

430

IN THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY!



**GEM 2<sup>D</sup>**  
**GRAND XMAS NUMBER**

**DINNER AT EASTWOOD HOUSE !**



# THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to  
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## THIS NUMBER.

I feel sure that there will only be one opinion among my readers as to the number in which these lines appear. And, in the words of the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "Weally wipping!" is likely to be their verdict. Will you all do your best to let such of your chums as are not already readers of the "GEM" know what a first-class paper it is? I feel sure, again, that to this end you can do nothing better than to lend them the Christmas issue as soon as you have read it yourselves. Meanwhile, about the next number.

For Nex. Wednesday :

### "THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!"

By Martin Clifford.

There is in this story a fine mixture of the grave and the gay, such as Mr. Clifford well knows how to give us. The rascality of the scheming Piggott, the Third-Form cronies of Racke, Croke, and Mellish, is a thing grave enough in all conscience; but there is any amount of fun in the dogged resolution with which the fags hold to the notion he has drilled into them that all the difference in the world exists between one shilling in silver or copper and a shillingsworth of stamps. Levison minor, who has by this time, I feel sure, established himself as a popular favourite with all readers, plays a leading part in the yarn, and his brother also figures prominently. But I am not going to tell you any more now. Wait till next week, and you will learn who won, and what profit the winner had out of

### "THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!"

### "STARS AND STRIPES" AGAIN.

I have heard once more from the American reader who calls himself by the pseudonym given above, and he is again in argumentative mood. Here are some extracts from his latest letter, which, by the way, he does not give me a chance of answering by mail:

"I notice that you do not deny that American film pictures are better than British ones. Nor do you make any reply to my comments on the way Fishy talks or on Clifton Dane of St. Jim's. I admit that the language in my letter was not typical of a Chesterfield or a Vere-de-Vere. But are your authors always polite to the U.S.? In a 'Magnet' story Bob Cherry says, 'George Washington could never tell a lie.' Bunter replies, 'He's about the only Yank who couldn't, then.' By what right does Mr. Richards brand all Americans as liars? Do you call this polite? You say that not an Englishman living cherishes any animosity against the U.S. because of the Revolutionary War. Why, only the other day I heard a Britisher say, 'I wish the Japs would go to war with the United States and give them a jolly good licking, to pay them back for defeating us in the War of Independence.' I entirely disagree with you concerning the use of the word American. If your argument is correct, why are not Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, British South Africans, and Anglo-Indians called English? It would be the greatest insult you could offer to a Canadian to call him an Englishman."

My correspondent is one of those who mistake shrieking for argument. I did not argue the film point with him simply because I do not know enough about the matter to offer an opinion worth having; nor do I regard it as by any means a matter of first-class importance. One might argue to eternity as to the correctness or otherwise of an author's version of the great American language, for it is in a continual state of change, which makes controversy concerning it useless. For instance, I was told the other day that what used to be known as "graft"—I apologise to "Stars and Stripes" for mentioning anything so deplorable—is now in up-to-date Americanese, "pork."

It is an old mistake to say that an author believes such

and such a thing because of things said by his characters; but it is a very absurd one, and I venture to say that when Mr. Richards wants to express his inmost thoughts on any subject whatever he will hardly put them into the mouth of Billy Bunter. At the same time, I think the American who really cannot lie and the Britisher who wants the U.S. licked by Japan in revenge for that war of ever so long ago ought to be in the same cage together in a show.

People living in any part of the American continent can be styled Americans, surely, and the style seems to me justified. The question my correspondent asks in relation to this simply shows his utter inability to conduct an argument on reasonable lines. Australians, New Zealanders, and the other peoples he names do not live on a continent named England. I don't know whether he will see the point, but I believe anybody who thinks will.

The Canadian who would take the being called an Englishman as the greatest insult you could offer him should share the cage with the other two. Why, it would be possible to call him, if you were cruel enough—well, 'nuff said!

## FOOTBALL NOTICES.

### Matches Wanted by:

- EVELINA C.F.C. (reasonable distance Nunhead.—C. W. Heritage, 102, Evelina Rd., Nunhead, S.E.
- STRATFORD ALBION F.C. (17)—4-mile r.—T. Bolt, 9, Ailwyn Rd., Abbey Lane, Stratford, E.
- SWINDON WEDNESDAY ALBION F.C. (17)—12-mile r.—E. M. Woodward, 6, Market St., Swindon.
- ST. JAMES' F.C. (15)—6-mile r.—H. G. Roberts, 9, Arran St. Roath Park, Cardiff.
- BASING F.C. (14-15)—14-mile r.—F. W. Berry, 38, Pearson St., Kingsland Rd., N.E.
- EASTLEIGH ARGYLE F.C. (16)—reasonable distance.—G. Wheatley, 1, Derby Rd., Eastleigh, Hants.
- A Merton Team.—Harry Spicer, 33, Miller Rd., Collier's Wood, Merton, S.W.
- CANN HALL WESLEYAN F.C. (14-15)—5-mile r.—F. Delaney, 52, Trumpington Rd., Forest Gate, E.
- GARTH A.F.C. (15-16)—6-mile r.—T. Phillips, Rose Cottage, Gwaelod-y-Garth, Taffs Well, Cardiff.
- BOULEVARD ATHLETIC F.C. (17).—G. Scrivener, 41, Glapton Rd., Meadows, Nottingham.
- CLIFDEN ROVERS F.C. (15-16)—3-mile r. Heaton Park.—R. D. Roberts, P.O. Box 12, Manchester.
- The A.F.C.A. (12½)—2-mile r.—A. E. Barnes, 161, Byron Avenue, Manor Park, E.

### Other Footer Notices:

- A junior club (14-15) wants players.—Stamped and addressed envelope to H. A. Just, 29, Theberton St., Islington, N.
- D. Maloney, 4, Mearns St., Gretnock, wants to hear from readers in his neighbourhood who would like to join club.
- BRIDGEMOUNT F.C. want players.—Ted Cooke, 186, Donegall Rd., Belfast.
- Four or five players (14-15) wanted for a Canonbury club.—A. S. Bourne, 39, Douglas Rd., Canonbury, N.
- Arthur Peloe, 40, Newcombe St., Anfield, Liverpool, wants readers (13-14) to join him in forming a club.
- Bob Askew, 8, Nelson St., Stepney, E., wants to join a club (15-17); plays right-back.
- A. Wheeler and A. W. Holtham (16 and 17) want to join a club in or near London.—Holtham, 3, Lonsdale Rd., Barnes, S.W.

Your Editor

# THE GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE GEM LIBRARY 2<sup>D</sup>.

## IN THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY!

A Magnificent, Extra Long, Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.  
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



The mandril shot out both arms. One paw snatched Baggy's cap from his head; the other took a firm grip of his hair. "Yaroooogh! Leggo, you beast! Yow-ow!" howled Trimble. (See Chapter 11.)

### CHAPTER I.

On the way to Eastwood House.

"MY hat! That's a jolly good riddance, anyway!" It was Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who made this remark. The "jolly good riddance" to which he referred was the exit from the compartment at Laxham Station of the egregious Baggy Trimble.

"Wathah!" agreed the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Though I am not at all suah, deah boys, that you were not a twifle too wough on pooah old Twimble—just a twifle, you know!"

"Rats!" said Herries emphatically. "After all, the chap's a rotter, a liar, and a funk! He—"

"That may be 'after all,'" said Monty Lowther blandly. "But it's certainly not the sum total. For the dear Trimble is also a swanker, a sponger, and—"

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No. 458. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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"Oh, cheese it!" struck in Tom Merry. "The silly image isn't here now, Monty, and it's hardly worth while slanging him behind his back."

"I should have the greatest possible pleasure in repeating my observations to Baggy's repulsive face, Tommy, old son!" replied Lowther.

"So should I!" said Herries.

Tom Merry grinned.

"My only sainted aunt, nobody is going to deny that we are all jolly well fed up with Trimble!" he said. "But we've had some fun with him, and I fancy it will be a long time before he gets chucking about broadcast his blessed invitations to Trimble Hall again."

"You're right, Tommy," said Digby. "He ought to have learned a lesson this journey."

"Trimble," said Manners sagely, "is one of those merchants who'd never learn anything. He'll be on the brag again before he's back at St. Jim's ten and a half seconds."

"There's one jolly good thing!" said downright Jack Blake. "We aren't likely to see the fat beast again before that, so we may as well give him a rest now!"

But there Blake was wrong. They were to see Trimble again long before the new term at St. Jim's began.

There were seven of them now that the unspeakable Baggy had left the company. The Terrible Three were there—Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Harry Manners. So were the chums of Study No. 6 of the Fourth Form passage—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Jack Blake, George Herries, and Robert Digby. They were on their way to spend Christmas at Eastwood House, the ancestral home of the noble Gussy.

And at one time there had seemed to be a very real danger that they might have forced upon them the unwelcome company of Baggy Trimble.

Baggy was not of the tribe of George Washington. Baggy's lies were as the sands of the seashore for number. He never worried about the fact that he was continually contradicting himself.

Trimble always talked of his home as Trimble Hall. He was never tired of telling about the family portraits in the picture-gallery, the suits of armour in the wide hall, the deer in the spacious park, the fish in the gleaming lake, the motor-cars, the horses, the bowing flunkies, eager to do his lightest bidding, and the enthusiastic and devoted tenantry which worshipped the Trimbles after the old feudal fashion.

But Trimble's real home was a quite respectable though by no means imposing villa in the small town of Laxham, not many miles from Eastwood House.

Towards the end of the term just ended, Baggy, in desperate need of ready money, had sought to raise it by issuing invitations to every likely lender to come and spend Christmas at Trimble Hall.

Everybody had refused, more or less politely, which was exactly what Baggy had counted upon. Among those who were more polite was Arthur Augustus, who had been betrayed by his natural civility into the false step of saying that he would have been very pleased to accept but for the fact that he had asked a number of fellows to go home with him.

Baggy saw his chance. Baggy seized it. Baggy hung on to it like the leech he was.

As D'Arcy couldn't go home with him, he would go home with D'Arcy. It seemed to Baggy an eminently desirable arrangement. To Arthur Augustus it seemed, on the contrary, objectionable beyond words. There was scarcely a fellow at St. Jim's whom Gussy would not have preferred to introduce to his family circle as a friend rather than the unspeakable Baggy.

But the fine old motto, "Noblesse oblige," ruled all Gussy's actions. Not even to Baggy Trimble could he be rude in a matter such as this, involving the sacred rights of hospitality.

The dreadful thing would have to be!  
It was Monty Lowther, always ingenious, who perceived a way out.

One after another the seven went to Baggy. Each told him the same tale. On reconsideration, each had changed his mind, and would be no end pleased to visit Trimble Hall.

A surprise awaited them. Baggy took it all coolly. He never turned a hair.

Monty Lowther came in for a very bad time. His scheme was denounced by his chums as the rottenest ever devised, worthy only of a born idiot.

Lowther himself, though hoping for the best, had some very anxious moments.

But as the time for departure drew near Baggy's bluff failed him. He was very plainly on tenterhooks.

He tried all sorts of stratagems to choke off his guests. The plain truth would have been best, of course. But the plain truth was never in Baggy Trimble's line.

The fact that Laxham, where Baggy lived, was on the same line as Easthorpe, the station for Eastwood House, enabled

the seven to keep up their spoof until the very last moment; and, once relieved of the horrible-dread that they might be forced to spend Christmas with Baggy, they played the game for all it was worth.

It was only when Trimble left the train that he knew they were not coming with him. And exceeding great was the relief of Baggy when he did know. For papa and mamma Trimble would have made things very warm and uncomfortable for their hopeful son had he descended upon them, without warning, with seven schoolfellows as guests.

But now Baggy had gone from their midst, and in the anticipation of the jolly times that were sure to be theirs during Christmas at Eastwood House, they forgot about him.

"I say, you fellows, look there!" cried Digby on a sudden. The train was thundering over a high viaduct, under which ran a broad highway.

Spread out along the highway was a decidedly interesting procession.

There were caravans, quite a number of them. There were led horses, there was an immense elephant; and, squatting by the side of a man who drove four ponies harnessed to an open cart, was a big brown bear.

"My hat, it's a giddy circus!" said Manners.

"Can't be anything else, though it's a bit late in the year for a circus," Tom Merry said.

"I guess they are on their way into winter quarters somewhere," remarked Jack Blake.

"That's a jolly old bear," said Herries. "He seems no end chummy with the chap in the cart."

"An' look at the elephant," chimed in Arthur Augustus.

"He's a weally fine animal. I could fancy myself in a howdah on his back, woamin'—"

"It would be a bit more of a real how-d'ye-do if you found yourself on the other side of the bear—not his back, you know, but his waistcoat—or where his waistcoat would be if he wore one—being hugged, Gustavus!"

"Oh, you cwass ass, Lowthah! I did not say how-d'ye-do. I said howdah! Quite a different thing! Don't you know what a howdah is, you uttah idiot?"

"Something like a wigwam, only more so, isn't it?" returned the humorist of the ~~Shell~~ grinning.

"I say, though, Gussy, you aren't over and above polite to your guests, are you? 'Cwass ass' and 'uttah idiot' don't strike me as epithets worthy of that repose which marks the caste of Vere!"

"Sowway, deah boy! But weally—"

"What's that?"

A yell, not unlike the war-cry of a Red Indian, had pierced the air from somewhere behind them.

"Sounds like young Wally," said Herries.

Jack Blake, who had managed to secure the best position at the window when the whole seven of them had crowded to it to look out at the circus, contrived to screw his head round enough to see.

"It is Wally! Stop that, you young ass!" he roared.

Now some of the others could also see, and they forgot all about the circus—out of sight by this time—when they saw.

The door of a compartment in the next coach had been flung open, and Wally D'Arcy, Gussy's minor, was trying to scramble out of it.

"Step it, Wally! I ordah you to desist!" yelled Gussy.

"Rats, Gus! I've got to go! Pongo's fallen out!" howled back the shrill voice of D'Arcy minor.

"It's all serene, you fellows! We'll see he don't get out!" called another shrill voice, which sounded like that of Manners' minor.

"Pongo ain't hurt! Look, you silly rotter! He's streaking after the train like a flash of lightning!" shouted Jameson of the Third.

The seven could see Pongo now. Pongo was Wally's dog, not a whit less dear to Wally's heart because his ancestry was, to put it in the most polite way, dubious. There was some terrier in Pongo, but most of him was simply miscellaneous dog.

But, whatever might be his defects from the point of view of a dog-show judge, Pongo could leg it, and he seemed to have a cat's allowance of lives. He was apparently none the worse for his fall from the train, and he was legging it like one o'clock, as Digby remarked.

He had jumped out of Wally's arms, excited into frenzy by the sight of the bear, had turned a triple somersault down the embankment, but had picked himself up, and was now racing along, seemingly not a bit the worse for wear.

"Fasten that dooh at once!" shouted D'Arcy major.

"Go and eat coke!" yelled back D'Arcy minor.

"It's all serene, D'Arcy!" howled Levison minor.

Pongo was lost to sight now. But the train was slowing down, and in another minute or two it rolled into Easthorpe station.



"One—two—three!" counted Jolly Nicholas, swinging Wally of the Third in his lean but strong arms. (See Chapter 15.)

## CHAPTER 2. High Promotion for Gussy!

**B**EFORE the train had fairly stopped the fags tumbled out pell-mell. Wally was first, of course, and after him came Jameson, Curly Gibson and Joe Frayne, and Manners minor and Levison minor.

For Wally, like his elder brother, had asked permission to bring a few fellows home with him; and the bountiful hospitality of Eastwood House had been offered to and accepted by five of the choicest spirits of the Third.

"Why, theah's the patah!" cried Arthur Augustus, spotting the erect, dignified figure of Lord Eastwood upon the platform.

Wally did not hear, and had evidently failed to perceive his father. He was making a rush for the rear end of the train, and his chums followed him as one man.

"Ere, come back, young gents! You mustn't go there!" yelled a porter, as the half-dozen left the platform.

Wally & Co. heeded not at all. They streaked along by the side of the line to meet Pongo.

"Oh, weally, patah, this is most awf'ly good of you, comin' to meet us!" said Gussy, clasping his father's hand warmly.

Lord Eastwood smiled, and greeted each of his son's chums before he answered that.

Then he said:

"I fear you have a disappointment in store, Arthur, my boy—in fact, something like a series of disappointments. I

have not come merely to meet you, though I arranged the time of my going so that I might see you all before I went."

"Goin', patah!" gasped Gussy. "I don't precisely catch on. You can't mean—"

"I am called away by business of the most urgent nature—business of national importance, I may say. I must take the next up-train, which is due in a few minutes.

"But you'll be back in a day or two, surely, sir?" said Jack Blake. "It wouldn't be half like Christmas without you!"

"That is a very nice thing to say, Blake, and I appreciate it, because I am sure you mean it. But there is no chance of my absence extending over less than a week. It may well last longer."

"Oh, bai Jove! What wotten luck!"

"Furthermore, affairs at the Front prevent Conway's getting any leave. And your Aunt Clayton is ill, Arthur, which means that neither she nor your cousin Ethel will be at Eastwood for Christmas."

"Oh, weally! How howwid!"

"You will have to play host, my boy, and your school comrades will be the only guests. Everything has been prepared to give you all a good time, and I hope you will have one, though the absence of other guests will naturally be disappointing to you all."

They were all disappointed. But in Gussy's cloudy sky there was a bright rainbow of compensation.

He was to take his father's place—to act as host! It was

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Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price, 1d. and will contain a Long, Complete S.ory, entitled:

"THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

high promotion for Arthur Augustus, and it pleased him hugely.

"You can wely upon me absolutely, sir!" he said earnestly. "I flattah myself that in a situation wequiahin' tact an' judgment, I am all theah!"

"Gustavus in the seats of the mighty!" murmured Monty Lowther in the ear of Jack Blake. "It's a bit rotten altogether, but I guess we'll all manage to enjoy ourselves, and I'm jolly sure Gussy will!"

"Just the good little ass's line!" answered Blake cheerfully. "Well, he can't do anything, very mad, with the whole crowd of us to look after him!"

Lord Eastwood's smile was a trifle wistful. No one recognised more fully than he did what a thoroughly good fellow his second son was—honourable, generous to a fault, warm-hearted. But Lord Eastwood had never seen any evidence of the tact and judgment which Arthur Augustus looked upon as his most marked characteristics. Wally, the wildest young imp of the Third, had as much of those particular qualities as the swell of the Fourth.

Now Wally himself rushed up, with Pongo hugged to his chest. The dog's tongue hung out, and he was breathing hard, but otherwise he seemed none the worse either for his fall or for his frantic chase after the train.

"Hallo, dad! Here's Pongo! He fell out of the train, but he's all right! I say, he knows you again! Good old Pongo! I always said he'd got more sense than Gus!"

"But your brother also knew me again, Wally!" replied Lord Eastwood, smiling.

He patted the mongrel's head, and shook hands with Wally and the other Third-Formers, all just a little bit awed.

"Oh, of course, I don't mean that Gus is really quite such an out-and-out duffer as all that, but—"

The signal-arm for the up-train clattered down.

"I must cross to the other platform," said Lord Eastwood.

Then he turned to Tom Merry.

"I want a word or two with you, Tom," he said gravely.

He and Tom crossed the bridge together, the others following at a respectful distance, a little surprised. But Herries did not come yet. He was making tracks for the guard's van to retrieve his cherished bulldog, the famous Fowler.

"I know you fellows will understand that I am not deserting you willingly, Tom!" said Lord Eastwood, in his hearty way. "I was looking forward to the Christmas in your company almost as keenly as any of you, I do believe!"

"We shall miss you no end, sir!" said Tom quietly.

"Try not to! Make the best of a rather maimed festival. That will please me even more than knowing I am missed. This is what I want to speak to you about specially, my boy. Arthur is the best of good fellows, but his heart rules his head. He is apt at times to be a trifle feather-brained. I don't think that is an unkind way of putting it, and I should not say even so much to most people. He is to act as host and head of the house in my absence, and I can trust him entirely as far as doing all that hospitality requires."

"I think he'll be all right every way, sir. We'll see that he does not kick over the traces."

"Have you not found it sometimes difficult to do that even at St. Jim's? It is hardly likely to be easier, I fear, in his own home. No, Tom, I cannot leave it to a committee, so to speak. I must put you in charge. It must be more or less a secret commission. Arthur's feelings shall not be wounded unnecessarily. What I want you to do is to promise me that, to the utmost of your power, you will act as a check upon any wild schemes he may be disposed to initiate. Diplomacy will be needed. Any open display of authority might do more harm than good. But if a crisis comes, the authority is yours, and you shall have the proof of that which Arthur will not think of questioning. Do you accept?"

"Of course I do, sir! There isn't anything on earth I'm more certain of than that you would not ask me anything unfair. I'll do my level best, if there's any need to do anything. But I do hope there won't be!"

Tom Merry looked very grave indeed. Lord Eastwood perceived that, and was pleased by it, for he did not want a light and easy assent.

"I am sure your best will be good enough for me, Tom!" he said.

And his strong hand rested for a moment on the shoulder of the captain of the Shell with a very fatherly grip. Tom was surprised to find himself swallowing down a lump that had somehow come into his throat.

A more suspicious and less generous fellow than Arthur Augustus might have had his suspicions aroused by this talk between his father and Tom Merry. But Gussy did not trouble his noble mind about it at all.

He was busied upon what seemed to him a most important

matter—no less than the impressing of his new importance upon the none too easily-impressed mind of Wally of the Third.

"You undahstand, Wally? The patah is called away!"

"What's the odds? He's coming back again, ain't he?"

"He will be away ovah Chwistmas, an' old Conway hasn't got leave!"

"Righto, Gus! I see what you're getting at now. There's got to be a boss of the show, just to give orders and all that, and, of course, the job's a bit above your giddy weight. You needn't worry a scrap. I'll take it on!"

Perhaps Arthur Augustus should have been prepared for this exceedingly cool offer. He should have known Wally's little ways quite well by this time. But the swell of St. Jim's had a wonderful capacity for being surprised, and Wally's audacity filled him with amazement.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "I nevah heard such uttably sillay wot in all my life! You are simply a kid. It is uttably imposa that you should take the patah's place! I shall do that, matchuwally. And you had bettah undahstand that from the outset!"

Wally's chums were grinning broadly. Even the face of Pongo seemed to wear a grin.

"Don't get your wool off, kid!" said the unflustered Wally. "We can settle this all right later on. No need to worry the governor about it."

"It is already settled, Wally!"

"Rats, Gus! You didn't properly catch on, I reckon. You couldn't boss a giddy cats' home. You always make a silly mucker of anything you take on—you know you do!"

"I object in the stwongest possible mannah to such injurious and wepwehensible wemarks, Wally!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Bai Jove, I must appeal to the patah, then!"

"Just like you!" retorted Wally hotly. "Go and sneak before I've done anything!"

The dispute was cut short by the incoming train. Lord Eastwood had a guard of honour to his compartment.

He stood looking down at the ring of eager young faces, and smiled. Perhaps he was thinking that the inevitable gaps left by the havoc of the war would be filled by the right sort of stuff as long as the schools of the country sent out such as his sons and their chums to uphold the honour of Britain.

Wally pushed to the front through the crowd, still hugging Pongo closely to his chest.

"I say, dad! That ass, Gus—I mean, you know, Gus says that I've got to knuckle under and do just what he tells me. That's not right, is it? Here, I say, dad, I want a straight answer, you know. It's a jolly serious thing for me. I'd sooner have stopped at the school for Christmas than have old ass Gus bossing me about!"

"In my absence and Conway's, your brother Arthur naturally takes his place as head of the house, Walter. I do not suppose—"

"It ain't a bit of good supposing, dad! I jolly well know old Gus!"

"Weally, Wally!"

"Rats to you! I say, dad—"

But the train had begun to move. There was no time for Lord Eastwood to shake hands with anyone. But his right hand touched Wally's face with something like a caress, and over the youngster's head he shot at Gussy a glance which said plainly:

"Go easily with him!"

Gussy had no wish to tyrannise over his minor. All he wanted was that Wally should admit his authority. But unfortunately that was about the last thing Wally intended to do.

The train rolled out amid a ringing salvo of cheers, and Lord Eastwood waved his hand from the window until he was lost to sight.

"Dad's all right ho—he's jolly well one of the best!" spoke Wally of the Third in the ear of Frank Levison. "Gus ain't really a bad sort either. But he's pottv, you know. He wants somebody to look after him. And I'm jolly well going to do it!"

Levison minor grinned.

On the whole, it scarcely seemed likely that the seats of the mighty would prove quite so comfortable to Arthur Augustus as he was expecting to find them.

## CHAPTER 3.

### Wally Causes Trouble.

"HEAH we are, deah boys! Of course, you undahstand why the motahs aren't in evidence? The patah sent them all to the Wed Cwoss, you know, evah so long ago."

"We know—we knows, Gustavus, old ass," said Jack Blake politely.

"And we shouldn't mind a scrap if we had to walk," added Digby.

"No need for that, Dig! We can all pile into this old wattlewag, an' the fags will have plenty of woom in the othah. Hewwies, I should weally be extremely obliged if you would be kind enough to keep that fearful beast from suiffin' at my twosahs in that vewy thweatenin' mannah!"

Towser was really no more a fearful beast than the well-hung and comfortable carriages were rattletaps. But allowances had always to be made for Gussy's picturesque methods of expression.

Herries looked at his chum rather more in anger than in sorrow.

"My hat, Gussy!" he said. "You can't talk like that, you know! Old Towser's a guest, like the rest of us. I asked you if you'd mind my bringing him, and you said 'Not a bit.'"

"What Gussy meant," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "was 'not a bite.'"

"Bai Jove, what an uttably w'etched joke, Lowthah! Yaas, Hewwies, deah boy, I know I agweed to Towshah's coming, so, of course, he is weally a guest. But, you see, I can't possibly have my guests bitin' my twosahs!"

"Do you think anyone would want to, idiot? None of us, for a dead cert; and old Towser's got as much sense as any of us. Why, if he was seen dead with a bit of anything so jolly loud as those bags of yours between his teeth, he'd—he'd die of shame, poor old chap!"

"After which, as our esteemed friend Towser isn't a cat, he might really be dead," said Lowther blandly.

Gussy looked down at the maligned trousers, which were in reality not in the least loud, but quite a tasteful shade of grey.

"Hurry up, you old fogies!" yelled Wally.

He and his fag contingent had already scrambled into one of the carriages. It was the one which Gussy intended they should have; but in justice to Wally's independent spirit, it may be said that he did not know that. Had he known it, he would certainly have gone for the other.

"We wufuse to be huwwied, Wally," replied Arthur Augustus. "Theah is plenty of time."

Gussy jammed the famous monocle into his eye, and regarded his cheeky younger brother with all the severity of which he was capable.

"Oh, rats to your old window-pane! Nobody cares about that, and you know jolly well you can't really see through it, you silly donkey! We're in a hurry if you ain't, and you'd better get a move on you, because we're going to race you. Aren't we, Binks?"

The appeal was to the driver, a weatherbeaten man of some thirty years beyond the military age limit.

Binks grinned at the youngster sitting beside him.

"I dunno as I mind, Master Walter," said Binks; "but Mr. Willis wouldn't ear of it, an' he might ask his lordship to give your 'umble the sack if we tried it on."

Mr. Willis was the head coachman, a most dignified personage, who sat bolt upright on the box-seat of the drag into which the older fellows were clambering.

"Oh, rats to old Willis!" said the irreverent Wally. "I'll put it right with the old buffer."

Then he yelled:

"I say, Willis, old cock, we'll race you, and give you to the station gates for a start, if you like! Only do hurry up and get a move on you!"

"I should not dream of such a thing, sir," answered Willis, in measured tones. "His lordship would not approve."

"You're no sport, that's what's the matter with you!" shouted Wally. "Gus, old ass, you drive that shebang, and we'll race. The winner to boss the show while the governor's away. Is it a go?"

"Most assuheadly it is not, Wally! The vewy suggestion is simplay widic. I am the pwopah wewpewesentative of the family during the patah's absence, and I am not in the vewy least inclined to hand ovah the weins to—"

"Who asked you to hand over the reins, idiot? I said you'd better take them, as old Willis hasn't got any sport in him. But I s'pose you and the rest of the old fogies would rather jog along at his pace, just as if you were going to a funeral. That ain't our style, you bet! Gee up, Binky!"

"I say, you kids, what about your luggage?" sang out Manners.

"That's all serene. Why should we trouble when old ass Gus is head cook and bottle-washer? It comes in his giddy department, of course. Ta-ta, ancients! See you some time before to-morrow, I suppose?"

Binks was grinning broadly as he drove off, though he was careful to keep his face turned from the august Willis. Before they were out of the station yard Wally had snatched the reins from Binks' grasp.

"Look after Pongo, Franky," he said to Levison minor, who had squeezed in beside him.

"Pongo's all right," replied the junior addressed. "I'm not jolly well going to hang on to his collar all the way."

A single term at St. Jim's had done much for Levison minor. His footing among the leading spirits of the Third was in no manner of doubt.

There was plenty of room for all the Shell and Fourth Form fellows in the drag. Their belongings were being transferred from the platform to a luggage-cart. Arthur Augustus stood up by Willis, and superintended the proceedings. No one had been at all keen on that seat by the side of the stiff-backed Willis.

"Wheah's my suit-case?" Gussy demanded, scanning the almost completed pile through his monocle.

"Are you blind, ass?" asked Digby politely. "There it is, on top of my old black trunk."

"That is not the one I mean, Digby. I mean the one I bought the othah day, with the patent locks an' my initials in wed on it. Has anybody seen that?"

"Yes, I have," answered Monty Lowther, and added in a whisper to Tom Merry: "I saw it the day when the dear old ass bought it."

"Everythink's on now, sir," the head porter assured Gussy, touching his forelock as he spoke. "An' that there one's all right. I remember puttin' of him on myself."

"Thanks, Casbon. Heah you are, my friend, an' you can settle with the west."

The head porter would have no difficulty in settling with his two aides, for the tip was a generous one.

"Thank you, sir; thank you kindly! Merry Christmas to all you young gents!"

They shouted good wishes in return.

"Dwive off, Willis!" commanded Arthur Augustus.

And the order was obeyed with such promptitude that next moment Gussy was swinging outside the drag by his hands, with his grey trousers in contact with the fore-wheel.

"Ow—yow!" he howled. "Weally, Willis—"

Tom Merry reached over, seized him by the collar, and yanked him aboard.

"I was not aware that you had not sat down, sir," said Willis stiffly. "If you will excuse my saying so, sir, it would have been wiser to sit down before—"

"Oh, yaas, Willis. Quite so," agreed Gussy, almost humbly. "But weally, you know, it's made a howwid mess of my bags, you know!"

"That, sir, is a pity; but I regard it as fortunate that you have sustained no personal damage," said Willis.

Conversation on these lines had no charms for Gussy. He dried up.

The drag was finely horsed, and the two blacks between the shafts made light of their load.

Wally & Co. had had quite a good start; but from the first it was evident that they would soon be overhauled.

D'Arcy minor looked back over his shoulder as he heard the clatter of the blacks' hoofs on the broad highway behind. "Gee up!" he shouted. And used his whip to the bays he drove.

"I say, Master Walter, they ain't used to—"

"Shurrup, Binky! I sha'n't hurt them. But do you think I'm going to have my brother getting ahead? Not jolly well likely!"

"Tain't much good, Master Wally. The drag's built for faster travellin' than this, an' them blacks have got the legs of my 'osses any day."

"We'll see!" snapped Wally. "Come up, my beauties! Put your beef into it! That's the style! Got your peashooters ready, you chaps?"

"What do you think?" yelled back Manners minor.

Peashooters were produced. In spite of all Wally's efforts the drag was fast drawing up to them.

"Don't whip them like that, Wally you young wascal! The patah—"

"Go and eat coke, Gus!"

Wally was not really doing much whipping. The lash might be flying all the time, but it was seldom it touched the satin skins of the bays.

"S'pose I pull right across 'em, Binky?"

"You can't do that, Master Wally! Why, there'd be a smash-up if you did!"

"Oh, rats! Can't old Willis drive?"

"Might not pull 'em up in time, you know, sir, an' if he didn't it would be a nasty mess."

"Oh, dash it! We're getting to Barnt Hill, and the beastly up grade will give them a better chance than ever."

"They're going to pass us, anyway, old man," said Frank Levison. "Not your fault. They've got the best horses, that's all."

"Shall we give 'em a volley now?" shouted Reggie Manners.

Wally glanced back.

"Not for a minute or two. Wait till they're about ten yards nearer," he said, with all the coolness of a veteran general.

"Bags Lowther for mine," said little Joe Frayne. "E ain't really a bad sort; but 'e is so funny, an' I'd like to cop 'im one!"

When Frayne was excited he was apt to relapse into the speech of his old Arab days, though he had learned better by this time.

"Lowther ain't really funny at all. He only fancies he is," growled Manners minor. "Bags my major! But I don't mind who else shoots at him, too. The silly ass won't get more than he deserves, anyway."

