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EVERY
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PONGO'S PLAYFUL PRANK!
(See the Grand School Story of St. Jim's—inside.)

A SPLENDID EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & Co.—

UNDER A CLOUD

By
Martin Clifford

A kind heart, a strict code of honour, an unsuspecting mind and a well-developed sense of gratitude are each and all responsible for the very dickens of a mess into which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, finds himself precipitated.

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus is Obstinate!

"D'ARCY!"

"Yaas, sir." The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was quite calm and collected. From the sound of it, nobody would have dreamed that the Fourth Form junior was standing before the headmaster of St. Jim's to answer a grave charge. Only his white face and gleaming eyes showed his inward anger and indignation.

There was a hush in the Head's study. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was there, together with Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, and Dr. Holmes himself. The faces of all three were grave and troubled. "D'Arcy," repeated the Head, "I understand that Mr. Railton has already told you that something very serious has taken place. During the week-end a sum of money—sixty pounds, to be exact—has been abstracted from Mr. Linton's desk drawer. The money has obviously been stolen, for the desk was forced. You fully understand the position, my boy?"

"Oh, yaas, sir! I also undahstand," added Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his voice trembling now with indignation, "that I am suspected of havin' stolen the monay."

The Head coughed. The frankness of Arthur Augustus was a trifle disconcerting.

"That is not exactly the case as yet, D'Arcy," he said, giving the junior a keen and penetrating look. "You are here to be questioned regarding the matter, however, because it is known that you were apparently in need of the sum of fifty pounds. I understand that it was a matter of common knowledge among the juniors in your

Form. Moreover, this afternoon you had the audacity to visit your Form master, Mr. Lathom, with a request for the loan of such a sum—an outrageous piece of impudence!"

"Weally, sir, I must beg to disagwee in wegard to that," said Arthur Augustus politely. "I do not wegard it as impudence at all. Mr. Lathom appeahed to think that I was bein' wude and diswespectful, but I was vevy sewious indeed."

"You admit quite openly, then, that you were in urgent need of such a sum as fifty pounds, D'Arcy?"

"Oh, yaas, sir! Quite wight!"

"For what reason should you, a Lower School boy, require such a large sum?" demanded the Head sternly.

"I gweatly wegwet, Dr. Holmes, that I cannot answah that question."

"You refuse to tell me?"

"I wegwet that I have no othah course, sir."

"Very well. Are you still in need of fifty pounds, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus went a shade paler. The question was ruthlessly direct, and he realised that to answer it truthfully would deepen the suspicion against him. He did not hesitate, however.

"No, sir, I do not wequiah it now!"

"What?"

"I am well aware, sir," exclaimed Arthur Augustus proudly, "that my statement will waise suspicion against me. None the less, it is quite twue."

"D'Arcy," said Dr. Holmes, after a pause, "this afternoon you requested Mr. Lathom to lend you the sum of fifty pounds. Now, some hours later, you tell me that you no longer require the money. Am I to understand that you have obtained that sum elsewhere, or that you discovered you did not need the money, after all?"

"I obtained the fifty pounds elsewhere, sir," said Gussy calmly.

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom exchanged meaning glances. "Very well, D'Arcy. May I ask from whom you obtained the large sum of fifty pounds?"

"I wegwet that I cannot tell you that, sir."

"Have you the money in your possession still?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Where is it?"

"Once again I gweatly wegwet that I cannot explain, Dr. Holmes!"

The Head's kindly face hardened.

"I order you to answer me, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed, anger in his voice now. "Cannot you see that suspicion cannot fail to be thrown on your shoulders if you persist in your refusal to answer my questions?"

"I am vevy sowwy, sir. I am not at liberty to explain," said Arthur Augustus, raising his head proudly. "I will, howevah, give my word as a gentleman that I did not steal Mr. Linton's sixty pounds, and I twust that you will accept it."

"That is quite impossible," said Dr. Holmes. "I must confess that hitherto I have had implicit confidence in you, D'Arcy. None the less, I must insist upon a full and frank explanation as to why you needed fifty pounds, and from where you obtained such a sum. Otherwise you will be held under the gravest suspicion."

"Weally, sir—"

A knock at the door interrupted the indignant reply of



-OF ST. JIM'S, STARRING ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY!

the swell of the Fourth. It was Kildare who entered, and the Head eyed him impatiently.

"It is in connection with D'Arcy, sir," said Kildare, giving that junior a curious glance. "I believe I have discovered his reasons for wanting to raise fifty pounds, sir!"

"Oh, indeed! You may proceed then, Kildare."

"Trimble of the Fourth seems to have heard D'Arcy telling his friends, sir," explained the captain of St. Jim's briefly, "that the money was wanted to help Mr. Rigg, the Rylcombe outfitter."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

D'Arcy's exclamation of dismay was fairly good proof that there was some truth in Kildare's information. The Head eyed Gussy blankly.

"Bless my soul! Mr. Rigg, the Rylcombe outfitter? Is that the case, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus remained silent.



