awe at the ever-changing panorama of lofty heights, frowning precipices, vast glaciers, and foaming cataracts revealed to us.

From Roger's Pass begins the down-grade, and some distance west of the mountains we find ourselves in the "dry belt" of British Columbia, a country of low-lying cattle-ranges and mighty rivers. After a thrilling ride through the Cascade Mountains and the Devil's Canyon, we emerge into the quiet peace of the meadow-lands of the Fraser Valley, and we know it is time to have our luggage ready. Finally, the train pulls into the station, or depot, as it is called, of the western terminus, Vancouver, and our long journey is ended.

In next week's article I will tell you something about the different provinces and districts of the Far West, and point out in which parts my chums will find most scope for their various tastes and abilities.

(Another of these helpful articles next Wednesday.)

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"TROUBLE FOR TOM!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

OUR GREAT NEW SERIAL.

## PLAYING THE GAME!



A Splendid Tale of School, Sport, and Adventure.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

## INTRODUCTION.

After an exciting election at Grovehouse College, Geoffrey Foster is chosen to fill the vacant position in the college cricket eleven when they play Headlingham—one of the most important matches of the year. The fact that Geoffrey is elected earns him the enmity of Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his friend and crony, Sidney Weames. Later, Geoffrey makes his way to the nets, where Jeffcock, William Hewitt—captain of the school and Foster's firm friend—and a lad named Adams are practising.

Geoffrey succeeds in bowling Jeffcock three times in four balls, and the latter loses his temper, and, with a cowardly blow, knocks Geoffrey down. This results in a fight, which takes place in an old gravel-pit—the scene of many a fight. Jeffcock informs his toadies that he is going to give Foster such a hiding that he will be unable to play in the Headlingham match. But Geoffrey proves the better man, and it is Jeffcock who has to stand down from the match.

Geoffrey distinguishes himself both at the wicket and bowling, but, mainly owing to bad play on the part of Weames and Talbot, Grovehouse loses the match. Two or three days later, Foster receives a letter from his mother, who says that his father is much worried about his business affairs, and behaved very strangely when the subject was mentioned to him.

(Now go on with the story.)

## The Cutting—A Coward's Revenge.

As he came to the end of the letter a lump formed in Geoffrey's throat which almost choked him, and manly, stout-hearted boy though he was, the tears came all unbidden to his eyes. His heart was too full for action. But recovering himself with an effort, and reproaching himself for his momentary weakness, he turned his attention to the newspaper cutting which his mother had enclosed.

It was a short paragraph, but quite long enough to fill Geoffrey with acute alarm. It was headed:

## "LONDON AND COUNTY BUILDING SOCIETY AND SUBURBAN MUTUAL ASSURANCE.

"We fear to announce to our readers that after careful inquiry into the scandalous rumours that were recently set afloat concerning the stability of the companies above-mentioned, we can, in justice to the thousands who have invested their money in the London and County Building Society and in the Suburban Mutual Assurance, only confirm them. It appears that their affairs have been woefully mismanaged by one of the responsible directors; and as Mr.

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday.

"THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday.

"CHUCKLES," 10. Every Saturday, 2

Jeffcock, with his customary acumen, has retired from his seat upon the board and from his connection with the companies, we leave our readers to draw their own conclusion as to who has been directly responsible for the mismanagement—to use the mildest term we can apply. Mr. Foster remains at the head of affairs, and while saying this, we make bold to add that all who value the savings which they have scraped together during the course of years to invest them in concerns which are rotten to the core, will withdraw their money from the London and County Building Society with as little delay as possible."

The newspaper cutting fluttered from Geoffrey's hand to the ground, and, sitting back in his armchair, he allowed his thoughts to wander home, and tried to comprehend what the feelings of his father must be, who had to go to his offices in the City and there boldly face the gibes and jeers, the openly-worded and yet well-guarded insults of men who were not fit to breathe the same atmosphere with him.

Presently Geoffrey rose, and, with his hands clasped behind him, he strode up and down the confines of his den, his brain throbbing with the bitterness of his reflections. He was only a boy, but he knew how serious things must be with these two companies in which his father and Rufus Bangley Jeffcock had been so closely concerned, for the editor of the financial newspaper to dare to print such a libellous statement. His mother's description of his father's strange behaviour confirmed it all. And Bangley Jeffcock had retired. Why? Geoffrey wracked his brains again and again, but at the end of an hour's distressing thought he was as far from a solution of the mystery as ever.