"I say, look there!" cried Levison minor.

On the top of the hill they were now ascending, looking positively gigantic against the skyline, appeared the elephant they had seen from the train. Behind it showed one big yellow caravan. The rest of the procession was as yet hidden by the hill.

"They're going to camp on Barnt Common!" cried Wally, in excitement. "Oh, good egg! I didn't think we'd have the luck to see them again, though I might have known they were coming this way."

"Now, then, Wally, get ova' to the left; do you heah? We want to pass!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

The road was a wide one. But Wally's tactics in keeping to the middle of it lent an element of risk to any attempt to pass him.

D'Arcy minor glanced round once more, and saw that the drag was within a few yards.

"Let 'em have it!" he howled. And his little band loosed off their peashooters.

The small, hard missiles rattled upon the hats and smote the faces of the fellows behind.

If that had been all, it would not have mattered.

But it was not all.

"Ow—yow! Yarooogh!" howled Lowther.

Joe Frayne was a dead shot with a peashooter, and Lowther had just opened his mouth to speak when Joe fired. The sudden entry into his open mouth of a pea travelling at a considerable velocity changed the tenor of his remarks in a marked fashion.

Wally & Co., who refused, as a rule, to admit Lowther's claim to be considered a humorist, thought him really funny just then.

"Hang it, that caught me in the eye!" growled Herries.

"Wally, you young wascal, I will give you the most fearful twashin' of youah life—"

"Stop it, kids!" sang out Tom Merry. "You'll frighten the horses!"

But the warning came too late.

At the same instant a pea hit Willis in one eye, causing him to blink both optics, and another stung up the sensitive nostrils of the near side horse.

The black reared. The other horse began to plunge and kick.

Arthur Augustus added to the confusion by a frantic attempt to snatch the reins from the hands of Willis. It would have been all right had Willis, who was blinded for the moment, let go. But Willis didn't.

"Oh, look out where you're coming to!" yelled Jameson.

"You'll be on top of us!" howled Curly Gibson.

The black brought his forefeet to ground again within a few inches of the wheel of the other carriage, narrowly escaping serious damage to his knees. His partner swerved inwards. Willis and Gussy both tugged hard at the reins. It was sheer luck that both pulled in the same direction.

The pair of mettlesome blacks shot forward. For a moment a collision seemed certain.

But Wally kept his head in the moment of peril, and collision was averted.

Then from ahead of them—very close ahead—came a weird sound.

The elephant threw up his great trunk and trumpeted long and loudly.

The two bays, already alarmed, made a dash forward, passed the drag, avoided the huge beast by inches, and bolted wildly downhill.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Tom Merry Has To Use His Fists.

WILLIS pulled the blacks up just in time. The man who was leading the elephant beat the great animal about the trunk with a stick that was more like a club. His language as he did so was anything but choice. He cursed the elephant, the horses, Willis, the boys, and everybody and everything concerned with a variety of oaths which pointed to his

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possession of a full vocabulary in this direction, if in no other.

"Bai Jove, it's sickening! That bwute ought to be stopped, you know," said Arthur Augustus, always hoity resentful at the ill-treatment of an animal.

"Well, I guess the elephant will stop him, when he feels he's had enough," said Lowther. "An elephant knows a thing or two, and is big enough to look after himself."

"Rats, Monty!" said Tom Merry sharply. "Gussy's right. Stop that game, you fellow! Do you hear?"

The elephant's obstinacy was aroused, and he showed no sign of being willing to budge. He planted his great feet firmly, and his little eyes gleamed with a lurid red light. It looked rather dangerous for the man who was maltreating him. But probably the fellow knew, or thought he knew, just how far he could go.

Elephants will stand a great deal from those put in authority over them. But they have a wonderfully keen sense of justice, and a marvellous memory.

A savage blow upon the trunk, which is far more sensitive than most parts of an elephant's huge carcass, caused the animal to trumpet shrilly, and still farther aroused Tom Merry's ire.

Tom jumped out of the drag.

"Stop that!" he said hotly; and his hands clenched.

The fellow, a short, thick-set man, who looked as if the Army were the right place for him at such a time, scowled, swore, and struck the elephant again.

The spectators were breathless for a moment. Not one of them all but believed the huge animal would seize his tormentor in his trunk, and dash him to the ground, so fierce was his aspect.

But he did not. And it seemed that the fellow had no fear that he would. Whether his lack of fear was due to knowledge of the animal or to sheer insensibility they could not guess.

"You leave 'im to take care of hisself!" said the man surlily. "E's big enough an' ugly enough, I reckon! I'll break the 'ulkin' great pig's spirit for 'im, I promise you! An' after I've done with him I'll attend to you, young bantam cock, if you give me any more of your lip!"

He tugged at the elephant again—an effort which had about as much effect as the push of a bluebottle might have done. A dozen men could not have stirred the huge beast once he had made up his mind to stand fast. And to that he seemed to have made up his mind now.

The fellow lifted his stick again.

"Better not!" snapped Tom Merry. "I don't believe he'll stand any more. And if he will, I tell you straight I won't!"

"You? What's it got to do with you, whipper-snapper?" hooted the man ferociously.

"Anybody's got a right to protest against cruelty of that sort," replied Tom firmly.

"Well, you've protested, so your bit's done! Now get out of the bloomin' road, or I shall use you to wipe it up with!"

And the fellow shouldered Tom roughly aside.

It was more than Tom Merry could stand. His blood was at boiling-point.

"Put up your fists!" he cried.

"Why, wot are you talkin' about, you young fool? I could eat 'arf a dozen like you before breakfast!"

"I'm not asking you to eat me!" retorted Tom hotly. "But I won't be shoved about by a blackguardly lout like you!"

Willis was looking very grave, yet not wholly disapproving. The other St. Jim's fellows came tumbling out of the drag, and ranged themselves by Tom's side.

Now, too, the circus folk began to come up. Among them was the man by whom the bear had sat—a man with a long, melancholy face, who looked as if the very idea of making a joke would hurt his feelings. He was, as a matter of fact, the circus' chief clown—which shows how deceptive appearances may be.

"He's above your weight, Tom," whispered Manners anxiously.

"I don't care a hang about that!" replied Tom, with a touch of impatience. "Perhaps the brute can lick me. He's welcome to try; but I sha'n't take it lying down, anyway!"

Tom Merry was anything but quarrelsome. But he evidently meant fighting now, and nothing that his chums could say or do was likely to have any effect upon his determination.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said the melancholy man, addressing the company in general. Then he turned to the elephant. "What's wrong, Tamerlane, old man?" he asked kindly, and the great animal, a moment before so furious, lowered his trunk, and touched his friend ever so gently on the shoulder with the tip of it.

"We'd better get off the road, hadn't we, old boy—eh?"





Tom Merry snatched up a heavy stick from the rack, and dealt the bear a lusty blow, while Gussy beat at the animal's back with his fists. (See Chapter 22.)

went on the clown, and Tamerlane suffered himself to be led off quietly. Indeed, he could scarcely be said to be led off, for he followed his friend as a dog might have done.

The short man was removing his jacket when the clown came back.

"Here, I say, Blader, what's this mean?" asked the clown sharply.

"I'm goin' to give this interferin' young 'ound the lesson of 'is blooming life!"

"Well, look out for the sack after it, that's all!" answered the clown, with a shrug of his high shoulders. "It ain't likely to please the boss, you know. As for the young gentleman, I kind of fancy he can take care of himself, Blader. Oh, I'm quite well aware that you reckon yourself a bit of a bruiser! But there's no science about you—no science; an' what's a fighting-man without that?"

"Weally, Tom Mewvy, I do not considah that you are in the vewy least bound to accept a challenge fwom an awful outsidah like that!" protested Gussy.

"Gustavus is right for once, Tom. It isn't really backing down, you know," said Jack Blake.

Lowther and Manners were silent. They, at least, knew that when Tom Merry's face took on that utterly dogged look argument with him was sheer waste of breath.

Tom was as reasonable as most fellows. But he could at times be as obstinate as anybody. The attitude of the man Blader had fairly made his blood boil. It was not now a question of whether he ought to fight. He wanted to fight, and he meant to fight!

Off came his coat and waistcoat, and he rolled up his shirt-

sleeves. The arms thus revealed were by no means puny. The muscle rippled on them. But Blader's were twice as thick, and looked hard enough for anything.

"Ready, cock-sparrow?" asked Blader sneeringly.

"Quite," Tom replied coolly.

Blader came on with a rush, arms going wildly. It was easy to see that the clown was right in saying that he lacked science. But his strength and his toughness had to be reckoned with, and these qualities made of him an opponent by no means to be despised. No boy could be expected to stand up against many blows from those big fists, and it scarcely seemed likely that a boy's blows would make much impression on the fellow's tough body.

But Tom Merry's chums knew how hard Tom could hit, and if they were not absolutely confident, they were at least hopeful.

Tom ducked and dodged, avoiding the swinging punches: then he got in a straight hard left, that took Blader full on the jaw. The man was plainly surprised, and even a little staggered.

But he rushed in again. His guard was of the poorest description; but for a moment or two he kept Tom so busy side-stepping, ducking, and dodging, that the boy had no chance to take advantage of this fault.

Above all things he had to avoid letting Blader get to grips with him. Once locked in the fellow's powerful embrace, Tom Merry would have had small chance. But Tom knew that, and acted on his knowledge.

The road gave plenty of space for manoeuvring, and he seemed as elusive as an eel. Blader wasted a tremendous

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amount of effort in punching at something which was never there to be landed upon when his fists should have landed.

He panted, and wasted breath in cursing, also. Tom was leading him a pretty dance, and Tom's chums cheered their champion to the echo, while from some of the circus folk also came shouts of encouragement for the younger combatant. It almost seemed as though the circus in general did not quite love Blader!

Now the straight left did its deadly work again. It took Blader fairly under the jaw. Stocky as he was, it lifted him off his feet. He staggered backward, and fell all asprawl.

Tom Merry dropped his arms to his sides.

"I don't suppose you're licked," he said, "or that you'd be willing to own it if you were. But there doesn't seem any need to fight to a finish. So, if you are satisfied, I am."

"Will I stop now, an' not pay you for that, d'ye think?" howled Blader.

He jumped to his feet, his face purple with rage, and, with a foul oath, made in again at the St. Jim's junior, trying to grapple him.

Tom had all his work cut out to avoid being clinched. In fine condition though he was, he puffed a bit before that attempt was finally defeated.

But defeated it was at length. Blader ceased to strive for a hold, and came on again with fists going in windmill fashion.

Then once more the straight left—the straight left, with all the vigour and all the weight of an athlete's body behind it!

Down crashed Blader, and even Tom's own chums gasped in surprise. Not one grown man in fifty could have struck a shrewder blow than that.

"Hurrah! That's done him!"

"Bravo, Tom!"

"Oh, well played, St. Jim's!"

"Bwaw, indeed, Tom Mewwy! I could not have stuwck a bettah blow myself!"

"My hat, Gussy, when it comes to blowing——"

"Oh, dwy up, Lowthah, pway! Why, what's that abominable wascal——"

Blader had jumped to his feet, panting hard, his face fiendish with rage. He rushed at Tom Merry, and kicked with all his force.

Had the kick got home, it might well have broken Tom's leg. But it did not get home. A long, skinny leg, clothed in trousers frayed at the bottoms and very shabby otherwise, shot out, hooked the leg of the cowardly brute from under him, and sent him to earth with a resounding thwack.

It was the clown who had thus interposed. But the clown seemed to be a modest man, who had no desire to brag about his promptness of action. For next moment he stood with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets and his melancholy face void of any expression whatever, looking as though he was the least likely man there to have done anything on the spur of the moment—or, indeed, to have done anything at all.

Blader lay for a moment half-stunned, and no one offered a hand to help him up. No one appeared to be particularly concerned as to whether he ever got up.

But there must have been an old feud between him and the clown. For when he did rise, unsteadily and plainly shaken, to his feet, he made for the long, melancholy man at once.

"I'll kill you for that, Jolly Nicholas!" he hooted.

Jolly Nicholas appeared to have some slight objection to be killed at once. He dodged, and took shelter behind the pony-cart he had been driving.

Jack Blake and Herries clutched Blader; but he shook them both off, and Herries went sprawling in the road. He caught at Arthur Augustus in a vain attempt to preserve his own balance. All he managed was to bring Gussy to earth with him.

"Hang it, you silly idiot! Can't you stand up?" roared Herries.

"Yawooogh! Oh, you cwass ass, Hewwies! Just look at my clobbah!"

But nobody looked at Gussy's "clobbah." All eyes were turned upon the big brown bear.

He had tumbled all in a heap out of the pony-cart. Now he rose on his hind legs, with a low growl, and faced the attacker of his friend, Jolly Nicholas.

The bear's eyes were bloodshot and angry. Blader, evidently a trifle alarmed, backed a little. The bear came on.

Then the clown, fearful of what Bruin might do in his wrath, moved forward, and came within Blader's reach.

In his craving for revenge, the fellow forgot his own danger. He grabbed Nicholas by the arm.

Next moment he found himself locked fast in the embrace of the bear.

"Call the brute off, Nick! Call him off! He'll kill me!" he howled.

"Here, Butternut, Butternut, old pal, easy does it!"

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Nicholas coaxed; he did not order. It was plain that he knew his influence over the bear had its limits.

Butternut growled, and gave Blader a squeeze that made him howl.

"I say, I say, what's all this shemozzle?" demanded an authoritative voice.

A tall, weather-beaten, upstanding man of fifty or more, with moustache beginning to turn grey, strode up, flicking a whip.

Even the bear seemed to recognise him as one having command. The bear's grip on Blader relaxed, and the fellow, panting for breath, squirmed away.

## CHAPTER 5

### Frank Levison's Pluck.

"I SAY, Wally, these beggars are running away with us!"

It was Frank Levison who spoke, in some excitement, but by no means unduly alarmed.

"Think I don't know that, dotter?" replied Wally through clenched teeth.

"Give me 'old of the reins, Master Walter!" urged Binks.

"Rats!"

The bays might be running away, but Wally was not going to admit that they had mastered him. He braced his feet against the splashboard, and tugged with all his strength at the reins; and, youngster as he was, Wally of the Third was no weakling.

It seemed little short of a miracle that collision with one or another of the circus vehicles was avoided. Wally's chums were quite ready to believe that all the credit was due to his driving. Binks knew better. The bays, excited as they were, avoided by instinct the danger which threatened.

"Oh, hang! That puts the lid on it!"

A sudden swerve had dragged the reins of the off horse from Wally's hands.

The danger was increased tenfold. At any instant the horse might catch his legs, and the chances were that the stout leather would stand the strain just long enough to send the bay plunging forward, and bring about a complete smash.

All that Wally could do was to sit tight, grit his teeth, and hope for the best. Binks was equally powerless. He was too old and stiff for anything in the way of an acrobatic performance.

But there remained Levison minor, and before either the old man or the boy realised what he meant to do he was acting.

Round the splashboard he squirmed somehow. An extra jolt must have shaken him off and sent him crashing to the ground, for the wheels to pass over him; but he never seemed to think of that.

Now he was lying along the back of the near horse. The animal felt the weight, resented it, and plunged. But Frank clung on with knees and hands. Not his own safety alone, but the safety of all his chums, depended upon his sticking tight, and that knowledge nerved him.

He did not hurry. To hurry might have been fatal. But he lost no time, though to the anxious watchers his movements appeared terribly deliberate.

And now he had a hold on the loose reins. Carefully he drew them up, alert to avoid any chance of their tripping up the horse.

He shifted back a little, the reins in one hand.

"Catch, Wally!" he cried; and his voice did not shake a bit.

Nor did the hands of Wally of the Third shake. He caught the reins deftly.

The mouths of those behind were open to cheer, but they held back from shouting. The danger was not all over yet. Frank Levison had to regain his place.

Curly Gibson admitted afterwards that he shut his eyes, afraid to look. Joe Frayne would own to no more than a blink; but it must have been a wet blink, for it left tears running down little Joe's face. Jameson said that Reggie Manners, with mouth and eyes wide open, looked like a dying codfish; Manners minor retorted that a piece of chalk might have made a black mark on the cheeks of Jameson, so pale did he go.

But it was not of his own danger that any one of the four thought, and the fears they felt evidenced no cowardice.

Now they cheered with the full strength of their lungs, heedless of the effect upon the frightened horses, for Frank was safely back in his place.

"Shut up, you dotters!" cried Wally.

His voice was shaky now, but the young hands that gripped the reins were firm.

The road began to sweep upwards again. The pace of the

bays slackened just a trifle. They were getting a trifle fed-up with running away, it seemed.

"It will be all right in half a mo, Binky," said Wally cheerily.

"An' no thanks to me, Master Walter," answered the old man, with a touch of bitterness.

Poor old Binks had felt keenly his helplessness!

Wally did not answer that till he had the horses well in hand. Then he pulled them round, and set their faces backward again.

"If you try to make out it was any way your fault, Binky, I'll—I'll jolly well punch your silly old head!" he said fiercely.

"Hear, hear!" shouted those behind, in chorus. "We all know Binks wasn't to blame, and we'll jump on anyone who says he was!"

Binks seemed easier in mind after that.

"You're a giddy hero, Franky!" said D'Arcy minor, in tones of the most wholehearted admiration.

"Rather!" chimed in Manners minor.

"You can jolly well bet none of us is ever going to forget this, young Levison!" said Jameson.

"I never saw nothing pluckier," said Joe Frayne.

And if Curly Gibson failed to add anything to the chorus, it was only because the lump in his throat was too big. He leaned over and patted Frank on the back.

Levison minor did not mind that so much, but the outspoken praise made him feel very uncomfortable. He blushed until his face, already scarlet, was almost beetroot in colour.

In his mind, perhaps, was the thought, "I wish Ernie could have been here!" For through thick and thin, through good report and ill report—not that there was much in the way of good report where Ernest Levison was concerned—Frank clung loyally to his black sheep brother. He knew how glad Ernest Levison would have been to see him making good among the fags in this way, but he did not realise that his brother, was far too clever not to be well aware that he had already found his feet in the Third. And, with all his faults, Levison major had heart enough to rejoice at that.

"What are we going back for, Wally?" he asked.

"Oh, only to see if that old donkey of a Willis has slaughtered my major and the rest of the old fogies!" replied Wally. "They ought to have been along before now!"

Wally was really more than a little bit anxious; but it was not Wally's way to let his feelings be seen too plainly.

All they could see as they ascended the hill was that the circus procession had come to a dead halt, and that seemed rather ominous. What was taking place was hidden from them by the crest.

"Where's the whip?" asked Wally.

"Ere, I say, old man, the 'osses don't want no more whip," protested Joe Frayne. "Bein' run away with once in a day is quite enough for me, an' if you want more you're a greedy pig!"

"The beggars ain't going half fast enough!" grumbled Wally.

But he could not use the whip, for it had been dropped; and, on the whole, it was certainly just as well he could not. The bays, though their chests were flecked with foam, had still plenty of spirit and energy left in them, and the pace at which they were now moving uphill would have satisfied most drivers.

They reached the top of the hill just in time to see Blader wriggle out of the bear's grip.

"Guess we've been missing something," said Manners minor.

"Guess I've had all I want in the way of excitement!" said Jameson frankly.

Wally pulled up the bays with a flourish, threw the reins to Binks, and jumped down.

"Hallo, kids!" he said loftily. "It's just your style to be getting into some silly mess when you haven't your uncle here to look after you!"

## CHAPTER 6.

### Gussy Bespeaks a Performance.

"HERE, Blader, come you back!" roared the proprietor of the circus.

For the tall man who had just come up was Mr. Horace Horsman, and every vehicle in the procession was marked in big red letters.

"Horsman's Hippodrome and Circus."

Blader hesitated a moment, but seemed to conclude that the invitation was too like that to the duck to come and be killed to be worth obeying. So he slunk further off.

"Now, Nick, what's it all about?" demanded Mr. Horsman.

"You'll have to be more careful with that bear of yours,

you know, or he'll be doing some damage. He ain't precisely what I should call a ladylike hugger."

"Really, gov'nor, I thought he was your bear," objected the long clown, looking more melancholy than ever. "Of course, he's a very pertikler friend of mine—I don't mind ownin' that much. But if he should happen, in the warmth of his heart, to squeeze anybody a little too hard an' stop his breath for good an' all—well, you know, it's you what's got to answer for it, not me."

"I'll have the beast shot!" snapped Mr. Horsman.

"Then you'll have to get another clown, an' that's all about it!" said Jolly Nicholas. "Better 'ave Blader shot. He'd be no loss. My old Butternut is worth a round dozen of sweeps like him!"

"Well, I won't shoot Butternut till I'm ready to do without you, Nick, and that ain't likely to be yet awhile," said Horsman, with a grim smile. "Speak up and tell your tale."

"Oh, there ain't much to it!" the clown said. He was plainly no sneak.

"Much or little, I mean to hear it!"

"Don't you come your emperor tone with me, gov'nor!" said Jolly Nicholas. "Boy an' man, I've known you these forty years—ah, an' give you more than one good clout of the napper when bein' four years older than you was—four years on the right side for me!"

"Did you ever see such an aggravating old stick-in-the-mud, young gentlemen?" said Horsman, appealing to the St. Jim's juniors. "Will you tell me what the trouble was?"

"Tellin' tales is not vevy much in ouah line, sir," said Arthur Augustus politely. "But I think you have a right to know something of what twanspiahed. That fellah Bladah was tweating youah elephant, which seems a most wemarkably docile an' intelligent animal, with great cwelty. My friend Tom Mewwy, heah, objected, an' they fought. I have no doubt that the bwute Bladah anticipated an easy victory; but he was taken in. Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Tom hastily. "There wasn't much in it, sir. I've learned to box, and your man Blader hasn't—that's all. He'd have knocked me into a cocked hat if he'd known the game half as well as I do."

"But that isn't all," put in Jack Blake indignantly. "I hate sneaking; but everyone here knows that Blader tried to kick our man, and might have broken his leg if it hadn't been for—for—er—Mr. Nicholas here."

"What did you do, Nick?" asked Horsman.

"Nothin' much, gov'nor. My leg seemed to shoot out unbeknown to me, an' Blader kind of tumbled over it—that's all. Then he came for me, an' then my friend Butternut took a hand."

Mr. Horsman rubbed a somewhat stubbly chin, as if in deep thought, for quite half a minute before replying.

Then he said quietly:

"You did the right thing, Nick, old dear—but then, you mostly do. As for you, young gent, I admire your pluck. Blader's got no science, as you say; but you couldn't know that till you'd tried, and it wanted some courage for a lad like you to stand up to him. He's far an' away the strongest man I've got. But then, we're very nearly all old crocks now, like Nick and me. All the young 'uns have found a better job in the Army."

Mr. Horsman did not say that he, also, would have been in the Army had he been young enough, but somehow every one of the juniors felt very sure of that. The circus proprietor and his old friend Jolly Nicholas struck them as the right sort through and through.

"Put it there, young sir!" said Horsman, holding out a big hand. And Tom Merry put it there, after which all the rest shook hands with the circus proprietor.

Friendly relations having been thus established, Arthur Augustus proceeded to ask some of the many questions that had occurred to him.

He was so interested in the circus that he ignored altogether his minor and the crime of which Wally had been guilty. As this suited Wally's book very well indeed, that young man refrained from drawing attention to himself for the present. There would be plenty of time later on to tell about the pluck of Levison minor. Wally, also, had shown pluck; but he had no desire to talk about that.

Wally and his chums were, if possible, even more interested in the circus than their seniors. So they crowded round to listen to Gussy and Mr. Horsman. Binks and Willis drew their horses aside, and the circus procession began to move forward again.

Jolly Nicholas and his friend Butternut scrambled into the pony-cart, and the clown gravely saluted the boys before driving on.

"Isn't it wathah late, bai Jove, foah a circus to be woamin' the countway, sir?" asked Gussy politely.

"That's so. We generally go into winter quarters a bit before this. But the weather's kept open, an' the money was comin' in, an' I don't mind ownin' that it was welcome, for

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we all had the very dickens of a bad time earlier on, when everybody reckoned the war was goin' to be the ruin of them."

"I see," said Gussy gravely. "Yaas, I see quite cleahly. But didn't conscription make a tewwible lot of diffewence to you?"

"I should say so, sir! For a bit I didn't know how to make out. All the younger men took—an' it's no secret to say that a man who's too old for the Army ain't exactly the chap for trapeze work, or ridin' a pair of bareback horses. Gets stiff, like, you see. For the tightrope it don't matter so much. I can still do the tightrope act myself if it comes to a pinch, an' I'm fifty-one. So we've cut out some of the equestrian business, and we've put in a good deal more clowning. That's the beauty of havin' a real first-rate clown like Jolly Nicholas. Him and the bear pretty near make a show by themselves."

"He seems a good sort," remarked Digby.

"One of the best, sir."

"Aren't you going to give a performance at Easthorpe?" asked Tom Merry.

Mr. Horsman shook his head.

"We did intend to," he said. "You'll find our bills up in the village. It was to have been our last appearance of the season. But there was some hitch. We couldn't pitch on the common, they told me, when I got there. I tried to see Lord Eastwood about it—"

"I'm quite suah the patah would have put it wight foah you if you had seen him," interrupted Gussy. "Excuse my wudeness in bweakin' in on you; but it weally is such a pitay you did not see the patah!"

"That's right," said Wally. "The old chap's got some sense. He'd have squared the thing if—"

"Weally, Wally, I am surprisid that you should wefer to ouah respected governah as—"

"Well, he is an old chap, ain't he, Gus, you ass?"

"Then you two young gents are Lord Eastwood's sons? Best respects, I'm sure!" said Mr. Horsman. "I've heard a lot about Lord Eastwood, an' nothing but good. He's one of the true Old English nobility, not one of these jumped-up titled johnnies that come out of nothing, an' smell strong of the money that got them their new names."

Gussy flushed with pleasure. These sentiments, though Mr. Horsman might be a trifle crude in his expression of them, were Gussy's own.

"Oh, never mind about the different kinds of lords," said Wally, who did not share his brother's pride of birth to any marked extent. "They don't matter a scrap. Question is about the giddy performance. The pater was called away in a hurry, or he'd have put it right for you in half a jiff. As he ain't here, I and my brother—"

"You take too much upon youahself, Wally. This mattah does not concern you in any way whatevah. I will settle it with Mistah Horsman."

"Oh, will you, though? Rats to you, Gus! I'm just as much in it as you are, and—"

"Dry up, Wally!" whispered Jameson. "You'll only get your major pulling the other way out of contrariness, you know. As long as we get a giddy performance, what's the odds about letting him take the giddy credit? If he don't get the chance of peacocking about that, he'll be peacocking about something else. That's Gussy's way."

Wally paid heed to the voice of Jameson. In many ways Wally of the Third was far shrewder than his major.

"I am quite suah I can settle it at Easthorpe," said Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Horsman still seemed doubtful.

"To tell you the truth, my lord," he said, "I'm above a bit fed up with that fat constable there. He's a longish way off being as-civil as he might be. He talked about the common bein' wanted for some military purpose."

"Oh, bai Jove! If that's the case, I couldn't do anything. Even the patah couldn't do anything. You will agree, Mistah Horsman, that ewverything must give way to military considewation in these days."

"That's so, sir—my lord, I should say."

"Pardon me, but you shouldn't," said Gussy. "I have no title, you know. My bwothah Conway is the heir."

"Excuse the mistake, sir. What I was going to say about the common was that we should have come an' gone before the soldiers had any need of it. But the bobby wouldn't listen to me. So I gave up the idea. After all, it's no great odds."

Whether a performance by the circus should be given in the Easthorpe neighbourhood might be no great odds to Mr. Horsman, who, naturally, looked at the matter from a cash point of view. It was hardly likely that such a performance in a country district on a December day—even with the weather so unusually mild for the season as it was—would bring in a great deal of money.

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But it seemed a far more important matter to the St. Jim's juniors. They were quite expecting a good time at Eastwood House; but the absence of Cousin Ethel and the other guests who were to have been there for Christmas would tend to throw them very much on their own resources, and a circus performance appealed to them as a very agreeable diversion.

"Bring him up to the scratch some way or another, Gustavus," said Jack Blake, in a rather loud aside to his chum.

"Let me think a moment. The mattah onlay wequiah a little bwain power, Blake," replied Arthur Augustus.

"Then it's just the sort of 'mattah' for Gussy, especially if it's a very little brain power indeed that's needed," said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, dry up, old ass!" growled Manners. "We don't want your funniesities just now. Keep 'em for the next number of the 'Weekly.' They don't worry anyone there, because everybody skips your column."

"I have it!" cried Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

"Stick a giddy pin through it, then!" said Herries.

"Look heah, Mistah Horsman, what's the mattah with campin' on this common, an' havin' the performance heah?"

The circus proprietor looked round him doubtfully.

"It's rather high," he said, "and a bit bleak. There's no sort of shelter from any storm that may beat up. And the only bit that's level enough for our purpose is right bang on top, which would be a pretty bad place if a storm did happen along."

"But theah's weally no sign whatevah of a storm!" argued the swell of St. Jim's.

"Not the ghost of a vestige of a sign," chimed in Digby.

And indeed the weather looked as like set-fair as well could be.

"There's another thing," said Horsman, half ready to be talked over. "Have I the right to camp on this common?"

"Don't worry about that in the vewy least, deah boy," said Gussy impressively. "It is part of the Eastwood manor, an' in the patah's absence my permish is all that you wequiah."

"Except mine, Gus," chipped in Wally. "But that's all right. I'm not going to raise objections when you're talking sense for once in your life."

Arthur Augustus tried hard to frown his minor down. The attempt was not a success. No one ever yet had managed to frown Wally down.

"Well, sir, I might chance it, as far as the weather goes. But there's the question whether I can expect a decent house. This is a bit out of the way, you know, compared with Easthorpe Common."

"That's all sewene, Mistah Horsman. I will make up youah takings to what you would weceive fwom a performance on the othah common."

Some of Gussy's chums felt inclined to gasp. This was bold, indeed, for the circus proprietor might easily name a heavy sum, and how were they to check the accuracy of any statement he cared to make?

But Gussy was always casual about money matters. What they would consider a big sum would not strike him as being so. And Horsman did not seem at all the sort of man to take advantage of his guilelessness, though other people had often done so.

"That would be makin' something very like a bespeak performance of it," said Horsman thoughtfully.

"Yaas. Foah the mattah of that, I do not gweatly mind if it is considahed as such, an' you hand me the bill to be footed ahtawards."

Tom Merry nudged Gussy. This seemed to Tom going a trifle too far. In fact, Tom, though as keen as the rest, had some doubt about the whole affair under these conditions. He was not sure that Lord Eastwood would approve.

"No, sir," said Horsman, to his relief. "I'll arrange the performance, as you're so set on it; but unless there's a dead loss, I won't ask you for a bob. As for throwin' the place open free of charge, that's only encouragin' spongers, an' I've no use for them."

"Vewy well, deah boy—er—Mistah Horsman, I should say. When will the performance take place, may I ask?"

"To-morrow afternoon. No good thinking of an evening

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show up here. I should say. I'll see about gettin' fresh bills out, an' I'd better fetch our crew back here at once. So ta-ta for the present, young sirs!"

## CHAPTER 7.

## Bringing Wally to Book.

**C**HILLINGHAM, the stately butler at Eastwood House, allowed his grave and dignified face to relax into a smile as the St. Jim's juniors trooped into the wide hall. He knew most of them well.

"Hallo, Chilly!" cried Arthur Augustus. "Any news from youah boy at the Fwont?"

The smile faded. The old eyes glistened with tears.

"Yes, sir, and not of the best," answered the butler. "I have had a telegram since his lordship left. William is in hospital at Brighton, very seriously wounded."

"Oh, bai Jove, Chilly, you must go to him at once, you know!"

"But, sir—Master Arthur—"

"Isn't that what the patah would say?"

"Yes, sir. But in his absence—"

"That's quite all right, Chilly, deah boy! Natchuwally, I wewepent the patah while he is away, an' I tell you that you've simplay got to go! Youah son William has been fightin' an' bleedin' foah his countway, bai Jove, an' now that he needs you he's goin' to have you! What do you say, deah boys—eh?"

There was a general murmur of assent, while the juniors stood round and wished that they could say something to comfort the butler, down whose cheeks the tears were running openly now. He was a widower, with only this one son, and unless he went the lad might die without anyone of his own kin to bid him farewell. Chillingham's sense of duty was keen. He had looked forward with some little apprehension to what might happen at Eastwood House with no one more responsible than the Hon. Arthur Augustus at the head of affairs, and no doubt he had made up his mind to do everything possible to restrain Gussy from any act of special wildness.

But, after all, the most he could do would have been little. He was both liked and respected, but his position was not such as to lend him very real authority. He could only protest. And what availed protests when Arthur Augustus or Wally of the Third was on the rampage?

And across the miles of downland between Eastwood House and the big seaside place where the hospital blue had become the predominant hue in the street and on the miles of front, he seemed to hear the voice of his son calling to him.