"I got the story from Trimble, sir," said Kildare grimly. "It appears that that rascal Stiggins, the man who caused the disturbance in the House, and whom the police are after, has robbed Mr. Rigg of fifty pounds. He was employed by him on D'Arcy's recommendation, D'Arcy promising to be responsible for him. Now that the rascal has disappeared with the money, D'Arcy seems to have taken it upon himself to replace it."

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Holmes and the two masters eyed Arthur Augustus blankly. Then the Head found his voice.

"D'Arcy, are the facts as Kildare states?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated, and then he nodded.

"It is all quite true, sir," he replied, with some dignity. "I refused to explain that because Mr. Wigg did not wish it to become common knowledge that his financial affairs were wathah wockay. As Twimble has got to know, howevah, theah is no weason to keep the mattah secwet any longah."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the Head, giving the junior a peculiar look. "But how did you come to recommend this man to Mr. Rigg, D'Arcy?" he added sternly. "I have heard from Mr. Railton that you have been on friendly terms with this man; it was a point in this astonishing affair that caused us to look upon your actions with grave suspicion."

"I wegwet that I did not explain the mattah to Mr. Railton when Mr. Stiggins was heah, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, it is vevy easily told. Mr.

Stiggins saved my life, and I felt vevy gwateful indeed to him. I also felt vevy sowwy for him, for he had told me his wife was ill and his children starvin'. I know now, of course, that he was not tellin' the twuth."

"That should have been obvious to you from the beginning, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton impatiently. "But you say that rascal saved your life. When and how?"

"It was he who dwagged me fwom undah the wheels of a motor-lowwy the othah day, sir, when I was injured."

"Ah!" Mr. Railton looked at the Head, who nodded for him to go on. "It was Stiggins who found you lying unconscious in the roadway, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, pursing his lips. "We are beginning to understand now. When you told me

that your life had been saved in that manner I felt very dubious about it, D'Arcy; I am very much more so now that I know it was this rascal Stiggins. How do you know he did as he claims?"

"Because he told me so, sir," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"You foolish boy! You know quite well that he has told you absurd falsehoods, and that he has proved himself a rascal and a thief. Yet you accept his word without an atom of proof."

"Bai Jove! Weally, sir——"

"There were no witnesses, I presume?" asked the Head.

"Oh, no, sir! The young wuffians from the village who attacked me left me lyn' unconscious on the ground, and washed away, not knowin', appawently, that I was hurt. Then Mr. Stiggins came along, and when I came wound I found him bendin' over me. He told me that I had had a vewy nawwow escape—that he had just dwagged me from undah the wheels of a motor-lowwy. Natuwally I was vewy gwateful, and I determined to do all I could for him. As he was out of work, I persuaded Mr. Wigg to give him a job at his shop in the village. Unfortunately," added Gussy sadly, "Mr. Stiggins has betwayed my twust in him, and has wobbed Mr. Wigg of the sum of fifty pounds, and the police are now searchin' for him."

"And you wanted the fifty pounds for the sole reason of making Mr. Rigg's loss good?" exclaimed the Head.

"Yaas, sir!"

"Very well. You have already told us that you have obtained that sum, D'Arcy. Have you paid it over to Mr. Rigg?"

"Yaas, sir. I—I washed ovah with it this evenin'. Mr. Wigg was vewy welived and gwateful indeed."

"I can certainly believe that," said Dr. Holmes dryly. "We now know why you required the money, D'Arcy. We have yet to learn, however, where or from whom you obtained it. Unless you can explain that, boy, I am afraid the gravest possible suspicion will be attached to you. I understand from Mr. Lathom, D'Arcy, that you wrote to your father, Lord Eastwood, for the money. What was his answer?"

"My patah's secwetawy answahed my lettah, sir. He stated that the patah is on the Continent, and that it was impossible to get in touch with him for some little time."

"Then I fail utterly to understand how you obtained such a sum as fifty pounds, D'Arcy, unless——"

The Head broke off. The face of Arthur Augustus went suddenly crimson.

"Dr. Holmes!" he stammered hotly. "Weally, sir, I—I——"

"It is your own fault, D'Arcy!" snapped the Head. "It is impossible and absurd that you could borrow such a large sum from any boy at St. Jim's at such short notice. Unless you can explain the matter satisfactorily, we can only draw one possible inference. Once again I demand that you tell me at once where or from whom you obtained fifty pounds."

"I cannot tell you, sir!"

"You refuse?"

"Yaas, sir! I gweatly wegwet——"

Knock!

Once again a knock at the door interrupted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 2.

Cardew or Gussy?

"**P**OOOR old Gussy!"

"It—it's rotten!"

"It's jolly serious, anyway," said Tom Merry in a low whisper. "Everybody seems to know now that Gussy was wanting fifty quid, and why. You're quite sure Gussy said he'd managed to get it, Blake?"

"Yes," Blake breathed the word, his face pale. "He told us he'd got it, and then he bunked off straight away with the cash to old Rigg, I believe. But—but where on earth could he have got it from, Tommy? We know, now, that no master or senior could have lent it him."

"That's just the problem," said Tom Merry quietly. "We—we know, I suppose, that old Gussy couldn't possibly know anything of Linton's sixty quid. But—but other fellows won't look at it as we do."