One thing he knew, knew with an instinct that nothing could have perverted, and that was, come what might, happen what would, he would know his father to be guiltless of any wrongdoing, know him to be an honourable, brave-hearted English soldier. The thought comforted him.

Yes, his mother was right. Gilbert Foster, whoever else might err, was incapable of fraud; and, made easier in his mind by his reflections, Geoffrey put the letter and the newspaper cutting in his pocket, and as the luncheon-bell clattered from its cage in the high school tower, he left his quarters, and thronged into the eating-hall with the rest of the boys.

But he had no appetite, and, later in the afternoon, he found that he could not concentrate his mind upon his studies. His thoughts were always wandering homeward, and it was a blessed relief to him when the school was dismissed.

In his study, later on, Adams found Geoffrey, strangely silent and preoccupied. He would not volunteer the careless

Adams that assistance in his Latin and Greek which his room-mate always looked forward to, and after several attempts at raillery Adams gave him up in despair.

"I shall believe presently, Foster," said he, with a meaning glance, "that you are in love. You've got all the symptoms. You're silent, taciturn, disagreeable, preoccupied, and as surly as a sore-headed bear. I'm sick of you. I'm hanged if I'll bowl at the nets to you. You can find someone else."

Geoffrey smiled at that.

"Forgive me, Adams," he said. "I am worried about something, and I'm not myself. I'm awfully sorry, but I shall be all right in the morning, I dare say."

Adams's smile vanished, and he looked serious; but, being naturally a tactful lad, he said nothing.

After supper Geoffrey, throwing off his lethargy with an effort, settled himself down to serious study, but just when he had got his books out upon the table, and was bending over them, clutching his head with his hands, the door was violently opened, and in came Haines.

The schoolboy's face was serious. He crossed quickly to Geoffrey, and looked him straight in the eyes. When he spoke, his voice had assumed a grave, sympathetic tone, quite unusual with him.

"Foster, old man," he said, "I want you to come to the great hall at once. Some of those beastly cads are trying to injure you in the eyes of the school. It's a rotten shame. I think you ought to go and face it out. I wish I could do something for you, Geoffrey. The brutes! I'd shoot some of 'em like dogs, if it were only lawful!"

"Why, what is it, Haines?" asked Geoffrey, looking up in surprise.

The boy hesitated.

"I can't tell you," he blurted out presently. "It's the meanest, dirtiest thing I've ever known. That's all I can say. Only I think you'd better go and see for yourself, Geoffrey. You better try and put a stop to it."

Geoffrey set his teeth tightly together, and, rising, walked quickly from the room. As he passed through the cold and ill-lighted corridors which led to the great hall, his active brain imagined all sorts of things. But imagination fell far short of the truth.

As he opened the folding-doors, and passed into the great hall, his ears were assailed with an outburst of boisterous laughter. Looking quickly around, he saw Jeffcock standing on a rostrum which he had dragged to the side of the blackboard upon which all the school notices were pinned, and pointing to something affixed thereon with a stick.

Gathered in front of him were over fifty of the schoolboys, and it was from these that the laughter and the boisterous came.

On the fringe of them he saw Jellotson standing, and William Hewitt, the school captain, was striding quickly through the hall towards the scene of the commotion.

Geoffrey and Haines gained the outskirts of the group of schoolboys without their approach being noticed. Then Geoffrey's face turned as white as a sheet, and his hands trembled with anger at the meanness of his enemy.

On the blackboard was pinned the cutting from the "Financial Times," which his mother had sent to him. It had been pasted to a sheet of foolscap so that it should be easily displayed, and on a streamer pinned above the paragraph the following words were boldly scrawled in blue pencil:

#### "THE TRUTH ABOUT FOSTER!"

What Jeffcock had been saying in the opening portion of his speech, of course Geoffrey could only conjecture at, but what he heard gave him a very fair idea.

"And so you see," Jeffcock went on, when the laughter of the boys had subsided, "what sort of a chap Geoffrey Foster is! The son of a man who acted like a poltroon and a coward in the South African War, a man whose worthless life my father saved at the risk of his own. Since then my father has befriended him for years. He put him in a position to float these companies to which the 'Financial Times' refers, and you see what's come of it. My father, finding he is unable to trust Major Foster, has retired from his seat upon the board, and now it seems likely that Foster will abscond. Nice state of affairs, isn't it? Some of you selected young Foster to play for the school team. What was the result? The school lost to Headingham College for the first time for over twelve years."