He wiped the tears from his cheeks.

"I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing, sir," he said, with a sort of proud humility. "But I don't know how to say 'No,' and I will prepare at once for the journey."

"Don't wowwy, Chillingham. You cannot possibly do w'ong by goin'. The patah would say the same, an' you know it. He weally ought to go, oughtn't he, deah boys?"

"Oh, rather!" came the chorus. Tom Merry joined in it. Certainly Chillingham ought to go. But Tom realised, if no one else did, that his going meant the loss of a restraining influence; and, fully determined as he was to keep his promise to Lord Eastwood, Tom saw that this new development might make it harder to keep.

"Thank you, gentlemen all. I assure you that your sympathy and kindness is valued," said Chillingham, a trifle stiffly, but with real feeling.

He went to pack. Said Wally to Jameson:

"I'm beastly sorry about William; he's no end of a decent chap. And I don't mind old Chilly a bit. But it's a giddy fact that it will be a good bit easier to make the old fogies sit up with him away. There won't be anybody at all to interfere with us now!"

"Oh, good egg!" said Jameson, no more meaning to be unfeeling than Wally, but with the same keen appreciation of any circumstance which added to the chances of the fags scoring over their older schoolfellows.

Arthur Augustus turned to Wally with a very serious face. "Now, Wally," he said, "I demand a vewy explicit apology to myself an' my fiwends foah youah gwoss conduct on the woad from the station!"

"Think you'll get it, too, don't you?" grinned Wally. "Rats, Gus!"

"Wats, Wally, is no argument!"

"Who said it was, ass? I don't want to argue with you!"

"Nor do I desiah to argue with you, Wally. But—"

"That's what the goat did. Never mind about butting, Gus. Just look after your own bizney, and we'll attend to ours. That's fair, ain't it, you fellows?"

The fags agreed as with one voice.

"That's fair, ain't it, Tom Merry? You're not quite such

a donkey as my brother, and I guess you can see reason, if you try hard."

Tom smiled.

"Thanks, Wally!" he said drily. "I'll do my best to live up to your good opinion. But, though I don't want an apology, as far as I am concerned, I think Gussy's right about the racing notion. It was a mad dodge!"

"Rot! It would have been all right if Gus had only behaved like a sport."

"Do you call that silly peashooting bizney sporting?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, of course not, when it's us!" retorted Wally bitterly. "Makes such a heap of difference who does it, you know."

"They've never done such a thing; they'd scorn to," put in Curly Gibson.

"Old fogies like them don't know what fun is," said Manners minor.

The argument was a fair one. Peashooters as weapons were by no means unknown to the Shell and the Fourth.

"Anyway, you young idiots must own that you came jolly near making a giddy smash-up," said Jack Blake.

"It wouldn't have been a scrap more our fault than yours if there had been one," objected Wally.

"You let the bays wun away 'with you, Wally," said Arthur Augustus gravely. "Suppose some of youah chuins had been killed? It was quite 'em, you know."

"If they ran away, I pulled 'em up, and drove 'em back, too, didn't I?" howled Wally. "It's more than you could have done, Gus, for all your silly swank! And there isn't a single chap among you old fogies—"

"You're wrong, Wally. There are seven single chaps among us—unless Gussy's contracted matrimony on the sly, when we weren't looking," chipped in Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, hang all that cheap rot! I'm serious—"

"Take something for it, kid. It won't do to let it go too far," said the irrepressible joker.

"Ring off, you ass!"

"Wally, I pwotest stwongly against the use of such oppwobwious terms to ouah guests!"

"Oh, do dry up, Gus! You make me ill. If Lowther is an ass at St. Jim's—and everyone jolly well knows he is—he don't stop being an ass when he gets here, does he?"

"Not necessawily, Wally. But this is not the place in which it is fit an' pwopah foah you to call him an ass."

"Any old place is good enough to tell the truth in, I reckon," said Wally flippantly. "But you idiots do keep interrupting so! As I was—"

"I thought you were remarking that we were all married men. As it seemed to me that you were under a distinct misapprehension as to the facts, I endeavoured to set you right. That's all," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"My hat! You are a first-class idiot!" howled Wally.

"Hear, hear!" cried the fags in unison.

"Well, what is it you want to tell us, anyway, kid?" asked Herries. "I should think it will keep till we've had a wash and brush-up."

"Kid yourself!" roared Wally. "You'd never have done what Franky here did! There ain't enough know-how in you, even if you've got the pluck."

"Oh, ring off! Do ring off, Wally!" said Levison minor, blushing furiously.

"Sha'n't! It's a jolly big score for the Third, and I mean to let these chaps know about it."

"What was it, Wally?" asked Tom Merry, who saw that there really was something of importance behind all this.

"I dropped the reins of one horse—at least, I didn't exactly drop them—they were jerked out of my hands," Wally explained—"and Franky got out—"

"Oh, do ring—"

But Joe Frayne and Curly Gibson stopped the mouth of Levison minor by forcible methods, and Wally went on breathlessly with his story.

"He got out on the other horse's back, and picked them up. I tell you, it wanted nerve! If he'd been shaken off—"

Wally D'Arcy was not given to sentiment; but his clear, young voice shook as he told of his chum's peril. Perhaps he visioned it more clearly than than he had done at the time.

"I say!" cried Manners major. "That was no end plucky! Shake hands, kid!"

"My hat, it was that!" chimed in Digby.

"You're the right sort, young 'un," said Jack Blake.

"But what in the world could we have said to Levison if his minah had been killed through youah sillay fault, Wally?" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay.

Levison minor drew himself up. He did not like that speech. It made him feel that the rest still considered his brother a rank outsider; and that same feeling had gone near to causing him to refuse Wally's invitation. The D'Arcys

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would not have dreamed of asking Ernest Levison to Eastwood House. But Ernest himself had urged him to go.

"Ernie would have understood," the youngster said, with trembling lips. "He's as plucky as anyone else. And there wasn't so very much danger, anyway. It isn't worth talking about."

But he had to shake hands with them all. And they liked him the better for his genuine modesty.

Arthur Augustus quite forgot the rest of the reproach he had meant to administer to Wally. It mattered the less inasmuch as reproving Wally was very like pouring water on the back of a duck.

The party trooped upstairs, all save Herries, who went out to see that his cherished Towser had been comfortably installed in the stable regions.

Towser had comfortable enough quarters. But Herries and Towser were both not quite satisfied.

"Tain't much like Christmas to leave you out here, old man, is it?" murmured Herries, caressing the bulldog's great head. "Oh, come along in with me if you want to! I'll make it right with old Gussy."

Herries was not without a kind of uneasiness, for he knew that Towser would have been left in his kennel had Lord Eastwood been at home; even if the dignified Chillingham had been on the spot to look disapprobation. But Herries comforted himself with the reflection that, after all, things were very different, as they had the house practically to themselves, except for the servants.

Towser followed him in and up the broad staircase.

Arthur Augustus was changing his trousers in the big bed-room which he was to share with Blake, Herries, and Digby. Towser sidled up unseen by Gussy. The first sign of the dog's presence that the swell of the Fourth had was the pressure of a cold, damp nose against his left leg.

"Ow—yow!" he howled. "Take the feahful bwute away, Hewwies! Why isn't he in the kennels?"

"Oh, don't be a funk, Gustavus!"

"Withdraw that remark at once, Hewwies, or— Oh, bai Jove, deah boy, I foahgot that you are my guest! But weally it isn't pweicely the thing to call a fellah a funk, you know."

"I didn't mean it, old scout. But, if you come to that, Towser's a guest as well."

"Yaas, deah boy, but—"

"Towser ain't a goat. He won't butt," said Digby, pulling the dog's ear gently.

"Oh, go easay, Dig! He might bite, you know! He may not approve of libaties."

Digby rolled the stolid Towser over and smacked his deep chest.

"He's as harmless as a giddy lamb," he said.

"And as well behaved as—as you are, Gustavus! There, I can't say more than that," said Herries.

The compliment tickled Gussy's self-esteem.

"Vewy well," he answered graciously. "If you so stwongly wish to have him in the house, Hewwies, deah boy, I withdraw my pwest. Aftah all—"

Towser was licking Gussy's hand now, as though he understood, as very likely he did. And that tickled Gussy's vanity, too, though he would not readily have admitted it, perhaps.

Herries threw off coat and waistcoat, and plunged his face into a basin of warm water. Towser trotted off to look for Pongo. He was on the best of terms with that nondescript specimen of the canine race.

## CHAPTER 8. Round the Hearth.

**D**INNER was over; a good thing well done, as Monty Lowther observed.

Chillingham had gone, after every one of them had shaken him by the hand, and, in words that were none the less sincere because in some case they might be a bit stumbling, expressed a hope that he would find his son getting on well.

Now the whole crowd sat around the great, open hearth in the wide hall, with a big screen behind them to keep off draughts, and talked. Wally & Co., who had chestnuts roasting, had made terms of truce for the time being. It is true that the terms of truce had not been openly proposed to the older fellows; but that, as Wally remarked, mattered the less since their seniors did not seem to have sense enough to perceive that a state of war existed.

Towser lay curled up at the feet of Herries, and Pongo had his shaggy head on Towser's heaving flank.

They had discussed the circus and the fellow Blader, as to whom the general opinion was that the Army was his proper place—"With the right sort of sergeant—for Blader," said Lowther. "Which, of course, would be the wrong sort for any decent chap."

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Mr. Horsman they all voted one of the best, and there was no difference of opinion as to the ranking of Jolly Nicholas as another of them.

"I say, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "don't you think it would be a jolly good ideah to twot down to the village in the mornin' an' give the young scubws theah a bob each so that they can all go to the circus, an' Horsman will be suah of a good house?"

"Jolly good, Gustavus—I don't think!" grinned Blake. "Who's to be sure that they'll use the money to go to the circus?"

"Oh, bai Jove, we could wisk that, I suppose!"

"I'm not so beastly keen on your tame kids in the village, Gussy," growled Blake. "Member how the little sweeps pelted us that day when we played Anarchists to take that fat rotter Bunter in, Tommy?"

The Terrible Three remembered very well indeed. That jape had scarcely been the colossal success anticipated. Herries, Digby, and Gussy, who had not made up in disguise to frighten Bunter, grinned. Wally & Co. also grinned—they did it aloud.

"Talkin' about Buntah," began the swell of St. Jim's.

"Don't! Let's talk about anything else rather than that awful object," said Lowther.

"Except Trimble," put in Jack Blake. "Sizing them up fairly, I should say Trimble's twice as bad as Bunter, and only about half as amusing!"

"Oh, weally, deah boy! Twimble's St. Jim's, you know, aftah all!"

"Can't help that. So is Crooke, so is Lev—"

Blake pulled himself up short. He felt like biting his tongue out for his folly.

He had not stopped in time, of course. Frank Levison had heard. His face went white, and his hands clutched the arms of the big chair in which he sat, with the curly head of little Gibson against his knees. But he did not move, and he did not speak.

What could he say, indeed? It was true that Ernest had never been any credit to St. Jim's. Perhaps he never would be, though Frank had hopes.

But Blake's speech seemed to the youngster a cruel one. It seemed so to Blake himself. He was quite honestly ashamed, though he had spoken absolutely without malice. He saw Tom Merry's frown and Gussy's glare and Wally's furious face.

He might have let it pass. Perhaps that would have been the better way. But it was not Jack Blake's way.

He got up and crossed over to Frank.

"Beastly sorry, Frank!" he said. "I oughtn't to have said that!"

His hand was held out. Frank Levison hesitated some seconds before he put his own small, brown paw in it, and when he did there was no grip on his side.

Constraint fell upon the gathering. But in a few minutes they were talking again. Frank Levison said little, however. He was wishing now that he had not come.

All of these fellows liked him, he knew. And he liked them all—Blake not least. It was easy to like breezy, generous Jack Blake.

But they did not like Ernie. The knowledge that they disliked and despised his brother was like gall to the warm-hearted, loyal fag.

"Ghosts? My hat, yes!" said Wally. "The old show's fairly crawling with them!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, ring off, Gus! You'd be jolly well up on the stilts in a jiffy if anybody said we hadn't any ghosts here, and you jolly well know it!"

"Yaas, deah boy; but to say that the place cawls with them—the expression is so widdy, you know!"

"Not half so ridic. as your silly old sheep's face!" replied the candid Wally.

"Of course, theah are ghosts!" said Arthur Augustus, in tones of impressive awe. "No respectable old family mansion would be complete without a spectah or two!"

"My hat, give me Peckham or Tottenham, then!" said Monty Lowther. "I dare say you could be decently respectable there without a blessed spook to your name. Sell 'em off to some of the rich Yanks who buy family portraits, Gussy, old scout, and invest the giddy proceeds in War Loan. That's as respectable as any old ghost, any day. Everybody's doing it, you know."

"Doing what? The Yanks in search of a pedigree?" grinned Tom Merry.

"No, ass! Buying War Loan."

"Oh, turn it off at the meter, Monty!" groaned Manners. "You're painful when you think you're funny!"

"And you're funny when you think you're painful—after old Linton's been operating upon you in his best style!" retorted Lowther.



The juniors sat around the great open hearth in the wide hall, with a big screen behind them to keep off draughts, and talked. Towser lay curled up at the feet of Herries, and Pongo had his shaggy head on Towser's heaving flank. (See Chapter 8.)

"Anybody who talks about canings ought to be bumped," said Manners minor.

"And what ought to be done to anybody who talks about Selby?" asked his brother, with a wink at Blake which passed unnoticed. For Blake's eyes were upon Frank Levison, as he sat silent in the flickering light of the fire. And the eyes of Jack Blake were unusually wistful.

"Ugh!" grunted Jameson, wriggling his shoulders. Wally & Co. were not precisely loved by Mr. Selby, the sour master of the Third.

"There ain't any Selby just now," said Wally calmly.

"There couldn't be—not at Christmas time," chimed in Joe Frayne.

"Cos if there was Selby it wouldn't really be Christmas at all," said Curly Gibson lazily.

Only Frank Levison said nothing. He was not thinking about his stern Form-master, but about that wayward brother of his. What would Ernie be doing now? Frank felt almost like a traitor for not being at home with him.

"I'll tell you a tale or two about the spooks," volunteered Wally.

"Mind they are true ones then, Wally," his major said warningly.

"Rats to you, Gus! Who minds whether spook yarns are true or not?"

Certainly, Wally of the Third didn't, if one judged by the stories he told. His ghosts were even sillier creatures than

those which the spiritualist who has got hold of a credulous victim professes to raise, and that is saying a good deal. The rest let Wally have his head for a little while; but then Lowther, putting aside jokes for a time, chipped in with a really impressive ghost yarn. Lowther could tell a story well, and before he had finished Curly Gibson was snuggling up closer to the knees of Levison minor, and Joe Frayne would not have looked over his shoulder for a five-pound note, and Jameson seemed to find it comforting to grip Towser hard. Some of the older juniors were not quite free from nervousness, either, though, of course, they would not have admitted it for anything.

"Think there's anything in it, Wally?" asked Manners minor later on, when cocoa and biscuits were being dealt with just before bedtime.

"In what, old man?"

"All these old ghost yarns. Oh, I know yours were only rot! You made 'em up as you went along, and you made 'em up pretty jolly badly, too. I could have wangled better ones myself."

"Righto, Reggie! You can have your turn to-morrow night, and if you can make the old fogies' hair stand on end I'll give you a putty medal."

"Lowther's was a bit creepy," said Manners minor. He and Wally had found a corner out of earshot of the rest.

"Did it give you a grue?" asked Wally, grinning.

"No, of course not! At least—well, not much. But Jimmy

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and Curly and Joe were all a bit nery. Not Franky—I don't think he really listened."

Wally frowned.

"Poor old Franky! The kid's jolly sensitive, you know. Blake might have kept off that rotten brother of his."

"So he might. But Blake didn't mean any harm. It just slipped out."

"He shouldn't have let it. I'm not going to have Frank's Christmas spoiled by a chap like Blake, hang him!"

Manners minor opened his eyes widely.

"I thought you liked Blake, Wally. I do—no end. I'm not sure that he isn't the best chap of the lot, except your brother and Tom Merry, perhaps."

"Tom Merry is all right, and there isn't a better chap breathing than old Gus, though I wouldn't let him know I thought so for anything! It wouldn't be good for discipline, you know," said Wally of the Third.

Reggie Manners grinned. Wally's attitude towards his elder brother was calculated to tickle anyone with a sense of humour.

"Gussy would give his head away if he could unscrew it," he said. "I never knew a more generous chap."

"Nothing particularly generous about giving that turnip away," growled Wally. "The thing's got nothing in it. But we were talking about Blake."

"Well, what about him?"

"I've thought of a scheme to get even with him, that's all."

"What for?"

"Why, for what he said to Franky, ass!"

"But he didn't say it that way at all. It just slipped out."

"Perhaps you know better than I do, young Manners!"

"I should think it's jolly likely, D'Arcy minor!"

For a moment they sat and glared at one another, on the verge of a quarrel.

Then Wally said:

"Oh, hang it, don't let's squabble! I was going to take you into this because you've got more nerve than any of the rest except Franky, and I'm not so jolly sure he'd come in."

Manners minor was mollified by the compliment. Wally did not often bestow such favours.

"My hat, I'm on!" he said. "Against any of the old fogies, for the matter of that. I reckon it's our duty to score off them, just to let 'em see they're not the only pebbles on the beach!"

"See here, Reggie, old scout, didn't you think Blake looked a bit queer while Lowther was telling that yarn?"

"Can't say I noticed it. Come to that, I didn't think he paid much attention."

"You bet, he did! Useful sort of thing, eyes are, ain't they? When a chap knows how to use 'em, that is."

"Do you mean I don't know how to use mine, ass?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Rats!"

"Wats' is no argument, Weggie," said Wally, mimicking his brother's lisp to the life, and making Manners minor laugh in spite of his inclination to feel wrathful.

"Well, what did you see with those extra-power eyes of yours, kid?" Reggie inquired.

"I watched the old fogies. You can count Tom Merry out. He didn't turn a hair. And, of course, Lowther knew it was jolly well all spoof, though I wouldn't be sure he couldn't be made to shiver by somebody else's yarns."

"Depends upon how it was told. Lowther does tell 'em jolly well, you know."

"My aunt, yes! That sort of thing's his giddy line. Your major was a bit thrilly, but not really funk'd. I believe he was thinking whether he could snapshot a ghost with his camera if he saw one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You kids seem to have something funny on," said Tom Merry, looking round at them.

"Yes. But it's not so funny as old Gus' face. And anyway, it's private," replied Wally.

"Time for bed," said Manners major.

"Rats to you!" retorted Wally. "My lot are going when I choose."

"Weally, you take too much upon youahself, Wallay—"

"Oh, shut up, Gus! You can toddle off when you like. I'm not stopping you."

Arthur Augustus let the argument drop. There was no hurry, anyway.

"My major sat with his silly old mouth open like a giddy codfish. He believed every blessed word of it. And Dig and old Herries felt queer, too. But Blake showed it more than anyone."

"It ain't much good arguing with you, Wally. You're one of those chaps who know it all, and a bit over. But I fancy you're wrong. Of course, we can't prove it; but my notion is that Blake isn't any more likely to be funk'd than Tom Merry, and that's saying a heap."

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"Can't we prove it, though? That's just what I mean to do, young Manners."

"Don't see how."

"You will when I tell you."

The rest of the conversation took place in whispers. Gradually a grin began to overspread the face of Manners minor. Whatever the scheme might be, it seemed to meet with his approval.

## CHAPTER 9.

### An Alarm in the Night.

IN the big blue room, each in his bed, the four chums of the Fourth Form slept the sleep of the just. Blake's bed was nearest the outer door, Gussy was next to him, then Herries, and Dig occupied the bed near the door, which opened into the room tenanted by the Terrible

Three.

Somewhere down in the lower part of the great house a clock chimed melodiously. One—two—three—four— Frank Levison, who was lying awake in a room farther along the broad corridor, counted the chimes up to twelve.

Midnight! The earliest hour of all the twenty-four!

Frank was not a superstitious youngster, and he had only given half his attention to Monty Lowther's ghost yarn. In fact, he had not been conscious of listening at all at the time. But now fragments of it came back to him, and he shivered, and wondered whether there were such things as ghosts.

Jameson and Curly Gibson, who shared the room with him, slept soundly. Frank rather wished one or the other had shared his wakefulness. But he would not wake either up.

Suddenly Frank sat up in bed.

He heard sounds—mysterious sounds.

Whence they came he could not tell. In a strange house and in the darkness it is not easy to judge of such things.

There was a door communicating with the room in which Wally, Joe Frayne, and Manners minor were close to his bed. But when that door opened very slowly and noiselessly, and something appeared, Frank quite forgot that it was not the outer door.

For a moment he held his breath, choking down with an effort the scream that rose to his lips.

Through the door had passed, just by his bedside, a white-sheeted figure, dimly visible in a phosphorescent glow that came from above the sheeted part.

Then black darkness and total oblivion descended upon Frank Levison. He had pluck beyond the ordinary, but he had been through a good deal that day, and this was the last straw. He had fainted.

"Jimmy!" spoke Wally D'Arcy's voice.

No answer. Jameson slept soundly.

"Curly!"

No answer again. Gibson was fast locked in the arms of Morpheus.

"Franky!"

Still no answer. But that was not because Levison minor was in like case with his chums.

"Just as well they're asleep," said Wally to the two behind him. "Frank might have kicked at the scheme, and Curly would have been nervous. I dare say Jimmy will be on his ear about being left out, but that's no great odds."

"Don't mess about 'ere, Wally, you ass!" whispered Joe Frayne. "You might wake them up."

"They'll be awake in a minute or two—when the old fogies begin to squeal," replied Wally, grinning diabolically through the phosphorus paint which covered the mask he wore. "Got the rope, you two?"

"What do you think?" growled Reggie Manners.

"See here, it's no good fixing that up at the outer door. You won't catch those chaps running after a ghost."

"Where shall we fix it, then?" asked Manners minor.

"In the doorway to the other room, of course, fathead! They'll do a bolt there for Uncle Tommy to take care of them."

"You seem to reckon you know everything about it, Wally," said Joe Frayne.

"Of course I do! It's my idea, ain't it? Kim on!"

The trio passed out. Frank Levison lay still, his head against the bars of the bedstead.

Wally opened the door of the room in which Blake & Co. were sleeping.

But they were not all sleeping now. Jack Blake had awakened. He was just turning in bed when he heard ever so slight a noise.

Like Brer Rabbit, Blake lay low. He had no definite suspicion of a plot, but nothing Wally & Co. did was at all likely to surprise Blake. As for ghosts, nothing was farther from his mind, which was an eminently practical sort of mind.



Then he caught a glimpse of the phosphorescent mask. Wally was hanging back in the doorway, waiting until his confederates had fastened the rope.

Blake lay still, grinning for six. He saw through the whole plot.

The fag trio evidently thought that all four of the occupants of the room were fast asleep. Or it may have been that Frayne and Manners minor doubted their ability to make a good job of fixing up that rope in complete darkness. Anyway, Blake now saw the light of a carefully-shaded bicycle-lamp flashed upon their work.

Blake remained quiet, watching, and grinning in enjoyment. He could hardly have grinned more broadly had he known that he was the special object of the plot. But that he did not even suspect.

Reggie and Frayne finished their work and stole out.

Wally stalked forward. Blake lay still.

Wally emitted a hollow groan. Blake could not restrain a snigger. But the groan drowned the snigger.

Chains clanked. Wally was doing the thing in style.

"Louder, ass!" hissed Manners minor.

"Oh, shut up, Reggie! You'll 'ave them 'ear you!" said Joe Frayne, in alarm.

Wally gave a very creditable groan indeed. A cow with the stomach-ache could hardly have improved upon it, as Blake told him later.

Groaning and clanking his chains, he advanced farther into the room.

Arthur Augustus awoke.

"Groooh! W-w-w-what's that?" he quavered.

Wally turned the light of his countenance full upon his brother.

Gussy shrieked. Blake jumped out of bed.

"It's all right, Gustavus!" he yelled. "It's only that young ass Wally, and I've got him!"

But Blake spoke too soon. He had not yet grabbed Wally, who ducked and escaped his clutch.

Now, from the next room, came the voice of Tom Merry.

"What's the row?" it asked sleepily. "I say, Blake——"

"Brr-r-r! 'Tain't rising bell yet!" mumbled Manners major.

If Wally could dodge—and he could—so could Jack Blake.

Wally failed to perceive what Blake was at—the driving him towards the door across which the rope was fixed.

By this time the ghost-player was just a little uncertain as to his bearings. There Blake, who kept perfectly cool, had the advantage of him.

Now Tom Merry flung open the door between the two rooms. At the same instant Blake, having shepherded Wally into the right direction, gave him a lusty push.

Wally stumbled over the rope, and fell forward into Tom Merry's arms.

"Yaroooh!" howled Wally.

"Well caught, Merry!" shouted Blake.

A light flared up. Herries and Digby awoke. Last of all awoke Towser. But if Towser was slow to awaken, he was quick to act when once awake. With a low, menacing growl, he sprang off Herries' bed, and seized the sheet in which Wally was clad between his strong, white teeth.

"Ow—yow! Keep that brute off!" yelled Wally.

There was a sudden patter of feet, and Pongo rushed valiantly to the rescue of his master. Towser could have eaten Pongo alive, but the dauntless little nondescript never thought of that. He forgot even the fact that Towser was his very good friend.

Luckily Towser did not forget. Pongo's assault seemed to convince the bulldog that, after all, this was only a game. He released the sheet, and tumbled Pongo over on to his back, holding him down by sheer weight in the best-tempered way imaginable.

"A fair cop, Wally!" said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"It went all wrong somewhere," replied Wally, taking off the mask.

"It went all wrong everywhere, if you ask me," said Jack Blake. "I was on to you directly you blew in, kid."

"That's what comes of having such a rotten conscience, Blake," returned Wally calmly. "I s'pose you were lying awake thinking what a beast you'd been to——"

From down the corridor came a howl of fear.

Jameson and Curly Gibson had woke up, to see Levison minor, as it seemed to them, lying dead, his head propped up against the bars of the bed.

"Oh-h-h!" quavered Curly. "He's dead! I'm sure he's dead!"

A rush down the corridor followed. Wally and Arthur got mixed up in the course of it, and sprawled together on the floor, with Towser sniffing at their bare legs, and Pongo snapping at Towser. Digby fell over the feet of Herries—so he said, at least—and said things that were not polite.

Jack Blake beat Tom Merry by a short head in the rush, and it was he who took Frank Levison in his arms.

"Young asses!" he growled. "He's not dead—he's only fainted. This is your work, Wally!"

Wally, utterly crestfallen, limped in just in time to hear. He said nothing for once. There seemed nothing to be said.

Tom brought water, and laved the youngster's face. Frank came to himself with a heavy sigh and a shudder of fear.

"It's all right, old kid," said Jack Blake soothingly.

"Nothing to be afraid of—only that silly goat Wally trying to take a rise out of me, you know."

"I—I— You fellows will think me an awful funk," faltered Frank. "I don't think I ever fainted before in my life."

"We don't think you anything of the sort," answered Blake, the arm around the fag's neck tightening its pressure.

"Even if it hadn't been for what you did to-day—or yesterday, I ought to say—well, we jolly well know your brother's no funk."

"Whatever else he may be"—that was how Blake would have finished the sentence in an ordinary way. But he wisely cut that out. Everyone knew that Ernest Levison, though he hated fighting, had rather more than his share of boldness. It might be called cool audacity; but at least he was no funk.

Perhaps it was a crude way of making amends to the youngster for the wound to his feelings. But Frank liked it. He knew Blake would not have said that if he had not meant it. And he smiled up into Jack's face in a way that told the Yorkshire lad he was forgiven.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Arthur Augustus Dispenses Largesse.

"WHO'S comin' down to the village with me?" asked Gussy at the breakfast-table next morning.

"What for?" demanded Blake. "Cut me another slice or two of that ham, will you, Tom?"

"I'll have some more coffee if you don't want it all yourself, Gustavus," said Digby.

"Oh, beg pardon, deah boy!" said Gussy apologetically. "I entirely failed to see that youah cup was empty."

"And I entirely fail to see how it's going to get filled by your pouring coffee into the sugar-basin," remarked Monty Lowther blandly.

"Bai Jove, what an ass I am!"

"You are, Gus, you are!" said Wally.

Wally had actually been silent for ten minutes on end—which was a very long time indeed for him.

Wally of the Third was feeling rather subdued that morning. His conscience pricked him whenever he looked at Frank Levison, and he scowled whenever he looked at Jack Blake. He looked at the Fourth-Former oftener than he looked at Levison minor, by the way.

Arthur Augustus bent upon his minor a glance of severe disapproval. Wally ought to have wilted under it; but the result was not according to programme. Wally showed no sign of wilting.

"Who's——"

"Tea, please, Gustavus, since you are so pressing," said Blake cheerfully.

"Yaas, deah boy. Beg pardon, weally!"

"Blake will have it in his cup, not in his trousers' pocket," said Lowther.

"Of all the cwas asses——"

"Oh, Gussy, Gussy, is that the way to talk to your guests?"

"It's all wright, Tom Mewwy—I mean it's all w'ong; but weally, as I was sayin', who's——"

"There's the postman!" cried Joe Frayne, and Arthur Augustus groaned.

He had not succeeded in repeating his question before the letters were brought in on a silver tray by a footman of the veteran brigade.

"Heah's one from the patah. Oh, bai Jove, though, it's foah you, Tom Mewwy!"

"Yes," said Tom, feeling a trifle guilty, though he knew the feeling was absurd. "He said he might write to me."

Arthur Augustus handed over the letter without a question. He could do nothing else but hand it over, of course; but it occurred to Tom that few fellows in his place would have kept silence thus.

The letter was brief and to the point. It said that the writer hoped that no occasion for Tom to exercise the authority given to him would arise, but that if any such occasion did arise, either through Arthur Augustus or Wally

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kicking over the traces, he was to show the offender the letter, and act thereafter as he thought best.

If Lord Eastwood hoped that there would be no need to use the commission, Tom Merry hoped so with tenfold vigour, as may be guessed.

"Monty would say that it was me in the seats of the mighty if he knew," Tom thought. He folded the letter carefully and put it away.

"Who's comin' down to the village?" asked Gussy again, when breakfast was over. "Weally, you fellahs—"

"What are you going down for?"

"I was undah the impvession that I had explained that, Hewwies."

"Oh, that silly ass notion of paying the kids there to go to circus—is that it?"

"It is vevy wude of you to chawactewise it as a—"

"Ring off, Gustavus! It is a silly ass notion, whatever you say," said Blace.

Everyone seemed agreed as to that. But at last Digby good-naturedly volunteered to accompany Arthur Augustus. The rest of the older juniors had made up their minds to go along to Barnt Common, and have a talk with Mr. Horsman, should he prove at leisure. As for Wally & Co., they did not condescend to make known their intentions.

Gussy and Dig ran out their bikes, and quickly covered the short distance. There was a cold snap in the air this morning. It really felt like winter. And, though it was still fine, there were clouds coming up from the north which looked ominously like snow.

The swell of the Fourth had his pockets full of shillings and sixpences. There could have been but little small silver left within the walls of Eastwood House when he had finished his money-changing activities. He was in high feather. Giving always pleased him; and he utterly refused to see any flaw in his present plan.

"Let's make a start stwaight away," he said to Digby.

"Right-ho! The sooner this wangle's wangled, the better," said Dig, who failed to share his enthusiasm.

"Theah's a kid ovah theah. Hi, kid!"

"Who's you callin' kid? Kid yourself!" howled back the urchin of ten he had addressed.

"Come heah, will you?"

"Not likely! Come an' fetch me if you want me!"

"I desiah—"

"Yah! Go 'ome an' learn to talk plain!"

"My hat! I should think Baggys faithful tenantry would be a bit more polite than that!" grinned Digby.

"I am afwaid, Dig, that it is due to the disgustin' wadicalism which is cowwuptin' the—"

"Rats! That kid don't know a radical from a donkey!"

"I am not suah, Dig, whethah— But that is scawely fajah, pewwaps. Anyway, he has gone. Theah is anothat. I know him. Tommy Twipah, come heah!"

The youthful Triper obeyed. He received a sixpence, touched his forehead, mumbled thanks, and hurried off.

"That's the way you like it done, I suppose, Gustavus?" said Digby.

"I see nothin' in the attitude of Twipah which would form a reasonable cause of complaint, Dig," was the stately answer.

Whatever cause of complaint there might or might not be in the attitude of Tommy Triper, there was certainly none with regard to the willingness of the village youngsters in general to take largesse at the hands of the noble Gussy. They were not merely willing—they fairly tumbled over one another in their keenness. Gussy beamed, but Dig was not quite so well pleased.

Up came the impolite youngster whom they had first seen, trying hard to look as like someone—anyone—else as possible.

"Here, you!" said Digby. "Stop, Gussy! That's the kid!"

"Bai Jove, yaas, Dig! I wecognise him now. But, nevah mind. I suppose you would like to go to the circus, my young fwiend?"

"Not 'arf, I wouldn't!"

"Heah is sixpence. In futchah, do not wash to the conclusion—"

Instead, the urchin, with the sixpence clutched tightly in his fist, rushed away.

Digby grinned. Gussy frowned, and sighed.

A dozen others received sixpences, or, in cases where the existence of a younger brother or sister was known or claimed, shillings. Then a freckled-faced, snub-nosed lad put in an eager application.

"I say, what's your name?" asked Digby.

"Triper!" replied the applicant.

"Christened Thomas—eh?" said Dig. "Second application, Gustavus. Turn it down!"

"I ain't Tommy Triper!" howled the lad. "I'm Garge!"

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Gussy looked doubtful. He happened to know Tommy Triper, but he had never heard of George of that ilk.

"I—I—weckon it's all wight, Dig!" he said feebly.

"Do you, old scout? Well, all I've got to say is that Thomas and Garge are twins, then!"

"Well, an' so we be!" said the youthful Triper, with a grin of relief at having so good an explanation offered for his benefit, as it seemed to Digby.

Garge—alias Tommy—received his sixpence, and discreetly retired. Other twins began to come forward. Easthorpe village seemed full of them.

"Either you're being done down, Gussy, or else twins are the staple industry of these parts," said Digby, in a slight lull.

"Oh, wats! You're too suspish, Dig!" replied Arthur Augustus, a trifle crossly.

"My hat! You're not half suspish enough, old chap! You're being done down right and left by these simple villagers. But it's all right as long as it suits you. It wouldn't me, that's all!"

Arthur Augustus looked a little uneasy. He prided himself on his perspicacity, and he hated the notion of being swindled.

Then his face brightened up.

"Bai Jove, Dig, it's all wight!" he said. "I haven't a single blessed tannah or bob left!"

"Then you've jolly well had your pockets picked!" said Digby emphatically. "You can't have handed over all you brought!"

"Weally, Dig, I am howwibly ashamed of you foah makin' such a howwid suggestion. These simple village—"

"They ain't half as simple as they look, old scout! Not one of 'em but has got more craft in him than you have. I don't say anyone's actually stolen from you; but, if they haven't, there must be a hole in one of your pockets, and that's all about it!"

Gussy thrust his hand into his right trouser's pocket.

"Bai Jove, Dig, theah is! Bub—but we must have seen them!"

"We haven't got eyes in the backs of our heads, duffer! I suppose that's how it was. My only Aunt Matilda Jane, here comes Tommy Triper again, or his twin Garge! You may know 'tother from which, Gussy, but I'm 'ot going to pretend I do. They're inside the same breeches and the same skin, as far as I can see!"

"What is youah name?" asked Gussy, as the scion of the house of Triper came up.

"Jim Triper!" was the ready reply.

"Sure it ain't Garge?" asked Dig.

"Garn! Garge is my twin brother!"

"I thought he was Tommy's twin brother?"

"So we are! We are tribulets, so don't you be so bloomin' clever! I ain't see you givin' nothin' away!"

"No, James Thomas Garge Tribulet Triper, and you're not likely to!" answered Digby, breathing hard.

"Well, then, what do you want to meddle for? Young Lord Eastwood ain't going to miss a sixpenny-bit, is he?"

"I am afwaid you are not a vevy honest lad, Twipah!" said Gussy sorrowfully.

Triper's face took on a menacing scowl.

"Do you mean I ain't a-goin' to have it?" he asked threateningly.

"Most assuahedly you are not! Alweady you and the west have had moah than I have given you!"

"How do you make that out, mister?"

But Tommy Triper knew. The gleam in his eyes told Digby that.

"Nevah mind! I have not the vevy least intention of givin' away moah, Twipah, so you can withdwaw" said Arthur Augustus, with stony dignity.

"An' I ain't to have my tanner? Tommy, he's had his'n; Garge, he's had his'n—"

"And James Tribulet now has the result in his pocket!" said Dig.

A new crowd was collecting. The later comers had not shared in the spoils, and they were badly disgruntled when it dawned upon them that the distribution of largesse was at an end.

"It ain't fair!" howled one.

"Why for don't we be gettin' of it?" yelled another.

"Come along, Gustavus! We'd best get out of this. They don't seem to like you as well as they did!" said Digby grinning.

The two mounted their bikes. But they had not pedalled ten yards before a clod of earth whizzed through the air and caught Gussy in the back of the neck.

"Gwooh! The howwid little wascals!" he said indignantly.

"They have positively no sense of gwatitude, Dig! Yawwoooogh!"

Another clod had smitten him.

"Go it!" hooted Thomas Garge James Tribulet Triper. "But they can chuck, can't they?" grinned Digby. "And they're making a mark of you, Gussy, which— Yoop!" It appeared that, after all, they were not making Gussy their mark to the invidious exclusion of his comrade. Digby had turned his head to look back, and a clod had caught him fairly and squarely on the nose.

After that the two pedalled their hardest, and were soon out of the danger zone. But behind them, as they left the village, sounded the derisive cat-calling and groans of some fifty assorted urchins, male and female.

"That, Gustavus, wasn't a complete success!" remarked Digby.

"Gwanted, Digbay! But it was weally my fault!"

"Of course it was, idiot! It was your rotten, silly scheme from first to last!"

"What I mean is that if I had not been sillay enough to have a hole in my trousers' pocket—"

"Jimmy, as well as Tommy and Garge, would have had his weak, and then everything in the garden would have been lovely! Oh, I don't doubt it, Gussy! You're simply ass enough for anything!"

## CHAPTER 11.

### At the Circus.

"BRRRR-R! It's jolly cold up here, you fellows!" remarked Harry Manners, as the band from Eastwood House approached the circus that afternoon.

It was certainly cold, and the indications of a storm had grown plainer. They found Mr. Horsman looking a trifle anxious.

"Perhaps it will blow over!" he said. "But I shouldn't like a real big storm to strike us in this exposed place!"

"How is the crowd wollin' up, Mistah Horsman?" inquired Gussy.

"Very well indeed, thank you, sir!" replied the circus proprietor. "Jolly Nicholas went over to Laxham this morning with Butternut, and let folks there know. There wasn't time to bill the town, of course. But Nicholas seems to have put the folks wise about it, for there's lots of 'em comin' in by train, I hear. That reminds me! A fat young chap was makin' inquiries a few minutes ago about Eastwood House. Said he was a schoolfellow of you gentlemen."

The seven looked at one another. The fat young chap could surely be no other than the egregious Baggy!

"Oh—ah—yaas, Mistah Horsman!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's all right. We know the fellah!"

"My hat, we do!" murmured Jack Blake.

"We're put on our guard, anyhow!" Tom Merry said. "We ought to be able to give the merchant a miss, knowing he's here!"

Monty Lowther shook his head sagely.

"If you gave Baggy a whole girls' school, which would be quite a number of misses—"

"Did I hear anyone say 'Ha, ha, ha!' inquired Tom Merry solemnly.

"You did not!" replied Herries, with emphasis.

"Even in that case you would not choke off Baggy!" went on Lowther, paying no heed to them. "Only chokey would choke him off!"

Again no one ejaculated "Ha, ha, ha!"

"See here, Gus," said Wally of the Third, "you're not going to bring your blessed Baggy home with—"

"Wot, Wally! He is not my Baggy. An' I have not the wemotest intention of bwingin' him home!"

"I wouldn't trust you. You're such an old ass, Gus! Anybody can get round you. How are the Triper Tribulets—eh?"

Arthur Augustus considered it a very regrettable circumstance that Digby had proved unable to keep his own counsel as to the events of the morning. He flushed redly now, and glared in turn at his minor and at Dig.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"That's just the way you like it done, isn't it, Gustavus?"

"What price twins and triplets at Easthorpe—eh, you fellows?"

"This wibald mewwiment is in vewy bad taste!" said Gussy sternly.

"Never mind, old man! Everyone knows you did—and were done—all for the best!" Tom Merry said, thrusting an arm through one of Gussy's, and drawing him up to the pay-box.

"Thirteen tickets foh youah best seats," said Arthur Augustus.

"Here, hold on!" objected Jack Blake. "Why should you shell out for everybody, old chap? We can pay for ourselves all right."

"Of course we can, and we're going to," said Tom. "Jolly fine cheek of you, Gus, talking about thirteen!" hooted Wally. "What have you got to do with my lot? I'm going to pay for them. They wouldn't be seen dead in a circus if you paid for the tickets!"

"Oh, that's too thick, Wally!" protested Frank Levison. "Thanks ever so much, Gussy; but it's arranged that Wally stands treat to us."

The other fags murmured their thanks, too.

"Oh, dear! You fellahs won't let me awwange anythin' my way," said Gussy. "Seven tickets, then, please, madam! You six are my guests, an' I shall considah it extwemely wude of you if you weally insist on depwivin' me of the pleasuah of payin'!"

The stout lady at the receipt of custom smiled, and the six gave way.

"Better make it eight, Gussy, old man. I find I've left my purse at home," said a familiar voice behind them. They did not need to turn in order to assure themselves that the voice was the voice of the unspeakable Baggy.

"Pity you didn't leave yourself at home!" growled Herries.

"I suppose I've as much right to come to a circus as you have, Herries?" squeaked Trimble.

"Not without paying, you haven't," said Blake.

"Oh, I say! You're not paying, you know."

"Gussy's standing treat to us. That's quite a different thing."

"Well, Digby, I suppose it won't break D'Arcy to stand treat to one more, will it?"

"But we're chums of Gussy's," explained Manners, in the tone of one who argues with a stupid and fractious child.

"So am I, ain't I? That's right, isn't it, Gussy, old pal?"

"Eight tickets, please, madam!" said Arthur Augustus, in accents of sad resignation.

"Ass!" hissed Blake in his ear.

Trimble trotted in with them, a self-satisfied smirk on his fat and unpleasing countenance. Baggy loved nothing better than a successful attempt at sponging.

"We shall never be able to shake him off now, hang it!" growled Manners.

They did not find themselves at once in the main tent on passing the pay-box. As Mr. Horsman had explained to some of them in the morning, he had lately bought up the remainder of the stock belonging to a bankrupt wild beast show. Butternut, the friend of Jolly Nicholas, had been among the purchases, and more of them were displayed in cages in this ante-room.

Tamerlane, the elephant, was there, and, apparently, in none too good a temper. Perhaps he did not like the nearness of some of the other beasts, among which was a sleepy and mangy-looking Bengal tiger.

"Hold on, you fellows!" panted Trimble, pausing in front of a cage, containing a mandril, a species of monkey with a very cross-looking face and an extremely highly-coloured and variegated rear.

"You fellows" did not hold on; as far as they were concerned Trimble was very welcome to stand in front of the mandril all the afternoon, but they had no intention of staying with him. A little of Baggy went a long way.

Wally & Co. halted, however. They were not interested in Trimble, but in the other monkey, as Joe Frayne audibly remarked.

Baggy seemed quite fascinated. The mandril glared at him. Baggy grinned at the mandril. He failed to realise that he was within reach of the creature's arm.

But Manners minor realised that fact.

"Lend me that stick, Curly," he whispered. "I'm going to give that beggar a stir-up! I've seen one before, at the Zoo, and he's like a giddy rainbow behind!"

"Oh, let's see!" cried Curly and Joe together.

Manners minor winked at Wally. Manners minor was less intent upon the study of zoology than upon the annoyance of Baggy Trimble. He got close up behind Trimble, and poked the mandril in the ribs.

"Give him another, kid," said Baggy patronisingly.

Only the fact that he had no stick had prevented Baggy from poking the monkey on his own account.

The grin of Manners minor widened, and like unto it were the grins of his chums. They did not want to hurt the cross-looking monkey; but they did want to draw its attention to Trimble.

Reggie "gave it another."

It was the straw too much. The mandril shot out both arms. One paw snatched Baggy's cap from his head; the other took a firm grip of Baggy's hair, which was the better available for the purpose as Baggy seemed to be in debt to the barber to some extent.

"Yaroooogh! Leggo, you beast! Yow—ow!" howled Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fags in chorus.

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"THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Look out, or he'll scalp you, Baggy!" yelled Wally.

"Leggo! Ow—yow! He's killing me!"

Tom Merry glanced round.

"There's that sweep Baggy in trouble again," he said.

"Serve him jolly well right!" replied Blake.

"In the soup is the proper place for Baggy," remarked Lowther.

But Tom went back. At a glance he saw that Wally & Co. were responsible for Trimble's mishap, and he did not want the fags to get into trouble with the circus authorities.

"Leggo, or I'll slay you! Leggo, you beast, I say!" hooted Baggy, doing a kind of impromptu war-dance as the monkey tugged harder.

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

"What's the matter here?" asked Horsman, hurrying up.

"Looks as if this merchant wants to get into the monkey's cage," said Wally, grinning. "Shall I open the door for him!"

"No, you young rip! Here, you, sir, leave that monkey alone!"

"Yoop! I ain't— Oh, dear, he's tearing my hair out by the roots! Pullimoff, do!" pleaded the unfortunate Baggy.

"Now, then, Jacko!" snapped the circus proprietor.

But Jacko only chattered his teeth and grinned viciously. Horsman collared the stick from the hand of Reggie Manners, giving that young gentleman a suspicious glance as he did so, and rapped Jacko on the paws.

Baggy, suddenly released, staggered back, and lay face upwards on the ground, moaning horribly.

"Here, I'll give you a hand up," said Tom.

"You young gents had better get along inside," Horsman said.

Wally & Co. moved on. Baggy, with Tom's help, scrambled to his feet.

"Get my cap for me, will you, Merry?" he moaned.

"Yes—I don't think!" replied Tom.

The mandril had the cap, and seemed pleased with it—perhaps as a trophy of moral victory.

"I say, I can't go about without my cap, you know!" burred Baggy.

"Dunno that there's any particular reason for your going about at all," answered Tom, with, what seemed to Trimble, brutal candour.

The mandril perched the cap on his head, in quite a rakish manner.

"Gimme my cap, you beast!" howled Baggy.

But the enemy paid no heed—unless the manner in which he regarded a tuft of Baggy's hair, which was still in his paw, could be considered as a subtle insult.

"Ain't you going to get my cap for me, Merry?"

"Yes, I am—not, Baggy!"

"Just like you chaps! I never saw such a rotten lot! You never stand by a pal!"

"I think we do, Baggy, but you aren't exactly a pal of ours, you know."

"Oh! Why not? I'm quite willing to be; it ain't my fault."

"Come along, and don't argue!"

"I can't come without my cap! Ain't you going to get my cap back for me, Merry, you rotter?"

"For two pins, Baggy, I'd—"

Baggy, grumbling and groaning, came without his cap.

"I shall catch my death of cold!" he burred.

"Righto-ho! Count on me for the funeral!"

"You're a beast, Merry!"

"You're a gentleman, Baggy—I don't think!"

They passed on to their seats. Baggy found himself next to Monty Lowther. Among all the chums there was none whom Baggy disliked more heartily than the humorist of the Shell.

"Hallo, your grace! How's Trimble Hall? And how are the loyal and devoted tenantry?" asked Monty.

"The hall's all right," growled Baggy, "and—"

"What? The hall's all right? After being burned to the ground? You don't say so? What ass said the age of miracles was past?"

"I mean— That is— Oh, really, Lowther, you muddle a chap up with your silly japing! It wasn't all burned, after all. The damage—er—wasn't quite so big as they thought at first. As a matter of fact—"

"Prepare for a whopper," whispered Manners, on Lowther's other side.

"My dear man, I'm talking to Baggy! I'm prepared for Kaisering to the tenth power!"

"Ha, ha!" chortled Manners.

"What's that idiot cackling at?" asked Baggy crossly.

"I say, I am not going to sit with you fellows? You ain't very civil. Where's my pal, D'Arcy?"

But Baggy looked round in vain for the noble Gussy.

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He was not to be seen.

"The performance is just going to start," said Tom Merry. "Where's our Gustavus?"

"I'm on to come along with you and look for him," volunteered Blake. "Perhaps he's gone smitten on the stout lady who sells the tickets, and has stopped behind to propose to her. Ha, ha!"

"No go!" said Tom, grinning. "That's Mrs. Horsman."

The two left their seats, and passed out together. They were just in time to see something that seemed to them highly amusing, though Gussy, naturally, hardly saw it in the same light!

## CHAPTER 12.

### Arthur Augustus Meets Trouble.

GUSSY had stopped to contemplate Tamerlane, the great elephant.

Perhaps the dejected look of the huge animal moved the tender heart of Arthur Augustus.

But it is difficult to express sympathy with an elephant. One may stroke a dog's head, a cat's back, a horse's nose, and feel sure that the animal, if it cares about that sort of thing at all, will understand. Where to stroke an elephant is rather a problem.

Gussy could not solve that problem, and he simply stood gazing—an attitude calculated to produce false impressions.

A large tank of water stood close to the elephant. The animal dipped his trunk into it. Gussy stood watching, and wondering whether water was as comforting to an elephant as beer seemed to be to many men.

Just as Tom Merry and Jack Blake came out from the inner tent the animal lifted his trunk from the water. Gussy still gazed, like one spellbound.

Then something happened.

"Yah—"

Gussy's wild yell of dismay was cut short.

A strong stream of water from the elephant's trunk had smitten him full in the face. It had the strength of a hosepipe with a powerful pressure behind it, and Gussy staggered before it.

The expression of dismay on his face was comical beyond words. Here had he stood, wishing the elephant well with all his heart, when the ungrateful beast had treated him as an enemy!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake and Tom together.

"Ho, ho, ho! He, he, he! Ha, ha, ha!" sounded in varying notes the laughter of others who saw.

"You—you extremely wude an' gwaceless animal! You—"

Jack Blake caught Gussy by the arm.

"No use slanging the beggar, old man! He won't savvy, you know."

"But I did nothin' whatever to pwovoke him, Blake! I—"

"Must have been your face, Gussy, old dear!" grinned Tom Merry.

"But how could my face exaspwate the—"

"It's often 'exaspwated' me," said Blake. "You don't keep it under proper control, you know. Here's your eyeglass. Bit wet, ain't you?"

"A bit wet, indeed! I am soaked to the skin, Jack Blake, an' my clobber is uttably wuined!"

"Not likely. It only wants drying. Better move on a bit, or that big chap may take it into his head that you haven't had enough yet. It's no good being greedy, old scout."

"I must pwceed home at once, an' change my clobber, Blake."

"Right-ho! Kim on, old son! We'll escort the victim, won't we, Tommy?"

Tom agreed readily. But Gussy would not have that. "It's wathah decent of you to offah," he said. "But theah is weally no need. I will wun home an' wide back on my bike. I would greatly pwefere that awwangement."

They saw that he meant what he said, and let him go alone. But they certainly would not have done so could they have foreseen that his troubles were by no means at an end yet.

As Arthur Augustus left the circus by the main entrance someone slipped out of it by the back, unseen by him.

Neither he nor any of his chums had noticed the fellow Blader about the place. But he had seen them, and had been a witness of Tamerlane's rude conduct to the great Gussy. Probably he knew better than anyone else why the elephant's temper was so bad.

Now he went running across the common on a line diagonal to that taken by D'Arcy. He ran crouched, taking every advantage of cover, like one used to doing so. But Mr. Horsman had told the fellows in the morning that Blader had been in the Army, and seen active service. He now had his discharge.

Judging by the pace at which he got over the ground, while handicapped by the necessity of keeping to cover, there was not much the matter, one would have thought, with his physical condition now. Gussy was running well, but the fellow gained on him, and reached before him a lonely place screened from view by the trees on each side and a sudden dip in the road.

Behind the shelter of a bush he threw himself upon his knees, turned his coat inside out, and hastily affixed to his face a bit of black cloth with two eyelet-holes. Thus partially disguised, he would not easily be recognised by anyone who did not know him well.

"Ere! Stop!"

Gussy heard, and looked round. What he saw was not calculated to make him stop. He had pluck enough for anything, but this footpad was very plainly overweight for a boy of fifteen, and discretion was certainly the better part of valour.

Unfortunately, Gussy was outpaced by the scoundrel. He ran hard, but Blader ran harder. The junior could feel the fellow's breath hot upon his neck. Still he held on, hoping to get out of that lonely dip, and see possible help in the stretch of road ahead.

Then, with an awful crash, he sprawled forward. Blader had shot out a foot, tripped him, and fallen upon his back.

Gussy was knocked senseless for the moment. Blader, with something more yielding than the hard road to fall upon, was only wounded. He recovered while his victim was still dead to consciousness.

He wasted no time. Gussy's watch, money, rings—everything of value he had upon him—were transferred to Blader's pockets. Then the rascal rose to his feet, gave one glance at the boy, who was now coming to, and disappeared behind the bushes.

Gussy staggered up, his hand to his head. He could hardly realise yet what had happened.

But to do that did not take him long.

"Oh, bai Jove! Wobbed!" he muttered. "Wobbed! The uthah scoundwel!"

He felt in his pockets, but with little hope that anything had been missed. Pursuit was out of the question. Already the footpad had disappeared. And even if Arthur Augustus had been able to pursue, to come up, what could he have done in the absence of help?

Shaken as he was, there seemed only one thing for him to do, and that was to go on to Eastwood House. Even there no help could be looked for. There was not a young, able-bodied man about the place. They were away on the western front of battle, or training to go there. Many of them were in Lord Conway's regiment. And, in any case, the footpad had too long a start for pursuit to be hopeful.

Gussy went in by a side door without being seen by anyone. He did not summon anyone to help him in dressing quickly, as he might have done otherwise.

But he dressed more quickly than usual, in spite of the singing in his head and the bruises on his body.

He had made up his mind to return to the circus, if he had to order out a carriage to get there. A suspicion as to the identity of his assailant had seized him.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I do weally believe it was that wascal Bladah!"

But he was not sure, and in the circumstances it would have been remarkable if he could have been sure. He had little to go upon except the man's stocky, powerful figure and his knowledge—slight enough—of the man's character.

Within a quarter of an hour he was ready for return, and that was something like record time for Gussy to dress in. But for once he was thinking more of other things than of his "clobbah."

He wheeled out his machine, and pedalled rapidly away in the direction of Barnet Common. It was to the south, and a strong north wind aided his progress so much that even on the uphill grades it was as though he was being pushed from behind.

"Bai Jove, though, the bad weather's comin'!" he told himself. "Those clouds are pwetty squally lookin', an' the wind howls like—like a thousand demons!"

## CHAPTER 13.

### The Storm.

INSIDE the circus D'Arcy's chums were beginning to wonder what had become of him—some of them, at least. Monty Lowther was one of those who refused to regard his continued absence as at all surprising.

"The surprise will be if our genial Gustavus turns up before the performance is over," he said. "Do you fellows realise the fact that he has to choose a tie? If he had nothing else to do, that would tie him to—"

"Oh, cheese it, Monty!" groaned Manners. "Your jokes ain't as good as Jolly Nicholas', you know, and you're keeping me from hearing his."

Jolly Nicholas was undoubtedly a first-class clown. His long, melancholy face seemed to make everything he said funnier. He never grinned, or even smiled; but he made others to grin exceedingly.

He was something like the best half of the show. Men and horses had been commandeered for the needs of the Army, and what were left were third-raters. But Nicholas and Butternut made up for it. The St. Jim's juniors laughed till they almost cried at some of the comic passages between the brown bear and the long-faced clown, and Tommy Triper and the rest of the Easthorpe urchins waxed fairly hysterical.

But Baggy Trimble did not like the bear at all. His seat chanced to be in one of the lower rows, and a movement of the shaggy Butternut towards that side of the ring sent him fleeing for safety higher.

"I—I don't fancy that beast of a bear!" he groaned, trying to get behind Herries. "I—I reckon I've suffered enough for one afternoon! Make that rotten ass of a clown call him off, you chaps! Ow—yow! He's coming! Oh, help!"

Jolly Nicholas had followed Butternut up to the barrier. No one but Baggy moved; they were all confident of the clown's ability to control the animal. Moreover, Butternut did not inspire fear in them. He looked as though a small child might safely have played with him.

Monty Lowther arose from his seat, and made a polite bow to Jolly Nicholas.

"Sir," he said, "we have here a—um. er—gentleman who cannot bear your animal!"

"He may forbear his alarm," replied Nicholas solemnly.

"He cannot. The bare notion of a bear is more than he can bear," answered Lowther.

"Ah, I perceive! It is the bare-headed young gentleman. Come down, Sir Barehead! Bear up, I say! And bear down also—bear down upon us, and shake hands with my friend Butternut!"

"Go along, Baggy! I'd go like a shot!" urged Wally.

"I won't go! Yarooogh! Who're you shoving, Digby, you rotter?"

"Oh, don't funk, Baggy!" said Reggie Manners scornfully.

"Yooop! I'm not going near the beast! He'd hug me to death!"

Wally slipped into the bottom row of seats, stretched out his hand, and patted the bear's shaggy head. Butternut looked at him hard, and yawned amiably. But Baggy Trimble did not consider that yawn at all persuasive; it disclosed too many teeth for Baggy's liking.

"The bareheaded young gentleman is certainly stout, and Butternut likes them stout. On the other hand," said Jolly Nicholas, "I should not class him as sweet or tasty, and I may add that my brown friend does not care for stout and bitter. Come along, Butternut!"

The bear ambled off by the clown's side, and the crowd roared with laughter. It might have been pretty cheap fooling, but they were in a mood to be easily pleased.

Baggy got to the top tier of seats, and sat there in solitary and rather miserable state. Nothing would persuade him to come lower till Arthur Augustus reappeared.

Then he scrambled down to get a seat by the side of his "old pal Gussy." By that time bear and clown were going off amid applause.

But Baggy found himself edged out. Gussy was in a hurry to tell his news, and the rest, when once they understood what a serious thing had happened, crowded round him, paying scant attention to Dora and Dolly, the Twin Trapezists.

Even Wally condescended to draw near and hearken, though, of course, he sniffed contemptuously when he heard that his brother had been waylaid and robbed.

"Just like you, Gus!" he said. "My hat, if you don't take the whole giddy biscuit factory as a silly ass!"

"What should you have done, Wally?" asked Jack Blake. "Frightened the beggar off by playing ghost?"

"Oh, rats to you, Blake!"

"Do dvy up, Wallay!" said Arthur Augustus. "See heah, you fellahs, theeah's somethin' that's twoublin' me!"

"Besides your face?" inquired Lowther, in dulcet tones. "Oh, wot! My face doesn't twouble me! Why should it?"

"My mistake, Gustavus! It would me if I belonged to it; but, of course, there's no accounting for—"

"There will be a dead funny merchant here in half a minute if you don't go easy, Lowther!" said Blake.

"What is it that bothers you, old scout?" asked Tom.

"I can't help thinkin' that the wascal who attacked me was that boundah Bladah!"

"Whew!" whistled Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Rats!" said Herries. "It couldn't have been! He was in the ring directly after you'd gone!"

"Not so sure about that," said Manners major. "I don't think it was directly after. In fact, I'm pretty sure it wasn't!"

"It's all a question of time," remarked Digby. "Of course, if the chap wanted to establish a—what-d'ye-call-it?—albumen—"

"You mean alibi, old ass!" said Blake.

"Right-ho! I'd got it near enough, I reckon. If he wanted to establish—"

"Capital word, Dig! Say it again!" put in the irrepressible Monty.

"Idiot! It's all a question of time, I say!"

"It will be for Blader, if Gustavus can prove it against him, for he'll have to do time!"

"Do dry up, you japing imbecile! This is serious!"

"I really don't think it could have been Blader, Gussy," said Tom gravely. "If it was, he must have scooted back jolly quickly!"

"I don't say it was, Tom Mewwy. I should be extremely reluctant to do even a wascal like Bladah an injustice, natchuwalli; but—"

"I say, you fellows, I don't like this!" squeaked Trimble. "There's a beastly storm getting up! It will tear the giddy roof off! I say, let's get along home!"

worried about other things that he had not even time to think of Baggy's barefaced cheek.

A heavy responsibility rested upon his youthful shoulders, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not the one to shirk his responsibilities.

It was owing to his solicitations that Horsman had consented to stay in the neighbourhood, and put up the circus for a performance on a high and exposed spot that was, as Gussy now recognised, as unsuitable at such a season of the year as anything well could be.

Mr. Horsman might fairly be reckoned as sharing the responsibility, of course; but Gussy scarcely thought of that. Now Horsman came forward.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I regret very much to make the announcement I am obliged to make. Our performance is not more than half over, but I feel that I really have no alternative but to cut it short at this stage. The storm is increasing in violence with every minute, and prudence counsels the furling of our tent and the taking measures against its violence at once!"

"Better let prudence talk, gov'nor!" said Jolly Nicholas, coming up behind him. "Perhaps prudence ain't so long-winded as you are. Boys and gals, do a bunk! This is the end—finis; it's all over for this year. Twiggy-vous? If you ain't sharp home, you'll be blown out to sea before you get there, and what would your mothers say then, poor things?"



"Good notion!" said Jack Blake heartily. "Best thing you can do, Baggy, with the walk to the station and the journey to Laxham in front of you!"

"Oh, I didn't mean that! I'm coming with you fellows!"

"Not on your life, you're not!" said Herries, with immense decision.

"It isn't your bizney, Herries. I wouldn't be seen dead at your place! My family's proud, and we don't care to associate with any sort of tag, rag, and bobtail!"

Baggy came very near to being pitched into the ring. Herries was furious.

"Go easy, old chap! Who cares what a cad like that says?"

"That's all very well, Tom; but—"

"We can't have a row in public, anyway!"

Herries saw that, and subsided.

Baggy leered in Gussy's dismayed face.

"You'll invite me, won't you, Gussy, old pal?" he said wheedlingly. "I can't possibly go home through the storm without a cap. It would be the death of me very likely!"

"All the more reason why you should be made to go!" growled Herries.

"Jingo, this isn't going to be half a storm!" said Frank Levison.

"Look at the wind catching the canvas!" Joe Frayne said. "We'll have the blessed tent down on us before you can say 'knife'!"

Gussy was growing very worried indeed. He was so THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 458.

There were very few grown-up people in the crowd, and these were already making for the exit. But the youngsters resented hotly the notion of losing half the performance.

Loudly rose the voice of Thomas Garge James Tribulet Triper.

"It's a do!" howled Master Triper. "I ain't a-goin'!"

But Master Triper, though a yelling throng of juveniles lent him the support of their leather lungs, found that he would have to go.

The circus staff, helped by the St. Jim's juniors, started shepherding the crowd out.

"Harry 'em up for all you're worth!" ordered Horsman. "This is getting serious!"

And it was. Before everybody was out from under it, the canvas roofing blew clean off, with a mighty rending of cords and a great snapping sound, and sailed away on the wings of the wind.

The animals were being hastily removed. The tiger howled fiercely; the monkeys chattered; and above the roaring of the wind sounded the shrill trumpeting of Tamerlane.

With one exception, the St. Jim's fellows—Shell, Fourth, and Third alike—worked like Trojans.

That exception was Baggy Trimble. Baggy got outside in the rush, and mizzled at once. If anyone missed him, it was naturally supposed that he was making a bee-line for the station; but probably no one did miss him.

The circus folk—even the women—also piled in for all they

were worth. Horsman and Jolly Nicholas, keeping their heads, directed operations, while lending a hand wherever needed, and even Blader worked like a man possessed.

But it was too late to save the tent. The storm had increased to a hurricane. It swept the home-going East-thorpe crowd before it till the members of that crowd felt as if they were flying rather than running through the noisy twilight. It beat so hard in the face of a solitary figure ploughing its way northwards that at times it stopped him dead; but he plugged on persistently.

"If I once get there, Gussy can't have the heart to turn me out in all this!" murmured Baggy Trimble to himself.

Behind Baggy, making for shelter, remained his school-fellows, toiling their hardest at what had become by now a forlorn hope.

The circus tent had to be given up for lost. Everything was got out of it before darkness came on, and what became of it after that no one saw. The failure of light naturally made matters worse.

With heads less clear and hearts less resolute among the fighters against that storm, everything would have been in confusion. But, though there was some confusion even as it was, there was not what there would have been had less true British, bulldog courage animated them.

"There goes a caravan!" said Tom Merry, shouting in Gussy's ear.

One of the caravans, caught by a strong gust, had heeled

right over and capsized on its side. Luckily, no one was in it.

Up on this exposed common, with nothing at all to break its force, the wind had a strength that seemed almost incredible. It had become a matter of difficulty even to keep one's feet. And every moment seemed to add to the force and fury of the tempest.

"Theah's only one thing to be done, Tom!" shouted back Gussy. "They must simply leave everything heah, and come along, animals an' all, to Eastwood House!"

Arthur Augustus paused, the wind taking his breath away.

For the moment Tom Merry's breath was almost taken away by this amazing proposition.

It was Gussy all over; his reckless generosity, his chivalric consideration for others.

But what would Lord Eastwood have said? Was this a case in which he would expect Tom to assert the authority delegated to him?