"Your fault, Jeffcock!" cried Moore, the wicket-keeper, from the background—"and Weames's. That young cad chucked away the match!"

Jeffcock ignored the thrust.

"And so," he said, "you see Foster in his true colours—the son of a swindling company promoter, the son of a man who was turned out of the Army because his country wouldn't have him."

With a bound Geoffrey, uttering a hoarse cry, burst through the crowd of boys, and, leaping beside Jeffcock on the

rostrum, he pulled down the offending paper and tore it into pieces. These he hurled into the startled Jeffcock's face.

"Whatever your father might have done for mine, or my father for yours!" he cried, in an intense whisper that thrilled all who heard it, "cannot hide the fact that you are a despicable cad. If you had a particle of honour or manly feeling, you wouldn't take these steps to try and injure me in the eyes of the school. You have tried to make my life a curse ever since I came to Grovehouse, but you haven't succeeded, and you never will! You tried to keep me out of the school team, and failed. You forced me to fight you, and you were beaten—and now this is how you try to obtain your revenge. You despicable hound!"

"Bravo, Foster!" cried Haines.

"Can you deny the existence of that paragraph in the paper?" asked Jeffcock, pale with rage.

"No," said Geoffrey, his lips quivering. "I can't and don't. But as to how it came to be printed, perhaps you or your father could tell."

Jeffcock's eyes blazed.

"It's a lie!" he cried.

"Where did you get the paragraph from?" asked Geoffrey hotly. "You don't buy financial papers at Grovehouse. Your father must have sent it!"

"And if he did?" asked Jeffcock, with a sneer.

"Then he is no friend of Major Foster's," said Geoffrey, "despite what might appear."

"He isn't now," returned Jeffcock angrily. "He has withdrawn his connection with both these companies. He wrote and told me so this morning. He said that if anybody is to be sent to prison over this job, it sha'n't be him, but your precious father will go to quod alone."

The words had scarcely left his lips, uttered with all the bitterness of his hatred of Geoffrey, when the youngster, with a swift blow, knocked him headlong from the rostrum. Jeffcock's fall was heavy, but he was on his feet in a moment, and, with a howl of mad anger he sprang towards Foster.

William Hewitt and Jellotson, however, dashed forward, and, seizing him, held him tight.

"Let me go! Let me go!" panted the coward. "I'll kill him!"

"He's much more likely to kill you, Jeffcock," said Jellotson grimly. "And, upon my word, from what I've seen and heard to-night, he would be doing the world a service, for you'd be no loss. Foster, go to your room like a good lad."

Geoffrey, whose face was drawn with pain, stepped down from the rostrum, and Haines put an arm tenderly round him.

"My dear old chap," he said, "don't you take any notice of 'em. They're cads, all the lot of 'em—and if I can have my way, we'll send Jeffcock to Coventry. He's not fit to wipe one's boots on, let alone speak to."

But Geoffrey, unable to stand any more, shook off Haines's hold, and hurried quickly from the hall.

#### The Failure of the London and County Building Society— Geoffrey's Worst Fears Confirmed—The Messenger —"By the Stile at Ten o'clock To-night."

Miserable as Geoffrey had been made by the events which we have narrated in the foregoing chapter, there was worse to follow, for hardly a week had elapsed before the Grovehouse was ringing with the story of the collapse of the London and County Building Society, and of the Suburban Mutual Assurance Co. Ltd., and of the flight of Major Foster.

The crash had come!

Geoffrey, lying face downward upon his couch in his study, with the tears streaming from his eyes—tears which he could not check in the first great crash of the disaster, had clutched in his nervous fingers another letter from his mother, in which she told him that the police-officers were in the house, and that her husband, the husband she had loved and cherished through all the years of their married life, had fled—fled she knew not whither—fled to escape the horrible degradation of a prison.

Geoffrey could not face the school. Not that he was afraid, but he knew how merciless was Jeffcock's enmity, and he knew how all those who had envied and disliked him for his preference would gloat over his misery. He could not bear it. He would not stand it.

He went to Dr. Morgan, and begged that he might be excused from school. The doctor's consent was readily given, for Dr. Morgan was not a strong, broad-minded man, fearless in the execution of his duty, but rather one inclined to bow down to convention, and condemn all that the conventional condemned. Dr. Morgan thought, perhaps, it might be best to prevent Foster ever appearing in the school again, and to get rid of him as soon as possible. But as the term had been paid for in advance, and as no instructions had

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come from Geoffrey's mother and father as to what should be done with him, he could not take such action, and was content to permit Geoffrey to nurse his grief in secret.

For the twentieth time Geoffrey read his mother's heart-broken letter through, as the hot afternoon's sun mounted in the heavens, and then as the school clock struck three he seized his hat, and wandered out into the school grounds, and thence through the big gates into the high-road that led to the town, a full mile away in the dip of the hill.

Geoffrey's heart ached as only a schoolboy's heart can ache when the first great trouble of his life comes suddenly upon him. He wandered on, hardly knowing whither he was going or what he was doing. It was five o'clock when he came wandering back through the town, and began to make the ascent that leads to the school. Grovehouse stood right ahead of him to the left of the hill, its cold grey turrets and embattled frontage rising up above the trees. It was a dear old place, and much beloved of him. And he was going to leave it—leave it just when he had hoped the best of his schooldays were to come.

Geoffrey, as he thought of these things, made up his mind that he would bear his burden like a man, and as he quickened his steps, a figure that had been seated beside the road suddenly got up and came to meet him. A man whom he had never seen before in his life stood right in front of Geoffrey.

"Mr. Geoffrey Foster?" he asked, with a keen glance at the boy, and standing erect almost like a soldier.

"Yes," answered the lad, surprised.

The man looked up and down the road and around him, with strange caution.

"I've brought you a message," he whispered. "From him!"

"From my father?" cried Geoffrey, trembling.

"To be sure, sir! The police are after him. He durstn't show himself. And so he sent me, Patrick Mulready, late of the 29th Hussars, trooper, mentioned in despatches for bravery in the field, to find you out and tell you that he'll meet you to-night in Elsworth village, by the stile that leads across Farmer Bates's field near the pond. He'll be there at ten o'clock. He can't be there before, as he has to come some distance, and he doesn't think it safe for him to be seen. He has to sleep by day, and travel by night as best he can. He's come down here at great risk to see you, sir. You won't fail him?"

"Fail him?" cried Geoffrey, from the bottom of his heart. "No! But how did you find me?"

"Went up to the school and asked for you. Was told you was out walking, and so sat by the road to wait for you," replied Geoffrey's strange companion.

"And how did my father come to choose you for his messenger?"

Patrick Mulready looked cautiously around again. "I was trooper under Major Foster," he said. "I was wounded in action with him, when Captain Jeffcock won his Victoria Cross." A nervous spasm twitched the ex-soldier's cheeks at the recollection. "I left the Army after I was invalided home. Major Foster got me a job with the London County Building Society as messenger. He knew"—and the man's troubled voice shook—"he could trust me. I'd have laid down my life for him during the war, sir, over and over again, if he'd asked it. He knew that, beer-drinking, dissolute ruffian as I am now, he could trust me, and when he absconded, sir"—Patrick Mulready's voice choked at the thought of his former officer's degradation—"he knew he could rely on me to take a message to you and not betray him. I'm working for Major Jeffcock now"—bitterly. "I've gone over to the enemy, because I can't starve. He knows why I've asked for leave, and where I've come to, but it's not likely he would want to betray the man whose life he saved in action"—and Patrick Mulready laughed bitterly—"into the hands of the polis."

He said no more. He waited for no comment on the part of the schoolboy, but, turning abruptly away, walked off down the hill towards Elsworth, and Geoffrey Foster, filled with amazement, after watching the dusty, ill-clad figure out of sight, continued on his way towards the school. His heart was beating with a strange yearning to see his beloved father again. He would know then whether Major Foster was guilty or not, and he felt that he could scarcely control himself until evening came. But it was necessary, and with an effort he calmed himself, so that when he entered his own room a quarter of an hour later Adams, beyond seeing that his comrade was troubled, could guess nothing of what had happened.

(Another long instalment of this splendid serial story next Wednesday.)

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**FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,**

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

**CHUCKLES, 1d.**

"THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE  
CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Walter J. Rowe, Mildura P.O., Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

Dr. A. Smith, 84th Bty., R.F.A., Jubbulpore, India, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 18-22.