One moment's thought convinced Tom that it was not. Lord Eastwood was the kindest and the most hospitable of men. He would not have welcomed a circus troupe to his ancestral halls with so little misgiving as his son Arthur was prepared to do; but in such circumstances as these he would have welcomed them. He would have held it impossible to do otherwise.

"I'll look for Horsman!" yelled Tom, and was off.



"Make that rotten ass of a clown call him off, you chaps! Ow—yow! He's coming! Oh, help!" roared Trimble, dodging out of the way. (See Chapter 13.)

He found the circus proprietor not far away, and in the very thick of the work, as he had expected. He was trying to get the caravan, which had blown over, on its wheels again; and among his helpers Tom could make out through the gloom Jack Blake, Monty Lowther, Wally D'Arcy, and Frank Levison.

Tom yelled his message in the ear of Horsman.

At once the circus proprietor straightened his back, standing upright.

"Sir," he said, "I accept gratefully! We shall never get the vans away from here to-night, and to stay here through the storm means death to some of the animals, and maybe to some of the folks, too."

The wind had dropped for a moment, and his voice was audible to all around.

"What is it, Tom?" asked Wally eagerly.

"Gussy says they'd better all come up to the house, and Mr. Horsman thinks it's a good idea."

"Oh, hang old Gus! I should have asked 'em up myself, only I've been slogging in too jolly hard to have time to think about it. That old slacker has just been standing still and thinking it out—if he can think! But I don't believe he ever thought of it at all; you put him up to it, Tom!"

"I assure you I didn't. The idea was his own entirely. And he hasn't been slacking, either, Wally. You've been piling in, I know, but I'll bet you haven't worked harder than Gussy has."

"You've all worked like heroes," said Jolly Nicholas, who had just come up. "And now, as the wind's droppin' an' we can hear ourselves speak, let's make a start for the marble 'alls of Eastwood House. Though I don't mind a lot if they ain't all marble, because, between you an' me an' Butternut, it's goin' to be a bit cold when we've finished perspirin'. Here comes the snow!"

The snow began to fall, thick and fast. Though the fury of the wind had abated, there was still enough left of it to send the big snowflakes swirling into their faces.

It was lucky that Eastwood House was not far away, for that was no night for a long pilgrimage.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Christmas Guests at Eastwood House.

WORD was passed for the move, and the circus-folk, nearly every one of them leading some terrified animal, drew together. Flaming naphtha-lamps, possible to keep alight now, cast a lurid glare through the snow.

Horsman marshalled his forces. Already, by almost superhuman efforts, the cages containing the wild beasts had been dragged to a position somewhat more sheltered than the top of the hill. These were sent off, and so was a caravan into which the women of the party had been crowded.

Blake, Wally, and Levison minor went to guide the men with the cages. Lowther and Manners volunteered to go with the caravan.

Now Tamerlane started, in charge of Blader and another man; and with them went Digby and Herries.

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The rest of the fags accompanied Jolly Nicholas and Butternut, squeezing with difficulty into the pony-carriage, and huddling up to the brown bear without the slightest fear.

"He did niff a bit," said Joe Frayne, afterwards. "But I'm 'anged if I minded that at the time; an' the big old beggar kept us all warm, you bet!"

Last of all came Mr. Horsman, Tom Merry, and Arthur Augustus.

The circus proprietor was very grave as he took a final look round to make sure that no one and no animal was being left behind.

But not a single word of reproach did he speak; and Gussy's heart smote him all the harder by reason of that silence.

"It's a vevy heavy blow to you, I feah, Mistah Horsman," Gussy said, when they were stepping out briskly to catch up the rest.

"Well, it means a deal of trouble an' a bit of loss," Horsman replied. "But, bless you, sir, what's this to what happened in Belgium? We'll live through it, thanks to you for your hospitality."

"But if it had not been foah my cwass folly—"

"Not another word, sir, if you please! I'm more than three times your age, and I ought to have had more sense."

Arthur Augustus did not seek to press the argument further. But Tom could guess what was in his mind. That day's work would mean a loggish bill for Lord Eastwood to foot. And he would foot it, even though Horsman raised objections. Tom was very sure of that.

The snow swirled around them. Already great drifts were forming by the roadside. The wind smote like the point of a knife. As the warmth due to the hard work they had been doing faded out they began to shiver.

The lights in the windows of the lodge made a welcome sight.

By the time they reached those lights, gleaming out over the snow, they had caught up with the procession—the queerest circus procession ever seen, Tom Merry thought.

"Let's go' ahead an' awwange wheah ewevything an' ewevybody is to be put up, Tom Mewwy," suggested Arthur Augustus; and, leaving Mr. Horsman, they hurried on.

But Wally had been before them. He had issued orders in a lordly style that Gussy himself could not have bettered. The housekeeper, alarmed at the prospect of such an invasion, had ventured to protest, it seemed.

"I shut her up in half a jiffy," Wally told them.

"Weally, Wally, I do twust you were not wude to the good old lady! You know how much the patah values Mrs.—"

"Rats, Gus! I suppose it wasn't rude to ask her how she'd have liked it herself if she'd been one of the trapeze-girls, and had had to jolly well freeze to death, was it?"

It came out afterwards that the housekeeper had considered it rather rude. Wally had managed to conjure up in her flustered mind a picture of herself in tights, and she had not liked that picture at all. But if Wally's argument had not been of the happiest, his intentions were good, and there was no lack of energy on the housekeeper's part in the

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preparations made to receive the circus-folk, male and female alike.

"Hallo! What in the giddy world does this mean?" exclaimed Tom.

The wide hall was full of people in snow-laden greatcoats. The melting snow had already begun to form pools on the floor. Things were going to be jolly and comfortable presently, everyone knew; but at the moment there was little sign of anything but discomfort and bustle.

And down the wide staircase, visible to all there through the open inner door, came Baggy Trimble, looking like the master of the place!

For Baggy was clothed in immaculate evening-dress, with patent-leather boots and a flower from the conservatory in his buttonhole. His fat face wore a self-satisfied smirk as he came towards them.

On closer view, Baggy, in all his finery, looked less like a gentleman than any one of the other juniors in their wet clothes, with the marks of hard toil upon them. For Baggy was not and never would be a gentleman. Nevertheless, the contrast was a marked one.

Baggy was like an unpleasant but sleek cat among a number of dogs of good breed, muddy from hunting in the winter woods and fields.

Arthur Augustus fairly gasped, too amazed to say anything for a moment.

"Look here, Baggy, get—do you hear?" snapped Wally, more ready of speech.

Wally's feeling was the feeling of every St. Jim's fellow there. No one wanted Trimble.

But, as might have been expected, Gussy rose superior to his feelings directly he was able to speak.

"I ordah you to be quiet, Wally!" he said authoritatively. "It is uttably impos to talk in that mannah to anybody undah ouah own woof!"

"Rot!" howled Wally. "I'm not going to be sat upon like that—not if I know it! Nobody asked Baggy; nobody wants Baggy; and we're jolly well not going to put up with Baggy!"

"The last train to Laxham has not yet gone, I believe," remarked Lowther pointedly.

"And I dare say one of the coachmen could drive down to the station all right, now the wind's dropped," said Manners major.

"Your people will be anxious about you, Trimble," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, no, they won't," replied Baggy calmly. "I told them I was going over to see the circus, and if I wasn't back they could take it for granted that I'd gone home with my pal, D'Arcy. That's all serene, ain't it, Gussy, old chap?"

Seldom had the instinct of hospitality more to contend with in the noble breast of Arthur Augustus than at that moment.

But that instinct triumphed.

"Yaas," said Gussy faintly. "It—it—it's quite all wight, Twimble."

Something like a groan in chorus followed those words. Trimble paid no heed to it. He thrust an arm affectionately through the right arm of D'Arcy major.

"I knew I could count on you, old sport!" he said. "You don't mind me borrowing one of your dress-suits, do you? I was wet through by the time I got here; and, of course, a fellow who's been accustomed to high society, as I have, likes to look decent."

"Oh—er—no, Baggy, I don't mind—at least—no, I don't really mind," gasped Gussy.

Herries marched up to Baggy.

"Whose boots are those?" he demanded sternly.

Herries knew them. His size was beyond that of any of his chums, but not beyond Baggy's.

"D'Arcy's, of course. What's it to do with you, anyway?" returned Baggy rudely.

"No; they're not. D'Arcy don't take number—I mean, I know jolly well they're mine. And you're going to take them off this moment, so make no mistake about it!"

Gussy darted a reproachful look at his chum.

Baggy got behind Gussy.

"It's all very well, Gustavus," said Herries firmly. "We all know you. You're the decentest chap alive. You're too jolly decent, that's what's the matter with you. Off with those boots, you scallywag!"

"Weally, Hewwies, deah boy—"

"This ain't my roof. I'm not under any obligation to be polite to trucking spongers!" went on Herries warmly.

"I'll clear out if you like, old man. That will make room for this worm, I suppose. But I jolly well won't have the worm wearing my boots!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Wally in delight. "Didn't know till now that there was so much sense in you old fogies!"

"Bettah take the boots off, Twimble," said Gussy. "I will wing foah a paiah of slippahs."

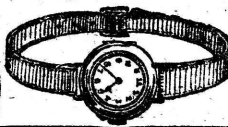
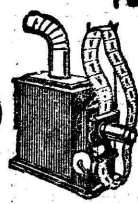
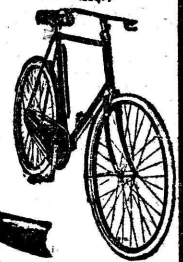
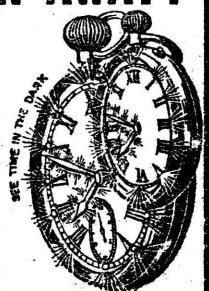
Grunting and groaning, Trimble obeyed.

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'At that moment a diversion occurred, causing the egregious Baggy to be forgotten for a time.

The man from the lodge appeared.

"Is Master Arthur here?" he asked, peering into the well-lighted hall blinking, fresh from the darkness outside.

"Yaas, I'm heah, Wogahs," said D'Arcy. "What is it?"

"There's been a motor-cycle accident outside the gates, sir. Sergeant-Major of the Southshires, on his way to East-thorpe. Got miz-mazed like, in the snow and the wind, and ran into a pile of stones. I'm pretty sure as he's got one ankle badly sprained, an' he's above a bit shook up."

"He must come up here," said Arthur Augustus at once. "Come along, deah boys! Some of us will take a cawwiage down an' fetch him up. No need to send pooah old Willis or Binks out on a night like this."

Everybody but Trimble was ready to go; but, of course, everybody was not needed. And when they got out into the stable-yard they found Willis pacing ill-temperedly up and down in the snow, fuming at the necessity of finding quarters for all Horsman's animals.

"I don't mind the horses, sir," he said. "Though, Heaven knows, I never looked to see my stables demeaned by circus horses. But that tiger, and the monkeys! What peace and quietness is there going to be in the stables with them near by? It's enough to worry a high-bred horse to death. And that elephant! He's beyond the limit—right beyond it, sir. And there's so much to be done, and—"

"Do not wowpy, Willis! Whatever theah is to do I an' my fiwends will help in. As foah the elephant, he must go in the big barn. And now I want a cawwiage to go down to the lodge."

"You don't want a carriage for a step like that, Master Arthur."

"You are w'ong, Willis, and I beg that you will wefwain f'rom arguin' mattahs w'ith me! I need a cawwiage because I have a damaged hewo to bwing up to the house—one of ouah gallant men in khaki."

"Of course, if you order it, sir."

"I do ordah it, Willis!"

"Then there's no more for me to say. But his lordship—"

"That mattah, Willis, you can leave to me!"

Within five minutes Gussy and Blake were on their way down to the lodge while the rest piled in to the help of Willis and the circus staff.

So well did they work, and so much did the reasonableness of Horsman about everything impress the stiff-backed old head coachman that he was found in a much more amiable frame of mind by the time the carriage returned.

The sergeant-major, a fine-looking fellow of just under forty, six feet and thirteen stone odd of brawn and muscle, was helped out.

As he descended, with the aid of Blake and Gussy, his keen blue eyes noted a face, seen but a second in the light of a stable lantern, but recognised in that second.

"Who's that man, young gentleman?" he asked sharply.

But neither of the juniors had seen.

The man was Blader. He had seen the warrant officer, and had lost not a second in putting himself out of sight.

For William Blader had particularly good reasons for not wanting to get into contact with Sergeant-Major Clough, of the 3<sup>d</sup> Southshires!

The soldier was helped through the hall to a warm and comfortable small room beyond it, and seated by a good fire.

"I will have wewfreshments ordahed foah you at once," said Gussy, beaming upon him.

"It's very good of you, sir, and I won't deny they'll be welcome," answered Clough. "But if there's a groom among your men of Army age, a short, thick-set fellow named Smith—"

"We have not a solitawy man about the place who could join the Army," said Gussy, with justifiable pride. "The patah—"

"But I saw this man, sir, and I knew him at a glance. He is a deserter from my battalion!"

"My hat, Gussy, it must be that chap Blader!" cried Jack Blake.

## CHAPTER 15.

### Christmas Decorations in the Wrong Place.

**I**S the man you mean a reddish chap, with a nose that's got a kind of knob at the end?" asked the sergeant-major—who seemed to think very little of his own damages in comparison with the chance of bringing a deserter to book.

"Yaas, bai Jove! That's Bladah, wight enough. But he belongs to the circus, not to ouah people."

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The sergeant-major looked puzzled. Blake hastened to explain.

"My word, you've got a rice little Christmas party here!" said the soldier, grinning.

"What ought we to do?" asked Blake.

"Oh, awwest the boundah at once!" said Gussy eagerly. "I considah a desertah a simplay disgustin' cweatchah."

Sergeant-Major Clough grinned again.

"'Fraid it's not quite so easy as all that, sir," he said. "I shall want a warrant. I hope he did not twig me, that's all. Don't let him get the alarm, and we may be able to nab him within twenty-four hours, with luck."

"The day atfah to-morrow is Chwistmas," said Gussy thoughtfully. "It will be quite imposs foah the circus folk to cleah out till atfah that, an' then it all depends upon what the weathah's like. We may be snowed up heah. No doubt Bladah will stay with the west. It seems a little like tweachewy to keep him so as to awwest him latah; but he is a desertah, an' that excuses ewything."

"Could I see the circus boss, sir?" asked Clough.

"Oh, by all means, deah boy!"

Mr. Horsman was sent in to hold conference with the sergeant-major.

Now things out of doors had been got into train. By this time the women folk of the circus had been conducted to bed, all glad to go.

The men trooped into the kitchen quarters, where they found all they could need in readiness, and Mr. Horsman and Jolly Nicholas were invited to join the juniors and the last-come guest.

It was late before anyone went to bed that night. Wally & Co. made their exit earlier than the rest. Utter weariness lulled suspicion, or Gussy and his chums might have divined the fact that it was not for nothing the fags departed in advance.

Except at supper, Baggy had not made himself at all conspicuous during what remained of the evening. He had kept as near as possible to Arthur Augustus—a doubtful compliment which the swell of the Fourth was far from appreciating. But he was too polite to let Baggy see that.

At supper Baggy had wrought powerfully, of course. His schoolfellows anticipated no less. But the others present, who did not know him, sat amazed.

Jolly Nicholas let his own plate stand almost untouched before him. His eyes opened widely. By-and-by his mouth also began to open. Joe Frayne looked at him and giggled. Arthur Augustus looked and frowned.

But a clown is a licensed joker. It was of no use to frown at the good Nicholas.

"If I'd only known," said Jolly Nicholas at last, in an awed voice, "I'd have been afraid to let my friend Butternut get so near him!"

"I say, Nick, why?" asked Wally, who had struck up a special friendship with the clown. And Wally nudged Manners minor as he spoke.

"The poor fellow might have been ate clean up," said Nicholas, in a hollow voice.

"Who? Baggy? That wouldn't have mattered a scrap. We could all spare Baggy," said Reggie Manners.

"Weally, Weggie—"

"No. Butternut!" answered the clown, his voice more hollow than ever.

Trimble, passing up his plate for further replenishment, had leisure to bestow an ugly scowl upon Nicholas.

The scowl was wasted.

"Excuse me, young sir," said Nicholas; "but may I ask whether you ever applied for a job with our circus?"

"Me! Do you think I'd lower myself?" squeaked Baggy, with a look like a basilisk.

"What was the application about, Nick?" asked Wally of the Third.

"Some young gent at school wanted to join us as the World-Renowned Wolfer, warranted to wipe up more in an hour than any other man on earth in a week," said Nicholas, without even a twinkle of the eyes. "Scuse me, sir! My mistake! I really thought it must have been you. Anyway, he was a whacked to the wide wolfer if ever you ran across him. I'll give you that much credit!"

"I'm surprised, Gussy, that you should admit these low circus people. Ow-yow! What are you kicking my shins for, Digby, you beast?"

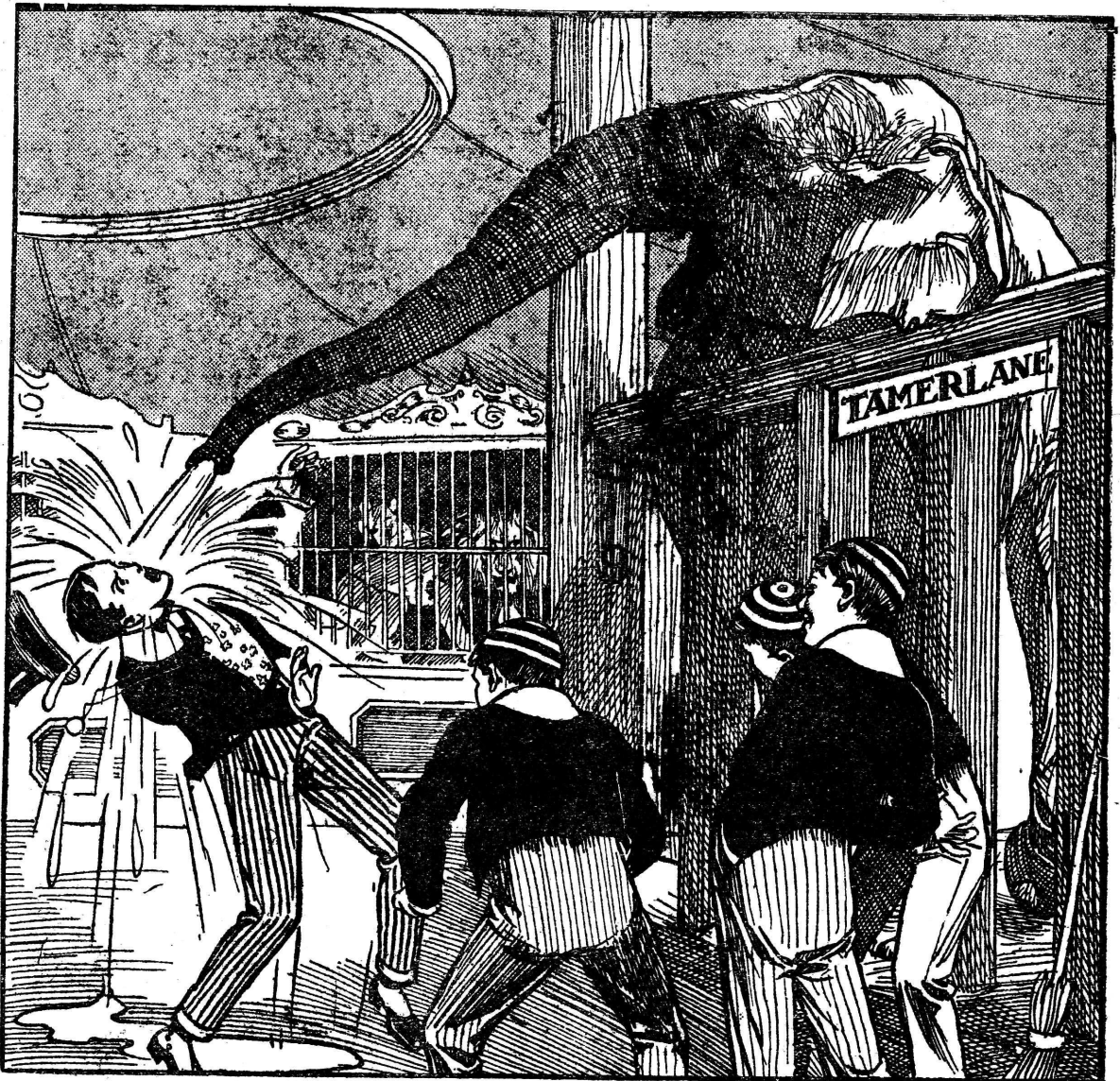
Jolly Nicholas said no more after that. He saw that he had put himself more or less in the wrong with both his host and his boss.

But he sat and watched Baggy's play with knife and fork in a fascination that never waned.

It might have been two hours after supper had been cleared away that the general move bedwards came.

"I say, Gussy," sounded the high, squeaky voice of Baggy—

"I say, old chap, can I have a snack to take up with me, in



"Yar——" Gussy's wild yell of dismay was cut short. A strong stream of water from the elephant's trunk had smitten him full in the face. (See Chapter 12.)

case I get feeling faint in the night? I do sometimes, you know, after a light supper."

"Jumping Jehosaphat!" murmured the clown. "A light supper!"

"Will biscuits do you, Baggy?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Heah is a biscuit-bawwel that you can take up with you!"

"Oh, I suppose they'll have to do, if you haven't anything else!" replied Trimble ungraciously. He looked into the biscuit-barrel; but he found it so nearly full that, even from the greedy Baggy, no complaint on that score was possible.

So he went up, clutching the biscuit-barrel to his chest, without a good-night to anyone.

He had a room to himself. No one wanted Baggy as a room-mate. There was a good fire burning in the grate, and a pyjama suit of Gussy's had been put to warm.

Baggy smirked around him. It seemed to Baggy that the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places.

"Shouldn't have had a fire at home!" he muttered. "They do do it here, and no giddy error! I'm not going under a week. That pig Gussy might have given me something besides measly biscuits to go at in the night, though. I'll look after things better to-morrow."

Baggy sat down by the fire, and put his hand into the biscuit-barrel.

After all, the biscuits proved not so measly. Baggy sampled them to the extent of a pound or so in a trifle over

five minutes. The reason why he ate so slowly was because he had begun to feel drowsy.

From the corridor came the sounds of laughter and the scurry of feet.

"Oh, they're playing the fool, of course!" said Baggy impatiently. "They never seem to get tired of that."

Baggy rose, with the intent to lock his door. But as he opened it, Wally plunged into the room, hotly pursued by Jolly Nicholas.

"Here, get out!" squeaked Baggy. "I ain't used to this sort of thing, you know! I— Ow-yow! Yarooogh!"

Wally, seeking shelter under the bed, had made a dive between the fat legs of Baggy, and Baggy had fallen backwards.

The clown—a conical figure in a suit of pyjamas which left exposed a good twelve inches of very skinny legs, strode across Baggy's prostrate form, stooped, and dragged out the writhing Wally.

In the corridor the other fags giggled and pushed one another about. Now the Fourth and Shell fellows, full of indignation, were tumbling out of their rooms.

"Get out!" gasped Baggy. "D'Arcy, I don't think you ought to allow this sort of thing! I've been accustomed to better-conducted establishments than this, let me tell you!"

"Go back to 'em!" shouted Jack Blake, catching Joe Frayne by the ear.

"We've no use for you!" howled Manners, collaring Reggie in a stern grip.

"Where's that young rascal Wally?" yelled Herries. "They were all in it, of course; but I'll bet it was his scheme!"

"Here is Master Wally," said Jolly Nicholas, exhibiting his struggling captive. "I intend to put Master Wally to bed—in my bed. I shall be quite satisfied to exchange with him."

"Chuck it, Nick! I ain't taking any!" shrieked Wally. Tom Merry had captured Curly Gibson, and Digby had laid hold of Levison minor. No one had any doubt that all the six had share in the guilt.

Jolly Nicholas led a procession to the room which had been allotted to him. The turned-down bedclothes revealed a heap of holly, prickly and red-berried.

"One—two—three!" counted Jolly Nicholas, swinging Wally of the Third in his lean but strong arms.

"Ah! Oh, don't!" spluttered Wally. "You—you'll spoil the Christmas dec—"

He did not finish. Jolly Nicholas sent him flying into the thick of the holly.

"Oh, good egg!" yelled Tom Merry. "Serve you right, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "You should have had bettah manmahs than to treat a visitah thus!"

"I jolly well hope it hurt him!" said Trimble viciously.

"Oh, you shut up, you rotter!" growled Blake, giving Baggy his elbow in the ribs.

Wally sat up, grinning.

"It's nothing when you're used to it!" he remarked airily. "Why don't you try some, Baggy?"

"Not likely!" said Trimble indignantly, and edged further away.

He could not understand why all the captive fags laughed at that, as if it were an excellent joke. He had not meant to be funny.

"Bring the rest along, and put them through it!" said Tom Merry grimly.

The fags were hustled along to the other traps they had prepared, and were rolled in the holly one after another. They squealed, of course; but to Baggy it seemed that they were not half punished, as they evidently took their punishment as in some sort part of the fun.

Baggy waddled to his own room, and locked the door. He was feeling sour.

"I could have told those silly asses of a score of better ways of putting them through it!" he muttered. "But they wouldn't have taken a scrap of notice. Beasts! Even Gussy don't really want me. But I'm not jolly well going to be choked off so easily!"

He sampled the biscuits again. When he had finished his sampling there was not one left. Then he smelt the scented soap, as if he meditated sampling that. It was of a sweet savour, but Baggy concluded that it might have its drawbacks as an article of diet. And, anyway, there was not enough of it to go far.

Slowly, basking in the genial warmth of the fire, Baggy undressed. Peace ruled in the corridors now. It seemed as though all the rest had sought the arms of Morpheus.

"Wonder whether they thought of a warming-pan?" murmured Baggy, ready to get into bed. He had thrown his borrowed raiment all over the floor. As it did not belong to him, there seemed no sort of use in being careful with it.

He plunged in.

"Yarooogh!" he howled. "Yoop! The young beasts! Ow-yow!"

Until that moment it had never struck Baggy that, while they were putting holly in other's beds, Wally & Co. were not in the least likely to forget him!

"Is that how you like it done, Baggy?" shrieked the exultant voice of Wally from the corridor.

Trimble rushed to the door. But he did not open it. He was not by any means sure that he would see the fags in full retreat. They might have the check to stand their ground.

He dragged out both sheets, with the holly inside, and snuggled down between the blankets. In a few minutes a sound like unto the sound of a trumpet proclaimed that Baggy had found repose.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Baggy's Night Foray.

**B**UT he did not sleep very long. In an hour or two he sat up in bed, and put his hands to that part of his anatomy which his waistcoat would have covered had he been dressed.

"Oh, I do feel so uncommonly peckish!" he moaned. "Stingy beast, that fellow D'Arcy! What's a dozen or so THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 458.

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measly biscuits to a chap who needs so much to keep up his constitution as I do?"

He thought hard. Baggy Trimble was not a great thinker; but when the subject of his cogitations was grub the thing he lived for—he could use his brains.

"I'll bet they did themselves better!" he grumbled. "They laid in a store for the night, I know. What shall I do? It's a pretty big house; but I guess I can find my way to the larder. I ought to be able to collar another mingy biscuit-barrel or two, anyway. Pooh! Biscuits in a house like this! Shameful, I call it! And for a chap with a delicate constitution like mine!"

Baggy scrambled out of bed. He had made up the fire before turning in, and the warmth of it now helped to lend him a kind of false courage.

This expedition was not wholly to his taste, for Baggy Trimble was by no means of the stuff of which heroes are made. But though he was not really hungry, he had persuaded himself that he was; and in the great cause of grub ad lib. Baggy could dare something.

The corridors were not quite dark as he passed along them, and he found his courage keeping up in a manner that surprised himself.

Through green-baize doors he passed into the kitchen regions. Here lights had been put out; but Baggy found a candle on a table, lit it, and passed on.

His search was not a long one. A pantry stood open before him within three minutes of his starting.

Baggy's eyes glistened wolfishly. Seldom before had he seen so much at one time of the sort of provender that his soul yearned after.

Inside great safes were hams and cold roast joints and chickens. On many a shelf were ranged tarts, mince-pies, jellies, custards, cakes, apple-pies, and doughnuts. Plum-puddings in basins dangled from the ceiling.

"Crumbs!" murmured Baggy, licking his lips. "I wish I'd thought to bring a portmanteau, or a dirty-linen bag! Even a hatbox would have been better than nothing."

He began to load himself up, grumbling at the necessity of carrying in his arms all he wanted to take—or, rather, all he could take.

When he had piled up such a load as it seemed absolutely impossible any one person could carry, he started out, leaving the lighted candle behind him. It was not until the sixth step or so took him into semi-darkness that he realised the fact.

He paused, uncertain what to do. And while he stood, irresolute, there fell upon his ears a sound that made him shiver from the crown of his fat, round head to the soles of his ugly feet.

The Bengal tiger had emitted an awful, heart-shaking roar.

It seemed to Baggy to proceed from somewhere quite close at hand. He could almost have sworn that the animal was just behind him.

Tarts and mince-pies fell from the heap he carried. The ruling passion was strong in Baggy. He stooped to pick up the pastry.

And as he stooped, something rushed at him from behind, bowling him clean over.

"Ow-yow!" howled Baggy, beside himself with fear. "Help! Murder! The tiger's got— Ow-yow! I'm killed! He's tearing me limb from limb! Yarooo-ooo-ooogh!"

Baggy shrieked as for a dozen. Up and down the house sounded the noise of his shrieking; and the sleepers above heard it, and stirred in their warm beds.

Even the shrill yapping of Pongo did not suggest to Baggy that, after all, it was possible that the tiger was not roaming about the house at his own sweet will.

Baggy felt something warm and heavy on his back. Hot breath was blowing upon his neck. Every moment he expected to be crunched between the tiger's jaws.

Now, with a rush, came his schoolfellows and Jolly Nicholas.

"Help! Ow-yow!" shrieked Baggy. If he had enough command of himself left to think clearly at all, he could hardly have expected help. Most certainly Baggy Trimble would not have faced a tiger for anyone else's sake, and Baggy was not in the habit of giving anyone else credit for higher qualities than his own.

"My hat!"  
"Oh, my only maiden aunt!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Oh, crumbs!"  
"Jumping Jehosaphat!"  
"Ho, ho, ho!"  
"Is that how you like it done, Baggy?"

"Bai Jove, if the feahful wottah hasn't been waidin' the lardah!"

"Come off it, Towser!"

Before Herries gave that order Baggy had begun to suspect that it could hardly be the tiger, after all. For everyone was laughing; even the solemn face of Jolly Nicholas had expanded into a broad grin.

Towser came off it, and ran to his master, wagging the rear part of his solid body with enthusiasm. Evidently Towser thought that he had done well.

Baggy did not in the least agree with Towser.

He got up, panting and breathless, and a tide of angry red flooded the pallor of his unwholesome, pasty face.

"You—you—I'll have the law on you, Herries!" he howled. "That dangerous brute nearly killed me!"

Herries patted Towser's big head, and looked round him.

"Can't see him," he said. "Where is he?"

"Where's who?" hooted Trimble. "I mean, that beastly bulldog of yours!"

"My hat! I thought you meant the tiger! As for old Towser, if he really has bitten you I'll have the old chap shot. I shouldn't care to keep him after he'd taken to eating carrion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's the giddy tiger, Baggy?"

"Show us the bites!"

"Weally, Twimble, I must wemark that I considah you a person who has no wight to intwude himself into a decent house!"

"Oh, come off it, Gus! What's the good of talking to that merchant about decency? He's Baggy Trimble, and he always will be Baggy Trimble, and you can't expect anything from him."

"He ought to be ragged, all the same," said Reggie Manners.

"Hear, hear!"

Wally, in hearty agreement with his chum's verdict, picked up a badly-squashed tart and planted it fairly and squarely upon Trimble's nose.

"Stop that, Wally!" cried D'Arcy major, in anger. "If Baggy is a Pwussian Hun—an' I am sadly afwaid that theah is no woom foah doubt on that scoah—we are not!"

"Bad argument, Gustavus," said Lowther. "I vote for reprisals."

"Let's roll the rotter in the good stuff he's spoiled!" said Blake.

Trimble dodged behind Gussy.

"I—I—I think you ought to protect me, D'Arcy—really I do!" he said feebly. "I—I don't see that I did anything wrong!"

"He doesn't see that he's done anything wrong. My hat!" gasped Digby.

"Great Scott, no! And you never will make him see it, whatever you say to him!" said Tom Merry.

"I haven't. D'Arcy wouldn't grudge me a mouthful of grub, would you, Gussy, old pal?"

D'Arcy's reply was a look of ineffable contempt. What Baggy had done seemed to him absolutely beyond the limit. But he did not forget the laws of hospitality. Baggy was a guest, though a very unwelcome one, and it was out of the question to do to him here what might fairly have been done at St. Jim's.

So Arthur Augustus rose to the occasion, as ever when a point of honour was involved, and cast over the miserable Baggy the mantle and shield of his protection.

"I will not have him wagged," he said, with dignity. "I am not going to say what I think of the disgustin', piggish wottah! It would be infwa dig to tell the low, swinish cweatchah my opinion while undah my own woof-twee, but—"

"Keep it up, Gussy! Go on not telling him what you think! It's so jolly like what we should tell him if we did tell him—"

"Oh, wing off, Lowthah, pway! Twimble, I wegwet that in the heat of the moment that I may have been betwayed into—"

"Never mind that, Gussy. I—I know you don't mean it. I—"

"Pardon me, Twimble, but I feel it my dutay to cowwect the false impwession you labour undah," said Arthur Augustus icily. "I mean ewevy syllable. But—"

A long-drawn, weird howl from the tiger broke in upon his speech. Baggy was not the only fellow present who started, for the beast really seemed to be very close at hand.

"It's in the house! I know it is! Oh, let me go! Ow—"

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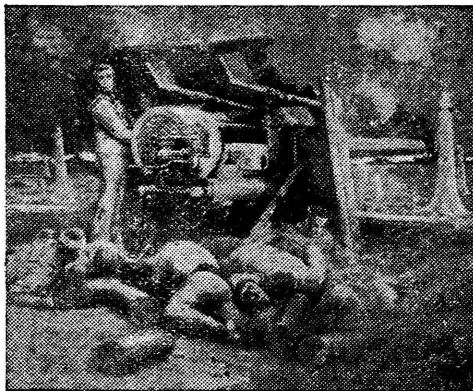
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yow! I shall be eaten alive!" howled Baggy; and, dodging Manners major and Herries, who tried to stop him, he fled.

"After him, Towser!" commanded Herries.

But Arthur Augustus, choking down gallantly the dread of the bulldog which he had always felt in some measure, seized Towser by the collar. Towser growled and struggled, but Gussy held on.

"Oh, all serene, old fellow, if you object," said Herries. "Quiet, Towser! You can leave go, Gussy. He won't kick against that."

"Lucky we left Pongo and Towser down here," remarked Wally, caressing his own curious canine specimen. "We might never have tumbled to what that beast Baggy was up to if it hadn't been for them."

Arthur Augustus did not think it so lucky. He would rather have preferred, on the whole, that the delinquencies of the egregious Baggy should not have been discovered—or, at least, that he should not have been caught red-handed.

"Br—rrr! It's getting parky!" said Jack Blake. "Let's get back to bed."

And they got.

## CHAPTER 17.

### Gussy Breaks Out in a Fresh Place.

"MY hat! Some snow!" It was Jack Blake who made that remark, looking out of the bed-room window next morning, and he used the word "some" in the up-to-date American sense.

Certainly there had been "some" snow, and still was, since there had come no change in the weather to get rid of it quickly.

Nor did a change in the weather, except for the worse, look at all likely. Great purplish-grey clouds covered the sky to east, north, and north-east, plainly threatening more snow. This was going to be an old-fashioned Christmas, and an old-fashioned Christmas is not what everyone really wants or relishes.

To the party gathered at Eastwood House, however, it had no terrors. The circus folk were in clover. Mr. Horsman might feel anxiety as to some of the animals, but all possible had been done to afford them the necessary shelter and warmth, and they were not very likely to take harm.

As for the juniors, Baggy Trimble was the only one among them who did not welcome the snow. Baggy could not be persuaded out. Snowballing had no charms for Baggy. He realised that a dead set was likely to be made at him, and he stayed indoors and frowned to his heart's content.

Baggy would not admit that his people were at all in danger of being worried about him. And, seeing that Baggy was Baggy, as Monty Lowther said, the rest were inclined to agree with him as to this.

They found it difficult to imagine anyone worrying about Baggy's absence. His presence was another matter. But, for their part, they had no intention of worrying unduly even about that.

Breakfast was followed by a snowball battle, in which J to Z—otherwise Tom Merry, Manners major and minor, Lowther, Jameson, Levison minor, and Jolly Nicholas—beat A to H—otherwise Blake, D'Arcy major and minor, Herries, Digby, Curly Gibson, and Joe Frayne. There was no mistake about J to Z having the better of the combat, but Wally said that it was all due to the stupid arrangement by which he and his major came to be on the same side; and later it turned out that the surname of Jolly Nicholas was Burrows, and that he had been enlisted on the wrong side, after which A to H needed no further excuse, for most certainly Jolly Nicholas had done doughty deeds, and had in a large measure contributed to the downfall of the opposing forces.

A heavy fall of snow began about lunch-time, and looked like lasting all day. It was resolved unanimously that Christmas decorations could be delayed no longer. But all hands did not get to work on them at once, for consultation with the housekeeper revealed the fact that if they were snowed up for two or three days there might be a shortage of supplies, and an expedition to the village to lay in more was at once proposed.

Lord Eastwood had always made a point of giving the local tradesmen as much of his custom as was possible, so that it was reasonably to be expected that a good deal of what was needed could be procured at Easthorpe.

The fag contingent volunteered as one man. Tom Merry, Lowther, Manners major, Blake, Herries, and Digby were keen on going. Trimble was counted out from the first, of course. As Lowther said, Baggy wouldn't be likely to go outside the doors till he was kicked out, lest he might find them shut against him on his return.

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But surprise was general when Arthur Augustus said that, on the whole, he would "wathah not go."

The lady members of the circus—or, at least, the more presentable of them—were helping with the decorations now. Mrs. Horsman was voted on all hands as jolly good a sort as her husband, and nothing more than that could well be said in her favour.

Dora and Dolly, the Twin Trapezists, who were, as a matter of fact, not even sisters, let alone twins, were both good-looking girls, with fine figures and most engaging and easy manners. Dolly was fair and Dora was dark.

Dora and Gussy were busy together in putting up holly and mistletoe wherever holly and mistletoe could be put up. Monty Lowther had been helping Dolly, and had come in for a little mild chaff in consequence. But it was certainly curious, considering how well they all knew what a singularly inflammable article the heart of Arthur Augustus was, that no one even suspected at the outset that it was the charms of Miss Dora that were withholding him from the expedition.

"Look here, Gustavus, you must come along!" said Blake. "It would hardly be decent for us to go and give pounds and pounds' worth of orders for stuff without you."

"Wats!" rejoined Gussy. "Wally will be tealh to wepwe- sent the family, if that is necessawy, which I do not see."

"Right-ho!" said Wally of the Third. "I can represent the family all serene—and a jolly sight better representative than old ass Gus! He's afraid of a few flakes of snow, that's what is the matter with old ass Gus!"

"That's very rude of you!" said Miss Dora. "And not true, either, for I am sure that your brother is the sort of boy who is not afraid of anything whatever."

"Thank you vevy much, Miss Dora!" said Arthur Augustus, rising and bowing low, with his hand upon his heart.

And even then no one suspected the truth!

It was upon Lowther that it dawned first.

They had nearly reached the village, their backs covered with snow to the depth of fully a couple of inches, for, of course, they had not to face the storm on the way down, when Lowther said suddenly:

"What jays we are!"

"Speak for yourself, old ass!" said Digby. "I feel more like one of the giddy birds that Arctic explorers tell us about than a jay!"

"I mean about Gussy, idiot!"

"What about Gussy?" asked Blake.

"My hat! Can't you see? Don't you twig? The poor old donkey is in love again!"

"Whew!" whistled Tom Merry thoughtfully, and remembered that Gussy was more or less in his charge. It was not a very welcome thought to him at any time; but dealing with Arthur Augustus in love, that would be a handful indeed! One could not consider Gussy the most tractable of fellows at ordinary times, but Gussy in love! Well might Tom Merry whistle and ask himself what he must do!

"You've got it, Lowther!" chuckled Wally. "Poor old Gus!"

"It certainly looks like another case," pronounced Blake judiciously.

"You bet your boots!" said Dig grinning. "Member Miss Bunnet, you chaps?"

"And Sylvia Carr," said Herries, also grinning.

"And the girl from—"

"And—"

"Oh, drop it!" said Tom Merry crossly. "I can't see the thing as a giddy joke, if you utter idiots can!"

"Whence this thushness, Tommy, old son?" inquired Monty Lowther.

But Tom could not explain.

He was the only one of them all who saw it otherwise than as a joke.

Tom seemed in a hurry to get back—they all observed that. "You leave Gustavus to his uncles, Tommy," said Jack Blake. "No need for you to worry. After all, he's our tame ass, not yours."

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Tom, oppressed by the weight of his unsought responsibility.

"You fellows needn't worry," said Wally calmly. "In fact, I think it's rather cheek on your part to reckon it's any bizney of yours at all. The pater naturally expected that I should look after Gus."

And after that there really seemed no more for anyone to say.

The goods were packed in the village, and the dozen St. Jim's juniors started back heavily laden. There was no use at all in leaving the things to be sent, for no tradesman would undertake to deliver them. Men were short, and it

was a man's job, while every hour made the drifts deeper and the roads more nearly impassable.

A man's job it might be, but every one of the dozen proved himself a man, in spirit at least. Not a shirker among them all!

"Look 'ere, Master Tom," said little Joe Frayne, smallest of them all, "you ain't give me a fair whack. Why, you've got three times as much yourself, an' you know it!"

"All right, Joe," said Tom. "I'll ask you for help if I need any."

Joe's spirit was that of every one of the fags. Wally insisted on taking a load as heavy as anyone's, got his way, and carried it through to the end, though how he ever got through with it Wally alone knew.

For it was hard work getting back. The wind beat upon them, the snow clogged their feet—every inch was a fight. They could never have managed it but for that fine, high spirit of esprit de corps, which counts among schoolboys as it does with regiments.

Curly Gibson was the first to show signs of weakening. Lowther took over half of Curly's load, and they struggled on.

Jameson dropped a few yards behind. Herries fell back to him, and when they caught up the rest again Herries carried a bigger weight.

Then it was Manners minor. Harry Manners said nothing. He did what was needful, and Reggie did not even protest.

By-and-by Levison minor was clinging to Jack Blake's arm, and Frayne to Tom Merry's. Of all the six Third-Formers Wally alone came through without help, and Wally was loaded as heavily as most of his seniors. Let it be counted to Wally's credit that not by as much as a word did he ever brag of his superior powers of endurance!

And it was just as well Wally asked for no help, for Digby was not in a plight to lend it. Dig would have tried, for his heart was as sound as any there. But when at last they reached Eastwood House Dig knew that he had reached as near his limit as could well be without collapse.

Not one of them but was very heartily glad to be back. Hot baths and a first-class lunch put them on better terms with themselves, though two or three of the fags were noticeably off their appetites at lunch.

Gussy did not perceive at first that there was a certain general coldness in their attitude towards him. For Gussy was in high feather, and, with Miss Dora on his right hand and Mrs. Horsman on his left, did the honours of the table in his very best style.

Nobody really believed that Gussy had intended to shirk. Everyone knew Baggy Trimble had. Yet they all felt more aggrieved with Gussy than with Baggy.

Arthur Augustus was one of them, and he had not been with them in what had turned out a really arduous enterprise. Baggy was not one of them; and if he had come along they could only have left him at the station or carried him back, as Lowther said. Quite certainly he would never have walked back.

By the time the meal was over Gussy had begun to have an inkling that his accustomed popularity was scarcely all at Lloyd's. But he was too much occupied with Miss Dora to inquire the reason. When Gussy was once fairly mashed, other things were small potatoes to him. This very bad joke was Lowther's, and nearly cost him a thick ear from Tom Merry, who was in no japing mood.

To Tom Merry, Lowther, and Blake, gathered together in one of the smaller rooms of the great hall after lunch, came Baggy Trimble.

"He, he, he!" chortled Baggy, rubbing his fat hands one over another. "My pal Gussy ain't half going it, is he? You fellows ought to have stayed with me this morning and seen what I've seen, that's all!"

Tom turned upon him so angrily that Baggy started back in fear of being struck.

"What do you mean, you fat worm?" he demanded wrathfully.

"I—I—oh, don't get your wool off, Merry! 'Tain't my fault if Gussy is in love again, I suppose! He, he, he!"

"What's he been up to?" asked Blake.

"Oh, my hat, don't take any notice of the fat ass, Jack!"

"Well, you might be a trifle more civil, Merry, I do think," whined Tumble.

"Don't get on your ear with the dear, sweet, innocent Baggy, Tommy," said Lowther. "Lend him five bob, and he'll tell you all he knows and a lot more besides."

"I don't want Merry's cash. I've got plenty of my own," returned Baggy haughtily. Then he weakened the effect by adding: "Besides, there's nowhere to spend it."

Tom turned away in disdain. Lowther and Blake remained. They did not feel too proud to listen to Baggy's

gossip, and Gussy in love again was not to them at all the serious matter that it was to Tom.

"What's old Gussy been up to?" asked Lowther.

"He's kissed her under the mistletoe!" said Baggy in hushed tones of mystery.

"Not much in that. I'd do it myself," said Lowther.

"But you'd rather kiss the other twin," Blake said.

"Oh, rats to you, ass! Anything else, Baggy, old dear?"

"Yes. He tried to put his arm round her waist!"

"Didn't she let him?" inquired Blake.

"I don't think she'd have minded. Only that clown chap—the beast!—came in just then. So she pretended."

"Why should you call Nicholas a beast? Now if Gussy had, there would have been some sort of reason in it, because he must have been a bit in poor old Gussy's way."

"He is a beast—a rotten beast," answered Baggy plaintively. "He bars me absolutely!"

"If that's the mark of the beast," answered outspoken Jack Blake, "there's quite a lot of 'em under this roof. And I don't mind owning up that I'm one of them. Come along, Lowther! I've had enough of this outsider!"

## CHAPTER 18.

### Tom Merry is Worried.

THE sergeant-major had spent a quiet and restful day. He had written to someone in authority upon the matter of Blader, they knew, for Tom Merry had taken the letter down to Easthorpe and posted it there.

Clough's device was evidently that of avoiding anything likely to give the deserter the alarm, and thus to keep him at Eastwood House with the rest of the circus folk till a file could come along to arrest him. He confessed, however, that he would have felt very doubtful of its success but for the weather.

"That ought to pin him down here," he told Horsman and Tom and Blake, when they were taking counsel together after tea. The house of D'Arcy was not represented at the council. Gussy was still acting shadow to Miss Dora, and Wally was busy with the rest of the fags in making preparations for the morrow. He had told Lowther, with a very wide grin, that they were choosing presents for Baggy Trimble.

"Yes, I think it should," said the circus proprietor. "Though, mind you, Blader's tough stuff, and personally I'm counting more on his not having twigged you."

The sergeant-major shook his head.

"I'm pretty sure he did," he answered. "By the way, Mr. Horsman, do you mind telling me how you came to be employing a man of military age and plainly fit for service?"

The query was put in quite a friendly way, but the sergeant-major's eyes were keen. Horsman met them frankly.

"I may have been wrong," he said. "But perhaps you'll take my word for it that I wasn't wilfully wrong. The man has a discharge in due form."

"Somebody else's," said Clough drily. "The thing's been done before, though there are difficulties about it. Not your fault, Horsman. Don't go thinkin' that's my idea. How did he shape with you?"

"A very mixed bag of tricks. The strongest man we had, and most uncommonly useful at a time like this, of course. But sullen and quarrelsome. Everybody hated him, except—except one of the girls—no need to mention names. Knew a deal about animals, too, and could manage them mostly, but not in the way I believe. By fear, not by love."

"You can't rule an elephant by fear," said the sergeant-major thoughtfully. "I've served in India, and I know their ways."

"But you can, for a time," answered Horsman. "The thing is, nobody knows how long it will last. I've warned Blader that Tamerlane might turn on him some day, and I never do feel quite easy about it. But the fellow seemed to have no fear. Now he was a bit afraid of the bear, an animal that's as free from any real vice as Nick himself."

"What are you takin' my name in vain for, gov'nor?" said Jolly Nicholas, entering at that moment.

"Talkin' about Butternut—an' Tamerlane—an' that chap Blader," replied the circus proprietor.

"Blader's done a bunk!" said Nicholas.

"What!" cried the sergeant-major, jumping to his feet, and then falling back into his chair with a groan. He had forgotten his injury for the moment.

"Clean gone!" said Nicholas. "He hasn't been seen since dusk, though nobody noticed his absence till I inquired about him."

"He can't get far in this weather," said Tom.

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Clough shook his head.

"He's an old soldier, and he can stand a good deal. I don't take it for granted he'll get clear off. The police will be looking for him, of course. But he has a fighting chance. By the way, I suppose there's no place he could hide in about the house or outbuildings?"

"Plenty, I should say!" Jack Blake replied. "But we can do a hunt round for him. Let's get old Gussy on the job, Tom. It wouldn't be a bad joke to tear him away from Miss Dora."

"Joke or not, it wouldn't be a bad move!" Jolly Nicholas said, drily and seriously.

And Horsman nodded assent.

Blake noticed nothing. But Tom fancied there were reasons why the two men disapproved of the evident infatuation of Arthur Augustus with the fair trapezist.

"I'll go and fetch the bounder!" said Blake.

When he had gone Tom Merry turned to Horsman and the clown. What he had to say was not easy. But already he had learned to regard these two men as friends, and the presence of the level-headed Clough did not trouble him.

"Look here!" he said. "You must have noticed how—er—how frightfully gone D'Arcy is on Miss Dora. He's making a silly ass of himself. You musn't think I want to run him down. He's one of the very best. But he gets like this now and then, and you can't hold the wild ass in a bit when it's so. Of course, he's only a kid!"

"But Dora ain't any kid, though quite capable of kidding anyone!" put in Nicholas.

"She's dangerous!" said Horsman gravely. "Not to your friend, Mr. Merry—at least, I don't see how she can be, for, as you say, he's a mere boy. But Dora's got a terrible temper, and a very keen eye to the main chance. I don't say she's a bad lot, mind you; a woman can be dangerous without being that. But if he were three or four years older—"

Tom groaned.

"That's just where it comes in," he said frankly. "It's this way. When he's like this he feels a man all over. He's the sort of silly idiot who would have made a Gretna Green business of it if it had been a hundred or so years ago. He might promise to marry her—yes, and hang on to his promise till he's of age and can do as he likes. I dare say he wouldn't like by that time; but a promise is no end of a sacred thing to Gussy!"

"By the time he's of age Dora will be of middle-age!" said Nicholas. "She ain't such a long way off it now. Older than she looks, Mr. Merry!"

"You may be takin' too serious a view of the matter, sir," said Horsman. "But I don't like it myself. There was a good deal of spooning between her and Blader. My missus warned her against the fellow, and Dora turned on her like a wild-cat. She had a row with Blader soon after that; but it's my belief she's still fond of him. You can't tell!"

"Women folk," remarked the sergeant-major, "are deeper than the deepest well that ever was dug."

"Married man yourself?" asked Horsman.

"No fear!" was the prompt response.

"Then you're no judge. My missus, bless her, is worth ten of me! But Dora wasn't out to the same pattern as my Bess!"

"You'll have to talk to Mr. D'Arcy for his good, sir," said Nicholas.

"I know I shall. But it won't be any good," answered Tom.

Blake came back.

"Gustavus won't budge a giddy inch!" he said. "He's holding wool for Miss Dora to wind. Says we can have Wally, who knows as much as he does."

"Ten times as much!" snapped Tom. "Wally can be a howling young ass, but he licks Gussy's head off for real sense!"

The two went off together to find Wally.

"What's the trouble, Tom? This is only just another of Gustavus' silly ass love affairs," said Blake. "My hat, I reckon it's a jolly good joke!"

"Then you're as big an ass as Gussy is," Tom said morosely.

If Gussy was enjoying his occupancy of the seats of the mighty, Tom Merry was by no means enjoying his. But, then, Tom had all the responsibility without any of the honour and glory, which made rather a difference.

Wally was loth to leave his brother fags, and could not be persuaded of the real importance of the matter, even when it had been fully explained to him.

"He ain't in the house anywhere, I bet!" he said. "Sure to be nabbed somewhere not far away—if he don't get into a snowdrift and jolly well stick there. Not much loss if he does, the rotter!"

They made a search—a fairly thorough search, as far Tom

and Jack Blake could judge. But the house was a big one, and Wally may not have bothered about places that seemed out of the question to him.

The hunting was in vain.

All the evening Tom Merry waited a chance to get in a word or two on the quiet with Arthur Augustus. All the evening he waited in vain, until Miss Dora had retired.

Then Gussy was ready to be talked to, though even more ready to talk.

"Entially at youah service, deah boy!" he said graciously. "Bai Jove, what an extremely wippin' gal Miss Dora is! So—so—weally, I seaweely know how to describe her! She is like the celebrated Cleopatwa of most infinite vawity."

"Oh, yes, I should say she's pretty various!" answered Tom, in tones that plainly proclaimed a distinct lack of enthusiasm as to Miss Dora.

Arthur Augustus elevated his famous monocle, and looked at his chum through it in a very searching manner.

"If you mean to imply anything in the least degwee dewogatory to Miss Dora—"

"Hang Miss Dora!" snapped Tom Merry. "You're making an absolute ass of yourself again, D'Arcy. And if you don't know it, it's time a friend told you of it!"

"I uttably wefuse to wegard in the light of a fwient anyone who says the least word against that extremely charming cweatchah!" replied Arthur Augustus loftily.

"What's the silly use of it, old man? You're not old enough to be flirting!"

"I wrequest you to withdwaw at once that vewy objectionable word, Mewwy! I wefuse to have the deepest and most sincere affection of my life chawacterised in such a mannah!"

"Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia! If you're not flirting, you silly idiot, what are you doing?"

"I have met the one and onlay gal calculated to make me happy for life, Tom Mewwy, and I do not mean to lose sight of her!"

"Going to follow the circus round till she gets an old-age pension—eh? I suppose she'll have that about the time you're twenty-one, and free—"

"Tom Mewwy, if you were not undah my own wool I would give you the most feahful thwashin' of youah life!" roared Gussy. "I decline to bandy words with you, howevah. We will wegard one anothah as—"

"Oh, no, we won't, Gussy! Even an ass like you comes to his giddy senses sooner or later, and I won't quarrel with you!"

"I do not wish to quawwel, especially in the circs, Tom Mewwy. The season of goodwill is no time foah quawwels. And while you are undah my wool—"

"Oh, ring off! It's your father's roof, not yours."

"That, I appwehend, is a distinction without a diffewence, as fah as you are concerned."

Gussy was riding the high horse now. Never had Tom seen him more haughtily frigid.

"I'm not so sure about that!" said Tom, badly nettled.

"What do you infer, Mewwy? You do not wegard yourself as my keepah, I suppose?"

It was on the tip of Tom's tongue to say that he did. But he held himself in. Not yet had the moment come when his commission positively must be shown.

"You need a keeper!" he said crossly, and turned on his heel.

Arthur Augustus gasped with rage to such an extent that he could not get out an articulate word.

## CHAPTER 19.

### One of the Eastwood Ghosts?

"WHAT'S that?"

It was Herries who asked the question. He had awakened from a sound sleep to hear noises in his room—noises which could only be accounted for by the presence of intruders.

Somebody giggled. Somebody else said:

"It's us, ass!"

The voice of somebody else was the voice of Wally of the Third.

Herries sat up at once. If Wally & Co. were in the room, mischief was to be expected.

"Oh, chuck it, Wally!" he said. "We're all too jolly tired for larks to-night."

"Tain't any lark!" answered Wally. "And, come to that, we're tired too. But we ain't quite such a sleepy-lot as you old fogies!"

Herries yawned, and stretched himself. He did not feel so tired, after all, he found. As he had had three or four hours' sleep, this was not wonderful.



But his three chums still slept. Only Blake stirred in his bed, as if he might wake before long. Gussy was dreaming of Miss Dora, and Dig, thoroughly outworn, was not dreaming of anything at all, but slept like one of the Seven Sleepers—the champion sleeper of them all—for choice.

"What's up?" asked Herries, beginning to get interested. For the whispering that went on told him that the fag contingent was there in full force; and it was not for nothing that they had all left their warm beds, he was sure. The snow had stopped now, and a frost had set in, and even in the well-warmed bed-rooms there had been a distinct fall of temperature.

"We think there's a ghost walking," said Curly Gibson, his voice shaking a little.

"Rats! If there is, it's one of your own making."

"We ain't having any more of that, after Franky the other night," said Wally soberly. "And I don't think it's a ghost, either. But there's something moving downstairs, and it isn't Baggy."

"I should rather say not!" replied Herries, grinning in the gloom. "Last night gave Baggy his fill, I fancy."

"We don't think so," said Wally. "It takes the merry dickens of a lot to fill Baggy."

"I didn't mean that way, you young donkey!"

"Oh, crumbs, don't you catch on, duffer? We know as well as you do that Baggy would be funk'd. But we reckoned that he might get so desperate at the thought of all the grub down there, and imagining he was peckish, that he might try it on, if he was ever so funk'd."

The theory was not an impossible one, as Herries saw.

"So we took it in turns to watch," said Jameson.

"And Jimmy and I did the first hour," added Levison minor, with some pride.

"Wally ought to have known better than to let you," struck in the voice of Jack Blake, surprising everybody.

"Hallo, old man, you awake?" asked Herries.

"I'm not talking in my sleep, that I know of," replied Blake. "Been awake for some time, as a matter of fact."

But his tones were still sleepy.

"It was quite all right, Blake, really," said Frank Levison. "I'm not a funk, you know, if I was silly enough to faint last night."

"I know you're not, kid," growled Blake.

"And Curly and I went next," said Manners minor.

"Groooh! I didn't think it was much of a catch," admitted little Gibson.

"But it was Wally an' me what twigged," said Joe Frayne proudly.

"'Cause why, you silly chump? 'Cause there wasn't anything to twig while we were on watch," said Reggie.

"I never said there was, did I?"

"Don't go mopping up all the credit then, fathead!"

"Look 'ere—"

"Oh, chuck that, kids!" said Blake. "What have you come to us for? That's the question."

"We came to Herries, really," replied Wally. "But we don't mind letting you into it, Blakc."

Jack Blake snorted.

"Why to me?" asked Herries.

"'Cause of Towser. Where is he? I don't care whether it's ghosts, or burglars—there's something moving about downstairs, and old Towser would be a jolly hefty chap to have with a fellow."

Herries got out of bed. The compliment to Towser had mollified him.

"Come along, Blake!" he said. "Shall we wake the others?"

"Not my silly ass of a major," said Wally, in haste. "He'd only go mucking up the whole bizney."

"We'll leave old Dig to it," said Blake. "Poor old chap, he had a fair doing yesterday."

"And we won't call the other three," Herries said. "Towser's shut up, Wally. He might have made a meal of that rotter Baggy, and I didn't want to have to shoot him."

"I'd be jolly glad to shoot him!" replied Wally.

"What, Towser?" asked Herries, in disgust.

"Crumbs, no! Baggy, of course. He's nothing but a Prussian Hun."

Blake and Herries were quickly dressed, and the eight stole out without awakening the rest.

"No, don't show a light, Wally," said Blake.

Here and there in the corridors was a carefully subdued light, which seemed only to make the gloom more visible. One or two of the fags may have felt a trifle uneasy, but no one owned to it. And the two Fourth-Formers seemed quite free from any such feeling. They fancied that Wally and Joe had imagined sounds below.

Baggy's snoring proclaimed that he was fast asleep. The

unlovely sound of it came clearly to them as they passed his door. At the top of the wide staircase they halted.

The dim light of a big lamp at the stair-head showed them a region of gloom below. Not one of them but caught his breath when there came to the ears of all a sound as of stealthy footsteps.

They were not close at hand. They were certainly not on the stairs. Whatever or whoever was walking was some little distance away—below there in the gloom.

Frank Levison caught at Blake's arm. Frank was well in advance. He may have wished for a moment that the rear had been his place. But it was only for a moment; and Jack Blake, the only one who guessed how he felt, thought none the worse of him for it.

Wally was the first to speak.

"It ain't a ghost, is it?" he asked. "Ghosts wouldn't make so much noise, I should think."

But Wally's tone was rather doubtful, suggesting that he was by no means convinced of the correctness of his own theory.

"Rats!" said Blake sharply, speaking out, too. "It's no ghost. That's all rot. But I don't make out a bit who it can be. Let's go down and see, Herries. You kids had better stay behind."

Blake's decided manner carried to the youngsters a sense of relief.

But it was ever so much easier to believe in ghosts in the gloom and hush of night than it had been sitting round the great hall fire—and some of them had more than half believed then.

"I'm game, Jack," said Herries. He was game, too, but hardly keen.

"So am I, and we're jolly well all going!" said Wally.

No one said no. If two were going, all would go; for none of them was keen on the notion of breaking up the party. There seemed more safety in keeping together.

But still they paused, waiting to hear those stealthy footsteps again.

"What's that?" faltered Curly Gibson, clutching Wally frantically.

"It's—it's p-p-pretty horrible, whatever it is!" said Levison minor, with chattering teeth.

It did indeed sound pretty horrible. It was like, and yet not quite like, a long-drawn-out wail. So might a banshee have uttered his dreaded warning by the walls of some old Irish castle.

But Herries surprised them all by laughing.

There was a trifle of shakiness in the laugh; but even so, it was good to hear.

"It's only old Towser," said Herries. "He's heard—that."

And somehow the "that" spoiled the good effect of the laugh.

"Have you chaps ever heard," asked Jameson, "that dogs howl most dreadfully when they see a ghost, or hear one?"

"Oh, come on, or stay here, as you jolly well like!" said Blake in impatience that may not have been wholly without some of the awed fear that others felt. "I'm going down!"

He led the way, and all followed. But three at least of the fags went down the wide staircase with their eyes shut, each clutching an arm of some bolder spirit.

Again that horrible wail, sending a shiver down the spine of the boldest. Was it Towser, or—

Even Herries was not sure this time. But then came a shrill yapping.

"Hooray!" cried Wally. "That's Pongo! Now I know we're all right!"

He did not explain how he knew that. But he meant what he said, for he tried to push on ahead of Blake. And, bold as he was, Wally had not hankered to be first until that moment.

They hurried down to find—nothing!

No one was to be seen. That was not a fact which disappointed them. On the whole, they greatly preferred not to see anyone.

But there was no trace of the passage of anyone. And if an intruder had come from outside, he could not have failed to leave some traces of snow along the corridors. Nothing of the sort was to be seen.

That made the whole affair seem terribly mysterious, and revived the ghost theory—though they all carefully avoided saying "ghost."

The dogs were fetched out, and went snuffing together along the passages.

"They're on the trail," said Blake hopefully.

"Think your name's Sexton, don't you?" retorted cheeky Wally. "I don't think! That's the wine-cellar door they've gone to, and the giddy place is always kept locked. You try it if you don't believe me."

They tried it. Certainly it was locked, and that it should have been locked otherwise than from the outside seemed most unlikely. Wally, indeed, said that it could not be locked from the inside. But he did not seem so cocksure about that as was his wont.

"There's nothing for it but to go back to bed," said Herries.

"Not till we've tried every window, and looked into every room," answered Blake firmly.

That task was no pleasant one, though all felt sure that no one could have got into the house. It was eerie work peering into dark corners and trying windows along passages that even to Wally seemed unfamiliar and mysterious in the gloom.

But it was done at last.

"Now we'll bunk off," said Blake. "And I must say you kids have shown up jolly well!"

The fags all liked that, though Wally pretended he didn't.

"I should think we've got as much pluck as any of you old geezers!" said Wally of the Third.

## CHAPTER 20. Lucky for Gussy.

"GWOOOH! You wretched young wascal, Wally!" "Merry Christmas, Gus, old ass! Is that how you like it done?"

Wally had just woke up his brother with a sponge of ice-cold water.

"Yaroooh! 'Tain't— Oh, drop it, you little scamp!"

That was Blake. Levison minor had brought a sponge to his bedside.

"Merry Christmas, Blake!" chirped Frank.

"Ow! Yow! Yooop! Call him off, Herries! He'll—"

And that was Jameson, who had forgotten that Herries had brought Towser up to bed with him after the search downstairs. Now, the bulldog, seeing his master threatened, had sprung straight out of the warm nest he had made for himself at the fag's chest, bowling him clean over.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Merry Christmas to you all!" cried Tom Merry from the next room.

"Sponges are off now," grimed Wally.

"There's Jolly Nicholas," said Reggie Manners hopefully.

"Let's go and wake him."

"You go, my son," replied Wally. "You haven't done your share yet."

Reggie went, followed by the other fags, who scented fun. But the fun was not precisely of the kind Manners minor had expected, though the rest found no fault with it.

Very cautiously Reggie turned the knob of the clown's bed-room door, pushed it open, walked in, and poised the wet sponge above the face of Nicholas.

Jolly Nicholas had snored up to that very second. Now his snoring came to a full stop. A long arm shot out. Manners minor found himself laid across the bed. The long arm rose and fell a dozen times, and a large hand smote the trousers of Reggie with mighty smites.

"Ow! Yow! Stoppit! Rescue!" howled Reggie.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared his chums.

"Merry Christmas, young gentlemen!" said Jolly Nicholas calmly.