Dick Connole, c/o Box 51, Port Adelaide, S. Australia, wishes to correspond with Catholic girl readers.

Miss Mabel Moss, 8, Gourys Street, Troyeville, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with boy readers, age 18-19.

E. H. Piper, c/o Mr. A. B. Barr, Otarene, via Rotorna, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the United Kingdom or New Zealand, age 15-17.

Cyril Shaw, Box 52, Exshaw, Alberta, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 13-15.

William H. Hall, c/o Mataura P.O., New Zealand, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 15-18.

Miss L. Anderson, P.O. Box 200, Invercargill, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England or Scotland, age 19-21.

A. Mack, 22, St. John Street, Quebec, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers.

Jack Banks, c/o Post Office, Taskatoon, Saskatchewan, Western Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England, age 18-20.

F. Apps, Morpeth, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England or Canada, age 15-17.

Arthur H. Green, Deakin Street, Beulah, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in the British Isles interested in stamps, age 13-16.

Geo. E. Doubleday, 365, Salter Street, Winnipeg, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in any part of the world (especially English) interested in photography, age 15-18.

Miss Louie Hodges, care of Mrs. Ferguson, Clifton Street, Toorah, Coolgardie, wishes to correspond with boy readers, age 18-20.

J. Hayles, 22, Hodgson Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Ireland, age 15-16.

Gerald E. Gould, care of The Broken Hill Water Supply, Ltd., Box 59, P.O., Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the north of Ireland, age 14.

H. Jones, Post Office, Murray Street, Gawler, South Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

J. Curry, care of Telegraph Department, Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16-17.

Teddy Gerster, South Hill P.O., Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles interested in stamps.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

**A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.****TIT FOR TAT.**

Judge: "What is your occupation, my man?"  
 Prisoner: "I'm a 'bus-driver, my lord."  
 Judge: "You mean you are a driver of horses attached thereto?"  
 Prisoner: "Yes, sir."  
 Judge: "You are charged with hitting this man on the face. Did you do it?"  
 Prisoner: "Certainly not!"  
 Judge: "What did you do, then?"  
 Prisoner: "I hit him on the nasal organ attached thereto!"  
 —Sent in by L. Watson, Hove.

**NEVER SATISFIED!**

The passenger bemoans his fate,  
 And grumbles if his ship is late;  
 But if, perchance, he cuts it fine,  
 He growls because it's off in time.  
 He grumbles if in fog or snow  
 The rate of progress is but slow;  
 But should the ship through speed be wrecked,  
 He blames the skipper for neglect.  
 Against overcrowding he will shout,  
 And try to keep the others out;  
 But how he growls if he should find  
 That he himself is left behind!  
 —Sent in by Edward Leary, Stepney.

**EXAMPLE FROM REAL LIFE.**

Teacher: "Evil communications corrupt good manners. Now, Johnny, can you understand what that means?"  
 Johnny: "Yes'm. For instance, father got a communication from mother's dressmaker this morning that made him swear."—Sent in by G. Evans, Sheffield.

**HE WAS RESERVING HIMSELF.**

At a Highland sports gathering Colin had entered for a number of events. The first of these was a quarter-mile race. This, Colin did not distinguish himself in. Out of eight runners he was last.  
 "Colin, Colin," cried a partisan, "why did ye run no faster?"  
 Colin sneered.  
 "Run faster!" he said contemptuously. "An' me reservin' mysel' for the bagpipe competition!"—Sent in by Jas. A. Goold, Kilm.

**KINDNESS NOT APPRECIATED.**

The little lad had been ordered to wait for his mother outside the shop while she went inside and made her purchases. He noticed standing in the road a horse, and, being very fond of horses, he went up and stroked it, and, producing a piece of bread, gave it some.  
 "That's right," said the driver; "always be kind to dumb animals. Does your mother give you big hunks like that?"  
 "No," replied the youngster; "I found it lying in your van!"  
 "Wot!" yelled the driver. "Why, you young imp, that was my breakfast!"—Sent in by W. Squire, Lambeth.

**THE COLD SHOULDER.**

"Steaks and joints to suit all pockets." So declared the printed notice in a butcher's window. The hungry tramp passing by observed it greedily. Then, bracing himself up for the coming ordeal, entered the shop.  
 "Well, sir," said the salesman, coming forward. "And what can I get for you?"  
 The knight of the road pondered for a moment.  
 "Look here, guv'nor! You say you have got joints to suit all pockets," he said. "But what about the chap with an empty pocket. What have you got for him?"  
 "I'm afraid we have only got the cold shoulder to offer him!" he answered. And the tramp made a hurried exit.—Sent in by Ernest Pratt, Durham.

**NO BED—NO CHARGE.**

An old Scotsman, on a visit to London, had just got into his bed at the hotel, when one of the porters hurriedly entered his room.  
 "Get up, sir! Make haste!" he burst out. "The hotel is on fire!"  
 The old man slowly raised himself on one elbow, and looked at the intruder for a moment.  
 "Mind ye," he said, with an air of determination, "if I do get up, I wiinna pay for the bed!"—Sent in by Thomas Brierley, Oldham.

**A GOOD EXAMPLE.**

The grammar lesson was in full swing, and all eyes were glued on the teacher, as he vainly tried to impress upon their memories what abstract nouns are.  
 "An abstract noun," he went on, "is the name of something that we can think of, but cannot touch. Can you give me an example, Wilkins?"  
 "Yes, sir," the lad answered, after a few minutes' pause.  
 "A red-hot poker!"—Sent in by M. Gilloch, Wandsworth.

**ONE BETTER.**

An Englishman, Irishman, and Scotchman were boasting to one another about the distinguished persons they had been mistaken for. The Englishman had been taken for Lord Kitchener, the Scotchman for the Duke of Norfolk.  
 "Bedad," said Pat, "that's nothing to spake about. Sure it's meself that was mistook for somebody better than them two. I was sitting in the park not long since, when a man came up and said: 'Howly Moses, is that really you?'—Sent in by A. K. Watson, Glasgow.

**MINDING HIS OWN BUSINESS.**

"You say," said the judge, "that the officer arrested you while you were quietly minding your own business."  
 "Yes, your honour," was the indignant answer. "He caught me suddenly by the coat-collar, and threatened to strike me with his staff unless I accompanied him to the police-station."  
 "You were quietly attending to your own business, making no noise or disturbance of any kind?"  
 "None whatever, sir!"  
 "It seems strange. What is your business?"  
 "A burglar, sir!"—Sent in by L. Hughes, N. Wales.

**MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.**

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

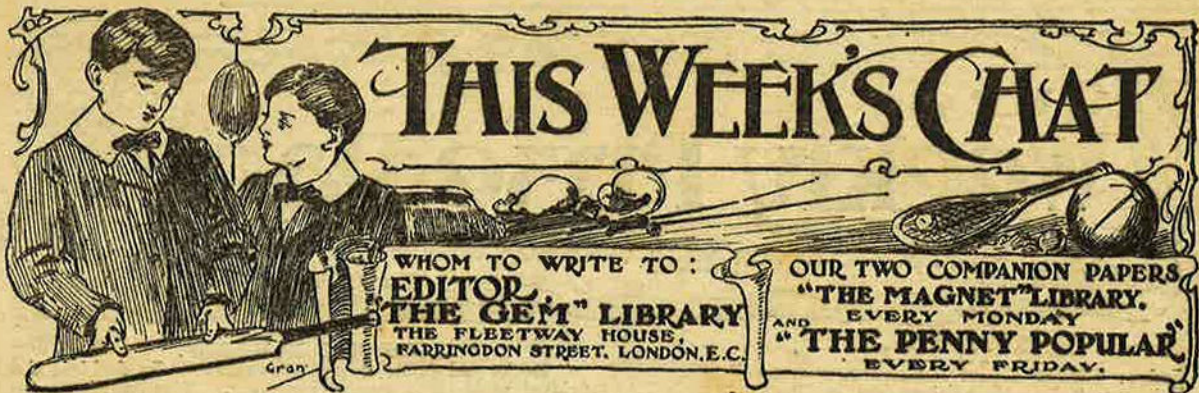
THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in other-wise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY—**"TROUBLE FOR TOM!"** A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Set of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



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Our next grand long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's finds Martin Clifford in his lightest and happiest vein. Nothing less than a calamity befalls Tom Merry! The anxious solicitude of his old guardian—Miss Priscilla Fawcett—for his health oversteps all bounds, and the unfortunate junior is quite dismayed by the precautions he is compelled to take. Miss Priscilla's anxieties are heightened by the forebodings of a gipsy fortune-teller. This, of course, makes matters worse, but in the end it gives the juniors an idea which offers Tom Merry a loophole of escape.