"Let's go and attend to Baggy," suggested Wally.

"Rotters!" grumbled Reggie. "Why didn't you rescue me?"

But he followed his leader.

It was of no avail. Baggy's door was locked.

But Baggy turned up to breakfast in quite good time. Trimble liked his bed as well as anyone; but it was not mere liking he had for the good things of the breakfast-table—it was adoration.

Outside was a world of dazzling white. The frost had fairly set in, and the great snowdrifts sparkled till they fairly dazzled the eyes. The bare trees had taken on a wonderful beauty from the snow frozen upon their branches.

"A real Christmas!" said Tom Merry, opening a window to throw out crumbs to a crowd of sparrows and robins.

"Grooch! Shut that beastly window, Merry, do!" squeaked Baggy. "We shall all catch our death of cold."

"Oh, go and bury yourself!" snapped Tom.

"Old Gussy's dressing up something extra special for that trapeze gal's benefit!" smirked Baggy when the window had been closed, which was when Tom thought well.

"Take that for talking about me so rudely!" shrilled Miss Dora, coming upon the scene just in time to hear. And she dealt Baggy as hearty a box on the right ear as he had ever had in his life.

"Yoop! How dare you? I—I—I'll—"

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"You won't do anything unless it's to apologise," said Monty Lowther, forcing the indignant Baggy into his seat again. "Get on with your gorging. You can't open your mouth without putting your great foot in it, and, considering how much you put in it besides, that's an error in tactics."

"My hat, she's a spitfire!" said Digby aside to Herries.

"Yes. But she looks jolly well with her eyes sparkling and her face flushed like that," answered Herries.

"She'd make a fine picture," said Jack Blake. "But I'd prefer her in a picture to any other way."

Gussy turned up at this moment, dressed to kill, and there was no doubt whatever—no possible, probable shadow of doubt—as to the admiration with which the noble Arthur Augustus regarded Miss Dora.

Blake had begun to think that it was getting beyond a joke, and he spoke to Gussy after breakfast. But he only succeeded in getting himself classed with Tom Merry in Gussy's black books. And the attitude of the swell of the Fourth towards Tom this morning was distinctly a frigid one.

Miss Dolly and Mrs. Horsman did not put in an appearance at the breakfast-table. Both were suffering from slight colds. The other feminine members of the circus troupe—some of them married women with children—preferred the kitchen regions. So Miss Dora reigned as queen of the banquet; and some of Gussy's chums thought rather wistfully of Cousin Ethel, who should have been there.

There was a little church hard by, and thither most of the party made their way through the snow for the morning service. After church, work was the order of the day for an hour or two for every able-bodied man and boy. Trimble was on the sick-list for the time being—a result of his Christmas-box, Lowther said, but Blake contended it was a result of his breakfast—labouring at making clear the paths and roads of snow.

Arthur Augustus did not shirk his share of that; but the moment he had changed his clothes he was by Miss Dora's side again. And later on, when twilight fell upon Eastwood House, and the great open fire in the hall flickered its light upon the red-berried holly and the white-berried mistletoe, on the portraits of dead and gone D'Arcy's and the bright faces of the schoolboys and the long visage of Jolly Nicholas and the square, heavy-moustached countenance of Mr. Horsman and the soldierly, handsome face of Sergeant-Major Clough, Gussy and the girl sat apart and talked together in very low tones, while Tom Merry watched them from afar with growing anxiety.

"I say, Tom," said Wally, seating himself close to the captain of the Shell, "that bizney's getting a bit too thick for my liking."

It must indeed have been getting thick when Wally of the Third considered it time to grow serious about it.

"So it is for mine, Wally," said Tom. "But there seems nothing to be done."

"Rats! I'm going to talk to old ass Gus like a giddy Dutch uncle."

"No go, kid! I've talked to him. So has Jack. He only gets on his ear about it. He won't take any real notice."

"He'll jolly well take notice of me!" said Wally resolutely.

"He's got to understand that I'm in charge here. I'll make him toe the line!"

And Wally tried. But the attempt was a failure. Gussy was head over ears in love—past all reason, all argument—even Wally's.

So things went on until dinner. Nothing had been heard of Blader, and no letters had arrived. But only the Sergeant-Major thought much about the deserter, and no one bothered about the absence of letters, due, no doubt, to the tremendous snowfall.

Trimble, who had shown evident signs of recovery by lunch-time, and had put away tea enough for six, rubbed his waistcoat when the dinner announcement was made, and proclaimed pathetically that he had never felt hungrier in his life.

But Baggy's was not the only hearty appetite there, though the rest fell far short of Baggy's quantity. The roast beef, the turkey and sausages, the fowls, the ducks, the blazing Christmas-pudding, the mince-pies, and tarts, and meringues, and cheesecakes, and jellies, all had ample justice done to them.

Dinner over, they sat around the table with desert before them. Baggy roused himself from a half-torpid condition to do further deeds of destruction. Arthur Augustus rose in his place at the head of the table—though Wally called the other end, where he sat, the head—to propose the toast of the King. It was drunk standing, with applause. But Baggy grunted, and looked disconsolately at the fruit from which he was being kept.

Jolly Nicholas asked leave to propose a toast, and gave the Services. He made quite an eloquent speech, and if the sergeant-major's reply was not eloquent, it was hearty and

well to the purpose. There was more cheering, and Baggy groaned inwardly.

Tom Merry got up, and in a few words asked them to drink to all friends present and absent. And they drank, and Tom thought of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, the best friend he had ever had, and of Talbot, whom he missed; and Frank Levison thought of his brother Ernie, and everyone had Lord Eastwood and the genial Conway and sweet Cousin Ethel in mind. And for more than one of them there were thoughts of near and dear ones over there, on the many fronts where the chivalry of Europe bade defiance to the motley hosts of Hundom.

Then Gussy rose again, and the flush on his face and the sparkle of the eye that his famous monocle did not hide warned some there that the noble Gussy was about to make a very big ass of himself.

"I have an announcement to make which I considah should be received with pleasuah by ewevybody pwesent," Arthur Augustus said, a trifle nervously.

"But he knows jolly well it won't be!" murmured Blake to Tom Merry. "Oh, hold on, Tom! What's the giddy use of getting on your hind legs to protest?"

But Tom Merry had risen. So had Wally.

"You just drop it, Gus!" yelled Wally. "Drop it while there's time, and the chaps who do know what an utter idiot you were going to make of yourself will keep it dark, though that's a heap more than you deserve!"

Miss Dora, her fingers playing nervously with the fruit on her plate, whispered something to Gussy. He shook his head, looking as obstinate as a mule.

Baggy Trimble took a big bite into a luscious slice of pineapple. The juice ran from the corners of Baggy's mouth; but he minded that no more than he minded what his host might commit in the way of utter folly.

"Be silent, Wally! I wrefuse to be intewupted. Pwasy sit down, Tom Mewwy! I decline to considah you as my keepah. Mistah Horsman—"

Across the table the circus proprietor darted a half-humorous look of resignation at Tom Merry, and resumed his seat. Tom followed suit. This was not the time to speak. He wished now that he had revealed his secret commission earlier. But would it have had any effect?

Only Wally remained standing.

"I ordah you to sit down, Wally!"

"Rats! Sit down yourself, you gibbering maniac!"

Pongo, excited by his master's raised voice, was yapping shrilly. Old Towser growled deep down in his massive throat.

"The announcement I pwopose to make—and no powah on earth shall pwevent me—is that my futchah happiness has been assuahed by the consent of—"

The rest of the announcement, which was to the effect that Miss Dora had promised to marry him at some date in the remote future, D'Arcy never spoke.

For into the dining-room rushed the housekeeper, followed by half a dozen frightened maids and one old footman, who brought up the rear because he was too slow to get to the front; and in a terrified voice the housekeeper gasped:

"Oh, Mr. Arthur—oh, Master Wally—oh, gentlemen—the bear's got into the house!"

"All the animals!" shrieked a pretty parlour-maid, her pink cheeks gone white with fear.

"No, only the bear; an' enough, too, goodness knows!" spoke the footman.

"Lucky for Gustavus!" grinned Jack Blake, as the rush from the table began.

With the eyes of Miss Dora upon him, Arthur Augustus could not be anywhere but well to the front in that rash.

## CHAPTER 21.

### Tom Merry Shows His Hand!

**N**ONE of the St. Jim's juniors felt any great fear of Butternut—Baggy excepted, of course. They had seen how docile he was with Jolly Nicholas.

But the kitchen-folk of Eastwood House were very naturally alarmed; and nothing the circus people could tell them had any effect in subduing their fears.

The men of the circus-troupe had been indulging in a sing-song in the great kitchen. They had not seen the bear. Some of the men and maids had rushed upstairs for safety, and with them had gone the women of the circus, flying to their children in some cases, as women will.

Now everyone but Baggy Trimble, the sergeant-major, and Miss Dora left the dining-room.

Baggy, his flabby face working with fear, yet stretched out his hand, automatically, as it were, towards a pineapple. Baggy liked pineapple, and did not like bears.

Miss Dora caught him a sharp knock on the knuckles with a pair of nutcrackers.

"Ow—yow! You bea—I mean, that, hurts!" howled Baggy.

"Serve you right!" said the sergeant-major grimly. "The boy's a coward, miss. Give him another!"

"So I will, if he doesn't—"

"Yaroooh! Stoppit! I'm not going to be hugged by a beast of a bear!" yelled Baggy.

"You'll never find any girl wanting to hug you," said Miss Dora, with ineffable disdain.

"Hear, hear!" cried Clough.

"I don't want 'em to. I hate 'em all!" replied the gallant Baggy.

Miss Dora bolted out. The sergeant-major sat looking at Baggy with contempt written all over his face.

"More than one deserter about!" he muttered. But Baggy took no notice; he was cutting himself a slice of pineapple.

Meanwhile, the chase of the bear was going on.

Jolly Nicholas led the way, with Wally as guide, and the rest trooped after them.

But nowhere could Butternut be seen.

"Look heah, Watkins," said Arthur Augustus to the old footman, "are you quite suah that you evah saw the beah at all?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Arthur! There couldn't be any mistake about that. All of us saw the beast. He looked in at one door, and we went out at the other. We didn't stop to gaze at him; but we saw him all right."

"He's been about here," said Wally. "I can niff him."

So could most of them, now that Wally mentioned it. Butternut had rather a strong odour of his own.

"Pongo has a chance to distinguish himself now," said Herries.

"Why not your old wash-out of a Towser?" snapped Wally.

"Oh, everybody knows bulldogs aren't dogs of chase!" said Herries.

But Towser and Pongo were at fault in equal measure, it seemed. It is true that they sniffed along the passages to the cellar door. But it appeared, from the testimony of Watkins, that the door had never been unlocked during the day. Very little wine had been required, and there had been no occasion to go to the cellar.

The bear had got out of the coach-house into which he had been put. His tracks in the snow showed that. He had got into the house; that could hardly be doubted.

But where was he?

The thing was as complete a mystery as the footsteps of the night before.

Baggy Trimble was still eating fruit when, having given up the hunt, the rest returned to the dining-room.

"Is it all right, you fellows?" he asked anxiously. "Of course, I should have come to help, look, only I've sprained my wrist—I—I mean my backbone—no, my ankle! I haven't liked to make a fuss; but I feel it due to myself to—"

"Oh, it's quite all right, Baggy! You needn't lock your door," said Monty Lowther.

Baggy grunted, and went off to bed. He wanted no inquiries about his sprained limb, and for the moment he was quite incapable of eating any more.

Now Tom Merry collared Arthur Augustus.

"I've got to talk to you seriously, Gussy," he said. "Don't go getting your silly wool off! Come along somewhere where we can be alone."

"I would much wathah not discuss anything whatevah with you, Tom Mewwy, as I do not considah that you have adopted at all a fiendly attitude to the most chewished wish of my heart," replied Gussy feebly.

"Come along!" said Tom sharply; and Gussy came, after one look round which assured him that Miss Dora was still absent from the crowd gathered about the open hearth where the great Yule-log blazed.

They went into the library, and Tom switched on the electric light.

"We can talk just as well in the dark," said Gussy. "Not that I weally have anything to say to you, Tom Mewwy, or that I undahstand what you can have to say to me, or that matthas in the vevy least. I am my own mastah, I appwehend."

"Not till you are of age, kid!"

"What are a few yeahs to one who loves as I love? Dowa will wait, an' as soon as I attain my majowity— But this is weally no bizney of yeahs, Tom Mewwy!"

"Think not, Gustavus? You reckon I'm butting in, don't you? Suppose I told you that Lord Eastwood specially asked me to look after you, and see that you didn't get into mischief?"

"Widic—positively widic! The patah would nevah put such an affwont upon me!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price, 1d. and will contain a Long, Complete Story, entitled:

"THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"It isn't anything of the sort," said Tom Merry quietly. "He knows I'm your true friend, old man; that there isn't a thing I wouldn't do for you. He knows that you've the best heart in the world, but that it does run away with your head a bit at times. Read that!"

Arthur Augustus read the letter handed to him in silence. It fluttered from his hands to the floor. Then he buried his face in his hands, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

It had hit him hard. Tom had expected it would, but not quite so hard as this. Tom was silent, too. He knew that was best.

Gussy lifted a tear-bedecked face.

"It was too bad of the patah, Tom!" he said feebly.

"No, old man. I won't have that. It was for your good."

"And now I suppose you mean to let all the west know, an' I shall have Wally chortling' an' Lowthah makin' his howwid jokes an'—"

"Go easy! I don't mean to tell a soul—not even Blake—if you will chuck this silly bizney!"

"I can't! How it is poss, Tom Mewwy? My honour is concerned. I have asked the deah gal to mawwy me, an' she has consented."

"Rats! You're only a kid. You can't marry her for a donkey's age yet. She never took it seriously, I'll bet!"

"I have pledged my word, the word of a D'Arcy. I cannot wetwact!"

"You're an utter idiot!" snapped Tom.

An utter idiot, perhaps. But utterly honourable, too. The word of a D'Arcy meant much to Arthur Augustus, for it stood for all that had made him the great-hearted gentleman he was and would always be, though he might never acquire any great share of worldly wisdom.

And Tom Merry, though he never talked of the word of a Merry, understood and sympathised in some sort even while he felt angry.

"What do you mean to do, Tom? I cannot face the west when they have heard of this. I must wun away!"

"Run away from Miss Dora? Not that I reckon she matters much. She's only playing with you, old chap. But you can't do a bunk in all this snow."

"Bladah did. An' the deah gal will undahstand."

"I doubt it. See here, Gussy, I'll give you till to-morrow to think it over, anyhow."

"Thanks, Tom! An'—an' if the patah had to do this cwuel thing, I—I'd wathah he'd trusted you than anyone else, even Jack Blake."

## CHAPTER 22.

### Wherein Things are Cleared Up!

EVERYONE except Jolly Nicholas slept behind locked doors that night. Some of them did not fear the bear; but even these had no wish to receive a midnight visit from the animal. Nicholas would have welcomed it; he was rather worried about his friend Butternut.

No, everyone did not sleep. It was in vain that Arthur Augustus shut his eyes, counted a thousand, or a million—he wasn't sure which, and it might have been only a hundred—imagined sheep going through a gap, and checked them off as they went, thought of Dora, turned his thoughts resolutely away from Dora. Whatever he did he could not sleep.

"Blake," he whispered at last.

But Blake did not answer, and Herries and Dig were plainly fast locked in the arms of Morpheus.

Gussy slid out of bed, put on his flowered dressing-gown, and went into the next room.

"Tom Mewwy!"

It appeared that Tom was also wakeful.

"What is it, old scout?"

Tom's tone was very friendly. It fell like balm upon the wounded heart of Arthur Augustus.

"I'm going downstaihs."

"I'll come along, old chap."

"You don't think I am goin' to wun away, do you?"

"Not likely! But I suppose you can do with a fellow's company?"

"Wight-ho!"

Both dressed quickly and silently. Tom glanced at his watch when they were in the corridor. It showed nearly half-past five.

"Been awake long, Gussy?"

"Onlay all the time, Tom."

"Oh, look ahead! There's somebody going down!"

"It's onlay that wottah Baggy," said Gussy wearily.

"Goin' down to pinch gwub, of course. What's the odds? What does anything watevah mattah?"

"THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 458.

OUR COMPANION THE "BOYS' FRIEND," THE "MAGNET," "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 1d. PAPERS: Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Saturday. 2

If Baggy Trimble had had the least idea that the bear had not been found it is likely that he would have made up his mind to starve—the process would not have been a short one—before he would have ventured the raiding of the larder again. But Lowther had given him the impression that Butternut was safely stowed away again.

The two behind held back, and let him get well ahead of them. They were of a mind to catch Baggy red-handed again.

When they reached the top of the staircase Baggy had disappeared into the gloom below.

They followed.

On a sudden a perfect pandemonium of noise burst out below.

"Fire! Murder! Thieves!" howled Baggy. "Leggo, you beast! Ouch! Yarooogh! Yoop!"

"Shut your row, or I'll slay you!" spoke a gruff man's voice.

Then there came the growling of Butternut.

Baggy did not shut his row. He could not have left off shrieking had he tried—as long as he was able to shriek.

But his cries ceased suddenly, to be followed by a gurgling noise, which suggested that someone had him by the throat.

The growling of the bear increased in depth, then stopped all at once. Tom and Gussy arrived on the scene just in time to see, by the dim light of a guttering candle, two forms gripped in Butternut's grim embrace.

One of those forms was Baggy Trimble's, the other was that of the scoundrel Blader!

The two juniors rushed forward, shouting for help as they ran. But to wait for help was out of the question. Before it arrived both of the bear's captives might be hugged to death, for plainly Butternut was in no playful mood.

Tom snatched up a heavy stick from a rack, and dealt the bear a lusty blow. Gussy beat the animal's back with his fists. He meant well, but the blows had about as much effect upon Butternut as they might have had upon the Monument.

But the bear felt Tom's blow, and turned savagely upon him, releasing both Baggy and Blader.

The fat junior tumbled over, gasping and moaning; the man bolted.

Tom bolted, too, with Butternut in lumbering pursuit. Gussy went after Blader. The swell of the Fourth was strung up to the point of daring any danger that night.

Now above them sounded the patter of many feet, the shrill yapping of Pongo, Towser's deep growl. Down the staircase came a rush, and Jolly Nicholas headed it.

That was lucky for Tom Merry, for the brown bear was really savage, and perhaps no one but Nicholas could have held him in check then.

Nicholas did it, though the great creature glared at him with blood-shot eyes, and growled in his throat fiercely.

Arthur Augustus came rushing back.

"He's gone to gwound in the cellah!" he panted.

"Who?" asked Manners major.

"Why, Bladah, of course! The wascal must have been hidin' theah all the time!"

"And that's where Butternut was, too, bet your life!" said the clown. "Blader wouldn't reli-his company; but they'd get along all right as long as the fellow was civil."

"He's locked the doah," said Gussy.

"Thought you said it couldn't be locked from inside, Wally?" said Blake.

"Well, I was wrong for once," admitted D'Arcy minor.

"That's nothing. You old fogies are wrong as near all the time as makes no odds."

"Any other way out of the cellar, sir?" asked Mr. Horsman.

"Theah's a flap at the far end in the yard," answered Gussy.

"It must be watched. We've got the rascal trapped, and he musn't be let slip through our fingers," said the circus proprietor. "Take that brute out of this, Nick! I'll come with you and watch the flap. We'd better put on overcoats. It won't be sultry—no Mesopotamia about it, I reckon!"

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus also donned overcoats and went out. A crowd of the rest gathered about the cellar door, while Lowther and Herries escorted Baggy Trimble back to bed, not forgetting to tell him what they thought of him on the way.

The snow had not been shifted from the cellar flap, which made it clear that Blader was still a self-made prisoner.

"But he'll have to surrender when his provisions give out!" said Horsman grimly. The circus proprietor knew of the waylaying of Gussy now, and his knowledge of the time taken by the various items of the programme enabled him to say confidently that Blader might have played the footpad and yet been back in time to establish what would seem to those who knew less an alibi.

And Mr. Horsman had very little doubt that Blader had

been the footpad. He could believe anything of a deserter, he said.

No one but Baggy went back to bed. The rest were far too full of excitement to think of going.

With the tardy dawn some of the circus folk took their places at the flap, relieving the other watchers. They were told something of Blader's misdoings, and Horsman said they were to be trusted.

But through their default the scoundrel nearly escaped.

Yells of warning brought breakfast to a sudden end. There was an instant rush for the front door, and round the house to the yards.

The watch of the circus folk had been badly kept. Blader had pushed up the flap a few inches, seen his chance, and made a break for escape.

He was running at top speed over the now hard-frozen snow for the gates when he was sighted, and he had so long a lead that he might well have got clear.

But something quite unexpected intervened. Out from the barn stalked Tamerlane, the elephant, barring his path.

He dodged and shrieked in fear, for he saw that the enormous animal was hostile, and Blader knew what an elephant's long-cherished enmity means.

The long, prehensile trunk shot out to full length. It twined around the man's body; it lifted him clean off his feet, right up into the air.

"Great heavens, the brute means murder!" cried Horsman. And he and Nicholas raced one another to avert the threatened tragedy.

Just in time! For a moment it seemed that Tamerlane would rebel. Who knows what memories of past ill-treatment stirred through his massive brain?

But Jolly Nicholas spoke. And he obeyed. Slowly, unwillingly, he lowered the fellow to the ground. Blader staggered over in a faint.

Then came Miss Dora, in wild haste, and threw herself in the snow by his side, and wailed and entreated and even swore.

Gussy was shocked to the depths.

"Weally, Dowa—"

"Oh, go to Bath, you putty-faced tailor's dummy of a silly kid!" screamed the lady of his love. And Gussy was cured within the almost incredibly short space of a single second.

Dora was not the angel of his dreams, and he saw her now as she really was—a good-looking, but essentially coarse and vulgar woman, almost old enough to be his mother!

Gussy's lost property was found on Blader, and he was marched off to the police-station as soon as he came to. Whether the military authorities would put in a claim to him they could only conjecture. The gallant sergeant-major said they had pretty nearly all sorts in the Army; but he rather fancied they could do without Blader's sort.

Butternut's sharing of the cellar with Blader was accounted for by Jolly Nicholas in this way. The bear had got into the house, and frightened the maids and the footman, they knew. Butternut was not wholly free from alarm himself, it was likely, and, seeing the cellar-door ajar, had taken refuge there. Blader, no doubt, had sneaked out to reconnoitre or to forage, and when he had found the bear in the cellar he had made the best of it. Perhaps he had not been sorry to have the animal's warm body to snuggle up against, for, though he had provided himself with blankets, the temperature of the cellar could hardly have been quite cheerful.

The key he had stolen from the butler's pantry. Watkins had not even thought of making sure it was still there. Some keys were, and that had satisfied Watkins.

It was a very chastened Arthur Augustus who saw Miss Dora depart, under escort of Mrs. Horsman, and accompanied by Miss Dolly. But Gussy would not have lifted his little finger to call her back!

On the day after Boxing Day Lord Eastwood put in an unexpected appearance. He heard the whole story. Gussy insisted on making a clean breast of it, though Tom Merry would not have told.

He did not nag. "The patah never does nag, you know," said Gussy. But he looked very grave indeed, and his few words of thanks to Tom were very warm.

In the matter of the hospitality accorded to the circus folk he had no blame to give his son, and he readily consented to Gussy's suggestion that something should be done to make good Mr. Horsman's loss, though on that score there was opposition to overcome from Horsman himself. He gave way at length, however, and when the circus people left, all the St. Jim's fellows felt that they were parting from old and good friends in Jolly Nicholas and his "guv'nor."

"Why, bless you, lads, we shall meet again!" said Horsman gaily. "I'm going to tour Sussex next year."

Baggy Trimble had an interview with Lord Eastwood, and then a carriage took Baggy to the station. No one had wanted to tell tales about the fat waster; but it was impossible to tell the whole story and leave Baggy out.

Baggy has met a real, live earl, and that is a memory Baggy will cherish. But he has since been heard to say plaintively that he was very badly treated at Eastwood House, for it was he who really ran Blader to earth, and no one gave him a word of thanks for it!

Tom Merry had had quite enough of the seats of the mighty. Gussy might regret the fall from power, but not Tom. The rest of the holiday was a far jollier time for him—and jolly it was for everybody, no mistake about that!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE THIRD FORM SWEEPSTAKE!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

## CONUNDRUMS.

Which is the most awkward time for a train to start?  
12.50; as it's ten to one if you catch it.

Why is a ten-shilling note better than a new half-sovereign?  
Because when you fold it you double it, and when you open it you find it in-creases.

Why is a sculptor's death the most terrible?  
Because he makes faces and busts.

What is the oldest piece of furniture in the world?  
The multiplication table.

What is the difference between an engine-driver and a schoolmaster?

One minds the train, and the other trains the mind.

What fastens two people together, yet touches only one?  
The wedding-ring.

What is the longest word in the language?  
Smiles; because there is a mile between the first and last letter.

Which travels slower—heat or cold?  
Cold; for you can catch it.

What relation is a doormat to a doorstep?  
A "step farther."

When can donkey be spelt with one letter?  
When it is "U."

Why are clouds like coachmen?  
Because they hold the rains (reins).

Why is a policeman like a rainbow?  
Because he rarely appears until the storm is over.

What is that which never asks questions, yet requires many answers?  
The door-bell.

What is that which goes up the hill and down the hill, and yet stands still?  
The road.

Why cannot a deaf man be legally convicted?  
Because it is unlawful to condemn a man without a hearing.

Why would a compliment from a chicken be an insult?  
Because it would be fowl language.

Why is a watch like a river?  
Because it won't run long without winding.

Who was the fastest runner in the world?  
Adam; because he was first in the human race.

Why is "E" the most unfortunate of letters?  
Because it is never in cash, always in debt, and never out of danger.

Why is a good actor like a good architect?  
Because they both draw good houses.

MY OPINION OF PUBLICK SKOOLS.

By BAGGY TRIMBLE.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—It must be distinctly understood that the Editor accepts no more responsibility for the views of his contributors than he does for their weird spelling, or their erratic use of capital letters, after the sixteenth century manner, to mark the words regarded as of special importance—such as "Grubb."

Their are lotts of things the matter with Publick Skools, but I have nott time to tel about t<sup>is</sup> awl.

I will, theifor, confine Myself to my Cheef Objektions. The first is Grubb.

The Grubb is not so good as ekspected, and their is nott enuff of it. Wott's the use of fore meesny Meels a day to a Felloe with ann Apptyght?

Their aught to be Seven at leest, and Snaks between. Moorover, the Meels should be Bigger and Moor Norrishshg.

How can you kall itt Egs and Bacon, wen their is onely one Eg, and the Bacon is konceeled under itt?

I kall it a-meer Impersitshun.

And, tawking about Impersitshuns, watts the use of riting lines? I get Lotts of them, but they don't do me enny Good.

My handriting is sumthing shokking, and awl due to lines.

This proves they are a mistaik.

Wuns, wen I shoed upp some lines which I had kollered from a fagg in the sekond form, and the little beest kried, which shoes his sillyness, mr. lathom sed, watt's the youse of pretending these are in your riting, Trimble, wen itt is evvydent they are the work of sumwun who rites a farr better hand than yores? Then he gave me the Kain, which I kall yerry, ungest.

Then their is the subject of masters. They are a most Scrowgy Krew, and nott wunn' of them has anny reel sence of gustice.

They seam to immagin a Felloe kums to skool to stuff his hed with lattin and yuclid and aljebber and such tommyrott, insted of—

(A line is deleted here. Our readers will have no difficulty in guessing what our unesteemed contributor wishes to stuff in preference to his head; but his language is so very frank that we feel some doubt as to its getting past the Censor.—EDITOR.)

As for the felloes, I never sore such a meen sett. Wen I wack out my Vast Remitences from Trimble Hall, they are round me like a Flok of Bees. But wen I happen to be Stoney, having maid Eksténsif Lones, they say I am a Spunjer, and other Disagreabel Naims, wich is unfare.

Butt they kanot dispise me halph as much as I Skorn them, the beests!

I am nott one of those Chaps who have nott an Idee in there Heds.

My Ideers are these.

Publick Skools wood bee grately Improved if masters were kompletely Abbolished and lessons maid Opshernal.

Of kors, Meels shoob be Obligatory.

A skollership shoob be giffen to the Felloe with the Best Apptyght.

This shoob bee maid so that he cood talk itt out in Tuk.

But this World is not Parrydisce. Qwite the contrary at times, indee.

I remember—

(We will leave Baggy to his memories, which seem to have come to him in dreams, for he stopped here, and was snoring with forty-trumpet-power when one of my subs collared this essay. On awaking, I understand, he found his face adorned with streaks of black, red, and violet ink. But I have no evidence as to whose work this was, and Lowther gives evasive answers when I press the point.—EDITOR.)

CORRESPONDENCE.

(Conducted by the EDITOR.)

D'ARCY ON WAR ECONOMY.

"Dear Boy.—I trust a few remarks on war economy will be acceptable to your readers at the present crisis, when even members of the Cabinet are beginning to realise that the posish is serious. With so much tin going in guns, shells, and official salaries, it is necessary for everyone to be very careful, and I trust an example will be set by St. Jim's. I have, therefore, thought out the following hints on war economy:

"1. Never buy a new topper till you have worn the old one at least a fortnight.

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"2. Always count your change when you change a fiver at the tuckshop.

"3. Never give more than seven-and-six for a necktie, and make it last a week.

"4. Don't take expensive seats at the theatre. A guinea stall is good enough for anybody, especially in war-time.

"5. Don't be extravagant in dress. Etons that have been worn a month can be cleaned and pressed, and worn a week longer.

"6. Don't waste money on jewellery. A fellow who gives more than ten pounds for a tie-pin in war-time is unpatriotic.—Yours, etc.,

"ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

NOTE BY EDITOR.—We thank our esteemed contributor for his valuable hints, and we solemnly undertake not to give ten pounds for a tie-pin even after the war.

GRUNDY AGAIN.

"Dear Sir,—I notiss that my contribewtions have been ekscluded from the weakly evvery time. I refuse to send any more contribewtions, and shall shortly be prodwucing a rivle jernal, 'Grundy's Weakly.' This jernal will give your rotten rag the kybosh, both in literary merrit and korrekct orthografy.—Yores kontemptuousley,

"GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY."

NOTE BY EDITOR.—Is our valued correspondent referring to his headpiece in his remark, "Grundy's Weakly"? He has our sympathy.

FROM THE NABOB OF GREYFRIARS.

"Venerable and ridiculous Sir,—It is with terrific pleasurefulness that I take up the esteemed pen to indite a few lines to your noble and ludicrous self. The esteemed Wharton brought home a copy of your valuable and disgusting journal, which was read by all hands with joyful deprecation. We are lookfully forwarding to the Christmas Number, which we are sure will go like warm cakes. May your respected shadow never grow less, is the atrocious wish of your devoted and ridiculous reader,

"HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH."

NOTE BY EDITOR.—We thank our correspondent for his good wishes, and congratulate him upon his mastery of the English language, which we consider terrific.

WANTS COLUMN.

Rekwired, in ekshange for a yallybale poket-nife, tarts or other Approved Grubb. No kwestshuns to bee asked.—Aplie, B. T., Shel Passaije.

Urgently needed, Professor Balmcrumpet's great work on the "Psychology of the Natives of the Uninhabited Islands of the Arctic Ocean." Must be cheap, as advertiser is not in affluent circumstances at the present moment, owing to his devotion to study, and the necessity of purchasing expensive volumes.—H. S., Shell Passage.

(Quite sure that a certain little flutter—on purely scientific principles, of course—with W—s had nothing to do with the monetary tightness, S—y, old dear?—M. L.)

Wanted, a plaice in the Jewnior Footer Teem by the best player in the Shel or Forth.—G. A. G.

Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth Form, desires to know the names of the miscreant or miscreants who filled his best patent-leather boots with what appears to be a mixture of glue, hair-oil, soot, and treacle. Reward offered, a thundering good liking!

(Don't all speak at once, dear boys!—M. L.)

For Sale, twenty-five (25) fancy waistcoats, in the most chaste and attractive designs; a large number of neckties, fashionable up to and even beyond the limit, and little worn; seventeen (17) toppers (with some of these footer has been played, but others are quite all right, deah boys!); and a quantity of other assorted clothing of superior quality. Advertiser, having recognised at last the fact that we are at war, proposes to wear cardigans and corduroys in future.—Apply to A. A. D'A., Study No. 6, Fourth-Form Passage.

(The authenticity of the above ad. has been denied with indignation. But it certainly came to us from Study No. 6; and as the usual rates for advertisements of this nature have been paid upon it—with what appears to be a bad German mark—we consider that there is no valid reason against its insertion.—EDITOR.)

thought that anybody else might have a wed flowah in her hat! Oh, cwumbs! What a wotten coincidence!"

He looked round from the quad. Miss Taggles was coming in, and she shook a bulky umbrella at the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus fled, and did not stop till he was safe in Study No. 6.