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In the current week's issue of our famous companion paper, "The Penny Popular," will be found something to please fiction-lovers of every degree, however widely varying their tastes. The most popular fiction may be divided roughly into three classes—viz., school stories, adventure tales, and detective dramas. In the "Penny Popular" alone of all story-papers can

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for week-end reading.

**REPLIES IN BRIEF.**

Will the following readers accept my best thanks for their letters: F. E. (Sheffield), Miss Kitty Larkin (Australia), and Pauline D. (Salop).

H. N. Saville (Sydney).—Many thanks for letter. I am extremely pleased with the souvenir you sent.

"A Regular Reader" (Australia).—I should advise you not to tamper with the pimples on your face. Consult your physician.

H. G. H. (Victoria).—Thank you for your letter. By the time you read this par "Poplets" Competition will have finished.

J. Warburton (Lancs).—I am afraid it would take up too much space to explain the ways and means of mending cinematograph films here. "The Kinematograph" dated December 11th, 1913, published an article on this subject.

C. Fly (Canada).—Very many thanks for your interesting letter.

J. Myers (Liverpool).—Why not visit your docks, and inquire of the port steward? I am sure he would give you all particulars as to how to get a job as ship's steward. Good luck!

A Coatbridge Reader.—Even if you do not inhale, smoking is bound to affect your wind adversely.

B. A. McDonall (Australia).—Very many thanks for letter and suggestion.

C. S. B.—Purchase a copy of Pendlebury's Arithmetic Book, published by G. Bell, 6, Portugal Street, W.C.

W. Puddicombe (Exeter).—If a jockey is thrown, and fails to catch his mount, he is disqualified. No riderless horse can win or be placed in a race.

**THE NAVY AS A PROFESSION FOR BOYS.**

By Admiral the Hon. Sir E. Fremantle.

I give some statistics below from a recent Admiralty report of the entries, which shows that the Navy has found no difficulty in filling its ranks with good material; but before leaving this part of my subject it is well to mention that the intention of the Admiralty at present is to enter seamen in the proportion of three "boys," two "youths," and one "man" for every six required. The following normal standards for "boys" is given to enable my readers to form some idea of the physical requirements for "boy" entry, in the other classes the standards are proportionally higher:

15½ and under 15½ years of age, height 5ft., chest 30½in.;  
 15½ and under 15½ years of age, height 5ft. 1in., chest 31in.;  
 15½ and under 15 years of age, height 5ft. 1in., chest 31½in.;  
 16 and under 16½ years of age, height 5ft. 1½in., chest 32in.;  
 16½ and under 16½ years of age, height 5ft. 2in., chest 32½in.

Specially desirable boys of good physique and education are occasionally entered slightly under standard, with the permission of the Inspecting Captain of Boys' Training Ships.

The "non-continuous service" men, it may be noted, receive a somewhat lower rate of pay than the "continuous service" man of similar rating, and they can only earn a small pension by service in the Fleet Reserve.

A "boy" then, or "youth," being eligible, is entered in recruiting centres in the principal towns, in the training-ships, or preliminarily by the coastguard. He then joins a training establishment, where he is kitted up and taught his duties. Even to touch on these would take up too much space, but as certain humanitarians have grossly exaggerated the punishments in the training-ships, I can only state here that I believe that the boys are very well treated on the whole, while they are certainly well fed and cared for. They are taught, no doubt, to obey orders and to move smartly, but I do not believe that the discipline is harsh, or the punishments excessive. A boy can be caned, and for certain offences he can be birched, but I certainly think that the infliction of these punishments on boys is preferable to long periods of cells of confinement. One thing I must draw attention to, namely, that it is most essential that suitable punishments should be allowed and duly reported, all irregular punishments and bullying being sternly prohibited. Some thirty years ago it was a common custom for petty officers and instructors in training-ships to carry canes or rope's ends, and readers of "Peter Simple" may remember the use of Boatswain Chucks made of similar implements, but this is never the case now, and I believe that the use of the official cane or birch is becoming less frequent. I am certain that no boy of good character need ever be liable to serious punishment.

(Another Special Article  
 on this interesting sub-  
 ject next Wednesday.)

*The Editor*

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