Five minutes later a charming young lady, with a red flower in her hat, stopped at the school gates, and looked round in a perplexed way for some minutes before she passed on. And the next time Arthur Augustus rang up the bunshop he was cut off so suddenly that he hadn't even time to give an order.

THE END.



## THE MISTERY OF MASS'S PENNEY!

A Scoole Yarn, by JOE FRAYNE.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Readers may observe that the youthful author has made a few mistakes in his manuscript. The printers had special instructions not to alter them. There seem to be several mysteries in the story—why another penny would not have served the turn of Mass quite as well; to what the gross conduct of Smith minor was due, and who lost the farthing? But never mind!

### CHAPTER I.

Breakin' the Noos Gentley!

"Hi, hi, hi!" yelled Bingham of the Third Form at Puddleingham scoole, as 'is chum A. A. O. Mass crossed the kloose of the scoole, after haveing seen that his white mice were still in there kage.

"Wel?" snapped Arther Albert Orgustus Mass, ternin' round.

"Wot the—witch the—is the mater with u, Art, old chap?" asked Bingham, in surprise.

"Nuthin' perticular," was the repli.

"Now, do tel me?" said Bingham.

"I don't no if i ought-ter tel u, Bingy," replied Mass, in a sorrowfool tone.

"Don't be a silly ass! Tel me, do!" grunted Bingham, in some anger.

"Wel, it's like this here—"

"Yes!"

"I—"

Here Mass stoped to recover his breathe, and to fumbul in his pokett. After searchin' fer about a quarter of an hour, he produced a farthin'.

"Tel the yarn," said Bingham impatientley.

"I am komeing to it," said Mass, neerley breakin' into tears. "Do u sea this farthin'?" Mass held up the koin.

"Wel, wot of it?" asked his chum, in wonder.

"Wel," said Mass, hangin' on his wercs, "I lost a penney, and found this instead, and—"

"Never mind," said Bingham konsollingley.

"But I do mind, bekoss this farthin' is a bad 'un!"

The unfortunate Mass burst into—wel, the reeder nos.

### CHAPTER 2.

The Return of the Lost Koin.

"How do u feel?"

Bingham asked the question of Mass. Bingham, with the help of a koupel of juniers, had karried Mass into the Third Form Kommon-room, and had given the pore lad a drink to revive him.

"Mi penney!" was all the arnser he got.

"Now, don't worrie about that penney, for goodness' sake, or u wil make yourself il. Another thing, it's bound to tern up in the long run. Besides, here's a penney to make it up," said the good-naturered Bingham, extendin' a koin of that valu."

"I don't want it. I want mi penney, and mi penney I meen to have!" groaned Mass retchedly, on the point of a kollapse.

"Now, do be reasonable, Mass!" said Bingham.

"I tel u I want mi penney!"

Suddenly the door of the Kommon-room was thrown open, and Smith miner dashed in. He rushed strait at Mass, court hold of him, and started pommelin' the pore lad, without any cause wotsoever.

At that Mass woke up, as it wear, and then the funn began.

Bif! Bang! Bash!

The too combatants went for each other hammer and tongs, Crash!

At last Mass had the uper hand of his assailent, and Smith miner went down like a leaf, with a bump.

"Yow! Grooooh! Owww, my dose! I give yer best, young Mass!" groaned the unhappy junier.

"Wel, you beter buz off, Smith. No; hold hard. We mite as wel giv u sumthing to remember, not to kome dashin' into a gentelman's room, and goin' for one of its inhabitants for nuthin'," said Bingham tartley.

Smith miner made a rush for the door, but he was kollered by the too juniers, and went threw a severe bumping.

They let him go at last, and as he krauled to the door, Mass raised his boot to give him a parting greating.

Then sumthin' startling hapened.

There was a dule ring on the carpet. Mass terned to look.

"My hat!" he gasped. "Hooray!"

Mass pounced upon the artical he saw on the floor, picked it up, and held it in frunt of him for everyone to survey it.

Wot was it?

The penney!

"Hooray!" yelled Mass again, in much delite.

And so the penney which Mass valued so much returned. It had been in the terned-up part of his trousers all the time!

THE END.



## THE RED ROVER!

Grand Serial, by GEORGE FIGGINS.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Exigencies of space have compelled us to use the blue pencil rather freely upon Figgy's serial. The result is a certain amount of scrappiness, but readers are at liberty to fill up the blanks for themselves.

### CHAPTER I.

"A sail!"

The cry rang out over the deck of the Red Rover.

The rakish schooner was skimming the blue waves of the Pacific.

"Ha!" cried the Red Rover. "A sail! Aha!"

The black flag was run up to the masthead, and the Red Rover . . . exploded with a terrific roar. Fragments were hurled far and wide over the blue waves of the Pacific. Meanwhile, the pirate crew . . . grew darker and darker, and overspread the whole expanse of the heavens. The wind whistled fiercely through the rigging, and the rakish schooner . . . lifted the cup to his lips, and drained the fiery draught.

"Ha!" he cried. "Revenge!"

Scarcely had the words left his lips, when a volley of grapeshot burst from the . . . gentle and smiling maiden. Her blue eyes gazed upon our hero, whose heart beat . . . sixty-five revolutions to the minute. Down in the stokehold, the grimy stokers were piling coal upon . . . the white, reverend head of the old sea-captain. Tears flowed down his rugged cheeks as he clasped his long-lost daughter to his breast, and cried

"Die, villain! With this trusty blade I will . . . take a reef in the mainsail! Hoist up the top-gallants!"

Like a white bird, the Red Rover fled over the blue waves of the . . . palm-shaded coral island.

Amid the peaceful shades of the palms, the . . . storm roared with terrific violence. Huge waves rolled round the wreck, and our hero, clinging to the floating spar amid the angry billows, heard . . . the soft song of the nightingale that welcomed him home. Everything was the same as of old, and he wept as he thought of the happy days he had spent in that sylvan home, where the . . . bodies of the slain lay in heaps, and the scuppers ran with gore! In the midst of the fray, our hero's sword flashed like lightning, as he slashed fiercely at . . . the old sea-captain and his daughter, now so happily reunited.

(To be continued.)

Wanted, a football. Offered in exchange, a handsome volume (leaves uncut; a present), entitled "Lives of Eminent Philosophers." Football need not be new. Or one shilling (1s.) would be accepted. Book cost seven-and-six (7s. 6d.).—Gibson, Third Form.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 458.

Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price, 1d., and will contain a Long, Complete Story, entitled:

"THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

# EXTRACTS FROM RECENT NUMBERS OF "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

## GUSSY'S LITTLE MISTAKE.

By MONTY LOWTHER.

I.

"It's Gussy!"  
"At the telephone!"  
"Shush!"  
Tom Merry & Co. grinned joyously.  
The prefects' room, in the School House at St. Jim's, was deserted—otherwise Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form could not have been busy at the telephone.  
The swell of St. Jim's was quite unaware that a crowd of juniors had gathered in the doorway to look on.  
"Yaas, I am heah!" he was remarking to the transmitter.  
"How awfully good of you to wing me up, Mabel!"  
"Mabel!" murmured Blake.  
"Good old Gussy!"  
"Shush!"  
What Mabel said at the other end of the wire the juniors did not know. But they could guess from D'Arcy's next remark.

"Bai Jove! It will be a gweat pleasuah, deah gal! It is vewy kind of you to allow me to take you for a little stwoll."  
The juniors suppressed their chortles with difficulty.  
"Yaas, I shall be delighted, deah gal! But how shall I know you, as we have nevah met?"

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "The mery duffer's making an appointment with a girl he has never met!"  
"Oh, crumbs!"  
"That's why the young ass has always telephoned to the bun-shop the last week or two!" grinned Blake. "He's always dodging the prefects, to use the telephone. He's made an acquaintance over the wires!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Arthur Augustus heard them then, and looked round wrathfully.

"Pway wun away, you wottahs!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"You uttah asses—Yaas, deah gal!" Arthur Augustus had to turn to the telephone again. "Yaas, certainly! I shall be there. I shall be waitin' at the school gates at five o'clock pweicely; so you will know me. But how shall I know you?"

"Echo answers how," murmured Blake.  
"Bai Jove! What a wippin' ideah! A wed flowah in your hat—first wate! You will weah a wed flowah in your hat? Good!"

"Ripping!" said Manners.  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Five o'clock pweicely, deah gal, at the school gates; and you will weah a wed flowah in your hat. If you are late, of course I will wait—yaas, wottah! Good-bye, Mabel!"

Arthur Augustus rang off.  
He turned, with a pink face, from the telephone, and jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the chuckling juniors wrathfully.

"You uttah asses—"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I wegard you as inquisitive and diswespectful beasts—"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin' all wound!" shouted Arthur Augustus.  
"Hallo! What are all you kids doing here?" exclaimed Kildare of the Sixth, coming in. "Clear off!"

And the juniors cleared off, still chortling, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stalked away, with his noble nose very high in the air. Arthur Augustus saw nothing whatever comic in his appointment with the new young lady at the bun-shop. He had known her quite a long time—on the telephone. But the other fellows seemed to see something very comic in it, and they yelled.

II.

"There he goes!" grinned Blake.  
Five o'clock was chiming out from the clock-tower when Arthur Augustus sauntered elegantly down to the gates.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 458.

OUR COMPANION THE "BOYS' FRIEND," THE "MAGNET," "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 1d. PAPERS: Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Saturday. 2

The swell of St. Jim's was looking his nattiest. If anything could have exceeded the glossiness of his topper, it was the polish of his boots. But nothing could have beaten the set of his necktie or the spotlessness of his collar.

The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyeglass for a moment disparagingly on his grinning chums, and took no further notice of them. He left them grinning. Quite heedless of their grins, Arthur Augustus stationed himself in the old gateway, to wait for the lady whom he was to know by the red flower in her hat.

Ten minutes passed. Evidently Mabel was taking full advantage of the lady's privilege of being late.  
But a figure came in sight at last.

Arthur Augustus's noble heart beat a little faster. It was a feminine form that was coming up the road.

As the lady drew nearer, D'Arcy scanned her carefully. There was a red flower in the hat, glimmering in the sun.

"Bai Jove, Mabel!" murmured Arthur Augustus.  
But the ecstatic expression faded from his face as the lady with the red flower came nearer.

The voice on the telephone had been quite sweet.  
But the lady coming up to the gates of St. Jim's, with the red flower in her hat, did not look very sweet.

She was forty-five at least, and powerfully built; and Arthur Augustus, though he regarded every member of the gentle sex with veneration, was conscious of a feeling of uneasy disappointment.

He had not supposed that Mabel was old enough to be his parent!

But the beautiful manners of the noble caste of Vere de Vere was not likely to fail Arthur Augustus even in this emergency.

Young or middle-aged or old, pretty or plain, the lady had come to keep the appointment on the telephone, and it was up to Arthur Augustus to take her for the proposed stroll, and to take her to tea in the village, as arranged, with the most exquisite urbanity.

He was equal to the test.

As the lady came up to the gates Arthur Augustus stepped forward, raising his silk topper gracefully.

"How wippin' of you to come!" he said.  
The lady halted.

"So jolly glad to see you, deah gal!" ventured Arthur Augustus.

"What?"  
"Shall we stwoll towards the village?"

"Eh?"  
"There is a vewy cosy place where we can have tea, deah gal—"

"Boy!"

"I twest we shall have a vewy agweeable stwoll, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus, faltering a little.

The lady did not look very agreeable. She seemed to be astounded—in fact transfixed!

"Young impudence!" she stammered at last. "How dare you!"

"Bai Jove!"  
"How dare you! Take that!"  
"Yaroooh!"

Arthur Augustus took it—he couldn't help it! It was a sounding box on the ear. The swell of St. Jim's staggered back in astonishment and horror.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.  
"Take me to tea, indeed!" snapped the lady.

"Oh, ewumbs!"  
"Hallo, Maria!" Taggles, the porter, came out of the lodge. "You've got 'ere, then? The missus has got tea ready. Hallo! Wot's the trouble?"

"I've been insulted!" snapped Maria. "Who is that boy, uncle?"

"Uncle!" stammered Arthur Augustus. "Gweat Scott! Is—is this a visitah for you, Taggles?"

"Yes!" gasped Taggles. "My niece, Master D'Arcy."  
"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus did not stay to explain. With burning cheeks, he fled. Miss Taggles tossed her head, and followed the astonished porter in.

"Oh, ewumbs!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "I—I nevah



## THE RED KNIGHT OF RYLCOMBE.

By RICHARD BROOKE.

(EDITOR'S NOTE.—I cannot get it out of Dick Brooke whether in this story he has used some local legend, or whether it is all out of his own head. But it does not matter much which is the case, as it seems to me quite a good yarn. If my readers do not agree, I can't help it. I am editor, anyway. 'Nuff said!)

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The lists were set on the Moor of Wayland, and for a day and half a day beyond that the five knights' challengers had held them against all comers.

And well they might, for right doughty champions were they!

Their shields hung in front of their tents at one end of the long lists. And by the bearings upon those shields men knew who waited within, ready to face any who dared to face them.

And one shield bore the arms of Edward, first Prince of Wales—first English Prince of Wales, that is. For Llewellyn and David and their forefathers had been princes in the land of mountain and vale. But they had died, and Wales was a vassal state now, conquered by the stern-faced king who looked down from his high seat upon this mimic warfare—that great warrior king called Edward Longshanks.

Gilbert de Clare, the mighty Earl of Gloucester; Robert de Clifford, of the great northern house; John de Harcourt; and last, not least, the good knight Sir Giles de Argentine. Such were the four who held the lists with the King's son.

And against them had ridden many of the best of England's chivalry, and some even from far Scotland, and two gallant levights of Fair France. Twice the Prince of Wales had been unhorsed; but on the whole had borne himself well, though no such warrior as his stern sire. And twice de Harcourt had been beaten. But the great Earl of Gloucester and the stark Clifford, and that good knight Sir Charles de Argentine—none had been found to lower their proud crests.

Now, as it seemed, there were no more to come against them. The knights' challengers had won, and all around the lists men debated to which of them the King would award the prize of victory, for indeed choice was hard, since Gloucester and the Clifford and De Argentine were all unbeaten and unscathed.

Then, at the far end of the lists a solitary trumpet pealed, and into the lists paced a red roan horse with a red rider in the saddle.

His armour was painted red. His shield was red, save for the strange device of a grinning skull upon it in white. The plume that fluttered above his helmet was red.

None knew that strange device. In all the heralds' lore no such arms belonged to any knight in western Europe. But that mattered little. To win fame, knights would adopt devices not their own, so that unknown they might fight, and by winning thus unknown increase the glory of victory.

Slowly the red roan horse paced down the lists until he was close to the pavilions of the knights challengers.

Then his rider reined him in. With the blunt end of his lance he touched the shield of De Clare.

He reined his horse backwards. Gloucester's great earl came out, fully accoutred for the fray, a fine figure of a man.

The combats he had fought had not sapped his vigour. He was still fit to fight for his life. But that was needless. This combat was not to the death. Had it been so there would have been no blunting of lances. The Red Knight would have struck the shield with the sharp end of his lance, and, with sharpened lances they would have fought.

Yet much may be done with the blunted weapon in strong and skilful hands, and so found the great Earl of Gloucester. Strong and skilful was he, yet the resistless charge of the Red Knight swept him from his horse's back, and for the first time in that tourney he knew the bitterness of defeat!

The stern-faced King, whose attention had grown slack, had his eyes bent eagerly upon the lists now.

"Splendour of Heaven!" he swore. "I thought there was scarce the man in all broad Britain who might so deal with De Clare since Geoffrey, mine old friend and brother-in-arms, died a traitor!"

But not alone to De Clare was the bitterness of defeat. The stark Clifford tasted it, too, and De Harcourt was over-matched most plainly, and even the good knight De Argentine went down. Last of all, Edward Prince of Wales was hurled back over his horse's crupper with such exceeding force that blood gushed from his nose and ears as he smote the ground.

Then the King gave his verdict, and the marshals of the lists agreed, and the heralds made it known, and men hailed

the Red Knight as Champion of the Tournament, seeing that he had so signally defeated, one by one, each of the knights challengers."

### THE SECOND CHAPTER.

"I will lift my vizor to the King alone," said the Red Knight.

In vain the marshals of the lists argued with him.

At last they told the King.

"Bring him to my pavilion," said King Edward shortly.

"Be on your guard against treachery, sire!" said the grizzled senior of the two.

"When feared I ever treachery? And why need any man fear it from so brave a knight as this?"

The Red Knight was brought before the King. The marshals retired.

Then, and not till then, did the victor of the tournament lift his vizor and show his face.

It was no youthful face. There were lines upon it, and above the temples the close-cut hair was grey.

"Geoffrey de Rylcombe!" cried the King. "Nay; but I guessed it when stout De Clare went down before your lance! Yet could I not believe, for men rise not from the dead to fight again."

"But men deemed dead may yet walk the world, sire."

"You were adjudged a traitor, De Rylcombe!" said Edward of England sternly.

"Falsely was I accused, sire, and wrongfully condemned! False witness was borne against me, and I had no chance to speak in my own defence."

"Show me proof, De Rylcombe!"

"That, on the instant, can I not. But I appeal from the judgment of Edward King of England to that Edward de Plantagenet, whose brother-in-arms I was—he who saved my life in the Holy Land what time we made the crusade together!"

The stern face of Edward Longshanks softened.

"Ay, Geoffrey! Once I stood between you and death, but thrice you saved me. Remember the ditch of Acre; remember the ramparts of Joppa; remember the battle at Evesham, when that stark traitor De Montfort went down!"

"I put these things from my memory when Plantagenet, condemned me unheard!" replied the Red Knight proudly.

"De Montfort was a gallant warrior, yet De Montfort was a traitor."

"They lied to you, sire, when they called me such!"

"Who lied?" thundered the King. "You impeach the honour of my house, De Rylcombe! Know you who was your chief accuser?"

"Ay! Edward of Carnarvon, Prince of Wales, the unworthy son of a great father!" answered the Red Knight, meeting firmly the King's angry glare.

A shadow as of pain passed over the King's face, for now he knew better than before he had known that in his son there was much that was evil and weak. Ill councillors ruled him, and he did that which was hateful in the sight of his stern sire.

"And why?" demanded the King.

"I was to have wed the Lady Alicia Glanville. Your son—"

"Speak not of that! Too well I know the story of that most unhappy lady. The temptation was there, and I fear me Edward fights temptation but feebly. Yet, it goes hard to think him so base! Had another told me, scarce could I have believed."

"It is true, sire."

"You cannot choose but believe, Geoffrey. Yet, again, all men held you dead! Is there magic in this? You fell, they say, fighting at the head of your friends and vassals. They brought me your shield, with many a gash and dent upon it, and I said then that my old friend had died hard!"

"It was another who died in my stead, sire; yet I think you would have named him friend also, for the sake of our old crusading days. Raoul, my foster-brother, my squire then, bore my arms and led my men."

"He was no knight."

"I knighted him. And he was more than my foster-brother, thou knowest, sire. There was the blood of our race in his veins, though in men's eyes he was not my brother."

"Ay, I know, Geoffrey! Peace to the soul of Raoul! He was a gallant man. But how came it that you were not in the fight?"

"I lay sick unto death, or nigh it—poisoned, they said."

"Who said?"

"The good monks to whom I owe my life—a life made waste!"

A silence fell upon the two. There were bitter thoughts in the King's mind, but the bitterness was not for the man before him.

"Stay with me, Geoffrey," he said at length. And for the

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 438.

Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price, 1d., and will contain a Long, Complete Story, entitled:

"THE THIRD-FORM SWEEPSTAKE!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

first time De Rylcombe heard the ring of weariness in the voice of that man of iron. "Affairs go not wholly well, and I need men I can trust."

The Red Knight knelt and kissed the King's hand. "I had thought to travel again to Palestine, if but as a simple palmer," he said. "But while Edward of England hath need of Geoffrey de Rylcombe, his place is here!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

And before a week had passed the need was great. That there were traitors about him, King Edward knew; but, in his pride, he would not stoop to guard against them, as a less brave man might have done.

It was on De Rylcombe's own pleading that he was made captain of the guard, with a place in the King's antechamber. Old campaigner that he was, he could sleep, as it seemed, with one eye open; yet that attempt was so cleverly conceived, and it came so suddenly, that almost was he overborne.

"To me, loyal men!" his cry rang out in the darkness. "House of the King! Rescue! To me!"

And three traitors went down before the swing of his great sword—one with helm cloven, one with a ghastly wound in his throat, the third with a broken sword in his body!

Men came hurrying, lights flared, the King appeared. A fourth traitor lay dead, throttled by the strong hands of the Red Knight. A fifth fell, and then, in the very moment of rescue, a dagger found the knight's brave heart.

Little of the traitors thought the stern King in that first moment. He knelt by De Rylcombe's side, and in his proud eyes was the gleam of unshed tears.

"God rest his soul!" he said. "For me, I shall never look upon his like again. Good knights have I many, but there was but one Geoffrey de Rylcombe, and here he lies! By all the saints, they shall rue it who wrought this foulness!"

THE END.



NOTICES.

Football.

[In order to get in as many notices as possible, those included have been cut down to the shortest possible limits. It should be understood that the figures in brackets always refer to age, and that "r." means "radius." Where these particulars are omitted they were not supplied by sender of notice. All applications may be taken for home and away matches.]

Matches Wanted by:

- KILDARE F.C. (17).—E. W. Lunnou, 14, Porchester Gardens, Bayswater, W.
- ELBOROUGH F.C. (15½)—Croydon district.—T. P. Warin, 105, Crowther Rd., South Norwood, S.E.
- A Dulwich Team (17, medium)—in South London district.—M. Edwards, 100, Clive Rd., Dulwich, S.E.
- A Liverpool Team (12).—J. Bayley, 14, Avon St., Belmont Rd., Anfield, Liverpool.
- M.H.F.C. (14).—F. H. Smith, 8, Brady's Buildings, Barnet Grove, Bethnal Green, N.
- ST. PETER'S PARK F.C. (14)—4-mile r.—J. Linfield, 26, Chippenham Rd., Harrow Rd., London, W.
- SHIRLEY CHURCH LADS' BRIGADE (14-16)—8-mile r.—C. L. Grinyer, 13, Wilton Rd., Shirley, Southampton.
- PEEL GREEN LADS' F.C. (16)—4-mile r. Eccles.—A. Green, 7, Park St., Patricroft, Manchester.
- AVONDALE JUNIORS F.C. (16-17)—ground at Hampstead.—G. H. Matthews, 143A, Kilburn Lane, Paddington, W.
- GRANGE ESTATE F.C. (14-15)—7-mile r.—R. Blakey, 23, Gray's Rd., Stockton-on-Tees.
- A Sheffield Team (12-13)—3-mile r.—C. B. Smalley, 31, Providence Rd., Walkley, Sheffield.
- EASTCLIFFE F.C. (15)—3-mile r.—G. Knox, 62, North View, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne.
- DEVON F.C. (14-16, strong)—6-mile r.—A. Moncur, 12, Claucus St., Bow, E.
- CLAY GARDENS F.C. (14).—F. Johnson, Littlemoor Lodge, Queensbury, near Bradford. Three good players also wanted.
- WHITEHEAD JUNIORS F.C. (16)—5-mile r.—R. C. Howe, Whitehead Aircraft C., Townsend Terr., Richmond, Surrey.
- WEST HAMPESTEAD F.C. (15½)—5-mile r.—H. J. Brickell, 32, Sumatra Rd., West Hampstead, N.W.
- ST. SAVIOUR'S F.C. (13).—East Dulwich district.—W. A. Colley, 102A, Hindman's Rd., East Dulwich, S.E.
- ST. MATTHEW'S F.C. (16½)—8-mile r.—C. Brewer, 76, Eastfield St., Stepney, E.

PARAGON F.C. (16)—2½-mile r.—W. R. Reynolds, 46, Darnley Rd., Mare St., Hackney, N.E. Also require one or two good halves.

KIRKDALE JUNIORS (16).—John Yoxon, 65, Cranmer St., Stanley Rd., Liverpool.

TOPLEY UNITED—4-mile r. Queen's Rd. Car Depot; ground and dressing accommodation expected.—Walter Martin, 65, Park View, Queen's Park, Manchester. Players, especially halves (14-16) wanted.

SWINDON CENTRAL F.C. (15-16)—15-mile r.—A. E. Sumbler, 26, Hyde Rd., Swindon.

STATION ARGYLE F.C. (14, away)—3-mile r. Highbury.—J. Holland, 6, Thornhill Houses, Barnsby Park, N.

FOLKESTONE EXCELSIOR F.C. (15)—3-mile r.; players also wanted.—Write or call, T. Milton, 35, Garden Rd., or S. Page, 52, Albert Rd., Folkestone.

ROSEWOODS F.C. (15)—S.S. of Glasgow.—A. Stephenson, 1, Battelfield Crescent, Langside, Glasgow.

WOOLWICH ORIENT F.C. (15)—6-mile r.—F. Slatter, 49, High St., N. Woolwich.

DULWICH A.F.C. (15-16)—4-mile r.—G. Wells, 1, Ferris Rd., E. Dulwich, S.E.

Correspondence. Leagues. &c.

E. Davis, c/o Mr. A. V. Osmond, 15, Bridge St., Bristol, wants a correspondent in Pitman's shorthand.

J. Currie, Mason Lane, Tapport, Fife, would like to correspond with readers in the colonies.

S. Cooper, jun., 122, Empress Avenue, Ilford, would like to hear from boys of 14 who want to join a correspondence club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

F. Hibbard, O.S., H.M.S. Galeka, wishes to thank heartily those who so kindly answered his appeal—especially Miss N. Watmough and Miss Edmondson.

Six Boy Scouts on Coastguard duty would be grateful for gifts of games, etc., to help pass the time off duty.—R. E. Boyle, Patrol Leader, Coastwatchers, the Tower, Blackpool.

Harry Sunter, 3, Vicars Rd., Roundhay, Leeds, wants members for foreign stamp club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

John Sproll, 69, Fountain Rd., Tooting, S.W., would like to correspond with anyone learning French, or with a French boy learning English.

Percy H. Bond, 182, High Garden, Benwell, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Robert Percy, 95, Joan St., Benwell, would be glad to correspond with foreign readers.

H. Bromley, 894, Leeds Rd., Bradford, would be glad to correspond with a reader interested in stamp-collecting.

P. Goodchild, 16, Stoke Rd., Aylesbury, would like to hear from a reader apprenticed, like himself, to the linotype.

M. R. Young, 9, Westbourne Rd., Barnsbury, N., wants members for the U.C.P.C. Magazine, correspondence, soldiers' fund.

Will the reader who asked others to send him foreign tram tickets write to S. Hayman, 11, Delhi Place, West Perth, West Australia?

Private T. Truman, No. 23395, H.Q. Signal Section, 12th Batt. South Wales Borderers, B.E.F., France, would be very glad of a mouth-organ.

Maurice A. Harris, law clerk, Kilmallock, co. Limerick, wishes correspondence with readers who are stamp collectors.

Miss M. Taylor, 16, Chiddingstone St., Hurlingham, S.W., would like to correspond with another girl reader of 18-19.

Harry G. Farr, 68, Broome St., Highgate, Perth, West Australia, wishes to exchange Australian stamps with readers in other countries for stamps of their countries. Correspondence to this end invited.

Miss L. Cohen, 11, Willowbridge Rd., Canonbury, N., would like to correspond with another girl reader.

Miss P. Croad, 10, Roehampton St., Westminster, S.W., wishes to correspond with another girl reader of about 14½.

I. Goldring, 124, Antrim Rd., Belfast, would be glad to hear from Roy Neill, of Queensland, who was asking for a correspondent a short time ago.

H. A. Lewthwaite, 1, Upper Knollys Terr., Pennycomequick, Plymouth, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamp collecting.

T. Fisher, Bude St., Appledore, Devon, is starting an amateur magazine, and would be glad to hear from readers interested. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

J. Morley, 3, Gloyer's Buildings, Alverthorpe, Wakefield, wants to correspond with boy readers of 14-15 in India, South America, or Australia.

A. E. Bramwell, 41, Rupert St., Birmingham, has started a printed amateur magazine, and will send a specimen copy for 2d. in stamps.

J. F. Yeo, 41, Church St., Singapore, Straits Settlements, wants to correspond with boys anywhere in the British Empire, with a view to the exchange of stamps and picture-postcards.

## A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



# Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

### WAS SHE A CANNIBAL?

"Yes," said the dear old lady, "I am very fond indeed of my fowls. I have brought them up from little chicks, and cared for them until they seem quite like my own children, you see. We are going to have one for dinner next Sunday."  
—Sent in by P. M. Oliver, Deal.

### PUTTING A VALUE ON IT.

"My boy, you have saved my life!" cried a seaside visitor, wringing the sea-water out of his soaked garments. "Let me reward you."

He thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a three-penny piece.

The boy pushed aside the generous hand.  
"I can't take it, sir," he said. "I don't reckon I earned it."

"But you saved my life!"  
"Yes, but it ain't worth all that money!"—Sent in by John A. Green, Runcorn.

### THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNNERS.

(A Parody. —To the air of "Keep The Home-Fires Burning.")

They were summoned from headquarters,

Called out to man the guns;

And their country found them ready

To oppose the scoundrel Huns.

They fear no foe, no hardship,

As they gaily march along;

And though our knees be trembling,

Let's all sing this cheery song—

There's a silver airship

Through the dark clouds gliding.

Though that Zepp be far away,

We'll down it, boys!

Keep the air-guns going,

While the bombs they're throwing.

When the pirate Zepp comes down

We'll be mad with joy!

—Sent in by Miss Dorothy and Miss Gwendolyn Hunter, Queen's Park Estate.

### MAKING EXCUSES.

The minister of a Scottish parish took a lot of trouble in writing for his more ignorant parishioners letters to their lads at the Front. One good old mother, asked whether there was anything she wanted added to what he had written and read over to her, replied:

"Ye might just say 'Excuse the bad writin' an' spellin', an' that'll dae fine, thankin' ye kindly, sir.'—Sent in by Reginald Evans, Leicester.

### A DIFFICULT PROBLEM.

"Garge," said the old countrywoman to her husband, as they watched the entrainment of a number of men bound for "somewhere in France," "what gets all over me is, how do the poor dear lads ever manage to get their legs into them queer twisted trousers?"

She meant the puttees.—Sent in by Miss H. Dunn, Birmingham.

### A YARN OF THE KING'S NAVEE.

Young Steam Hammer had got into a bad habit of slackness in the morning. Several times the ship's corporal, whose duty it is to see the hands turned out and hammocks off the mess deck, had cautioned him. At last he took Steam Hammer before the beak at six bells.

"This is a serious case," said the commander. "What have you to say?"

"I shall say nothing about it if you don't, sir," replied Hammer innocently and modestly.

"H'm! Have you ever been up before me before?"

"Dunno, sir. What time do you mostly get up?"—Sent in by E. C. Smith, South Tottenham.

### PAT'S QUERY.

"Shure, sorr," said the Irishman to the jeweller, "there's that big clock ye have outside. Ye say it will go eight days without winding. And p'what I'm afther wantin' to know is how long it would go if ye wound it, bedad?"—Sent in by Miss E. Jones, Rhosrobin.

### TRY AS THEY MIGHT!

Old Man Jones had never seen any football at all before he went to watch that Rugger game. This is how he described what he saw.

"Lot o' rubbish, I call it! Pack o' big chaps, wi' knickers not half long enough. Funny-shaped ball, most like an old bladder blowed up. Somebody kicks it. All of 'em run after it. One of 'em cops hold of it, an' streaks off, wi' the rest lickety-split after him. Then he gets behind the posts an' falls right atop of the ball, an' all the fellows behind him fall atop of him. And a lot of silly chaps shout, 'Try! Try!' But what were the good? Try as they might, they couldn't bust that ball, an' they never did!"—Sent in by A. Baker, Wood Green.

### ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF IT!

"Hast tha gotten any souvenirs, laad?" asked one North Country warrior of another, as the hospital train carried them nearer to dear old Blighty.

"Nowt much. Aw've got some bits o' shrapnel, an' a few bullets, one o' them pickelhaubes, as they call 'em, an' a dure-handle."

"Tha's gotten a dure-handle, laad? Why—"

"Ay, a dure-handle, same as Aw said, an' 'tis the best souvenir o' th' lot. 'Twere like this, tha seest. Coomin' oot o' trenches for rest billet, Aw were very dry, so Aw

ca'ed at one o' them pubs, an' just got t' handle in my hand when, by gum, along comes a coalbox an' shunts pub into middle o' next week, an' their stood Aw wi' t' handle in my hand!"—Sent in by Harold Hartley, Stockport.

### THE SILENT DRAMA.

She was over eighty, and for the first time in her life she went to the pictures.

"How did you enjoy yourself, mother?" asked her daughter.

"Oh, pretty fair, considering! But, Bess, I doubt I'm getting deafer than I'd counted in my old age, for it's a fact as I never heard a single word they said all the time."—Sent in by H. Gardiner, Farnham.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

### THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

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in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes.

If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.

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