"The beaks won't, anyway," said Manners grimly. "And if Gussy won't explain——"

"He won't!" said Blake, with a groan. "If he wouldn't explain to us, he certainly won't to the Head, or anyone else. He can be as stubborn as a mule when he likes. He's in a jolly serious hole, you chaps."

"Phew! Yes, rather!"

There was no doubt about that. The faces of Gussy's chums were grave as they stood in Masters' Corridor and gazed at the closed door of the Head's study. From behind

the door came the faint hum of voices. Only a few minutes ago Mr. Railton had vanished inside, with Mr. Linton, Kildare, and the hapless Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry and his chums were not alone. Trimble had obviously spread the story round, for quite a crowd of juniors were standing about, breathless and scared. Most of them were eyeing Blake and his friends very curiously.

Certainly they had good reason to be scared and curious. And there were several among them who did not hesitate to air their views openly on the subject.

"Plain as a pikestaff!" Racke of the Shell was saying, and his words reached Blake & Co. clearly. "D'Arcy was desperately needing fifty quid, and we know why. In my view, Linton needn't look far for the blessed thief. It's plain enough!"

"Well, it looks queer," said Croke. "D'Arcy's about the last chap one would suspect. But—well, what can a fellow think? I suppose old Rigg threatened to make him pay up, as it was his fault."

Jack Blake's face went red with anger, and he would have rushed at the cads of the Shell, but Tom Merry dragged him back.

"Hold on, old chap," he said gently. "I feel that way myself, but it won't do any good, will it? I'm afraid Racke and his pals aren't the only ones who'll be gassing like that. Let the cads rip."

"Well, dear men, what's the trouble now?"

Cardew, Levison and Clive came along and joined the chums in the passage. They whistled in utter dismay when they heard the grave news. Cardew seemed to be the most unconcerned of the three, however.

"Dear old Gussy!" he murmured. "What a lad he is for gettin' into trouble. So he toddled off and paid old Rigg, did he?"

"Yes," admitted Blake reluctantly. "Goodness knows where he got the money from, but it's impossible to believe that—that——"

Blake paused.

"That Gussy pinched Linton's sixty," finished Cardew easily. "Quite so. But the beaks and the fellows won't think so. Looks to me as if Gussy's booked for the long jump, unless——"

"Unless what?" said Levison, eyeing Cardew curiously.

"Unless I go to the Head and own up!" said Cardew.

They stared at him.

"Look here, Cardew," said Levison angrily, "this isn't a time for your rotten jokes! The matter's jolly serious. I should think you could see that!"

"I do, dear man," said Cardew. "That's why it's necessary for me to chat with the Head on the subject."

"But why?"

"Because I lent Gussy the fifty quid!" said Cardew.

"You?"

"Wha-at?"

"Just that," said Cardew, smiling round him as he saw that Racke & Co. had caught the words. "As I lent the fifty to dear old Gussy, that rather lets him out—what?"

"You—you lent D'Arcy fifty quid?" asked Racke blankly. "What rot!"

"Not at all, Aubrey. But you needn't look so disappointed, dear man. Even if you are disappointed at the idea of not seein' Gussy booted, after all, you'll still have the pleasure of seein' little me booted, perhaps."

There was a silence. All eyes were fixed on the smiling, unperturbed features of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Levison and Clive will bear me out that my noble relation, Gussy, visited me for a private conversation this afternoon," proceeded Cardew coolly. "He asked me to lend him fifty quid. As a friend and relation, I joyfully handed him over the needed quidlets. Yes, I think I'd better discuss this matter with the beaks. So-long!"

Cardew smiled round at the staring crowd and walked to the Head's door. He knocked upon it and vanished inside, thus interrupting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remarks.

The Head stared angrily as Cardew walked almost leisurely into the room, after closing the door carefully behind him.

"Cardew!" thundered the Head. "How dare you intrude in this careless, impudent manner? Leave the room this instant!"

"Excuse me, sir, but it's most important that I should explain matters. As it was I who lent D'Arcy the fifty pounds——"

"What?"

The exclamation came simultaneously from the Head and Mr. Railton.

"Cardew!" gasped the Head. "What do you mean? Am I to understand that—that you are saying you lent D'Arcy the sum of fifty pounds?"

"Quite so, sir. I lent it to him this afternoon!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Cardew gave Arthur Augustus a smiling glance.

"D'Arcy!" gasped the Head, glancing at the juniors in turn. "Is this correct? Did Cardew lend you fifty pounds this afternoon?"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He was still prepared to keep his promise to Cardew, even though the latter had himself disclosed the secret.

Cardew grinned slightly as he caught the swell of the Fourth's questioning glance.

"Is it necessary for D'Arcy to answer, sir?" he said coolly. "I have spoken the truth; D'Arcy came to me this afternoon and asked me to lend him the money. I handed it to him on condition that he would never say where he obtained it. That is why he refuses to speak now. He obtained it quite innocently, and I led him to believe that it came from my grandfather."

you possessed such a sum, and the name of the person from whom you obtained it?"

"Ahem!" Cardew's coolness left him for the moment, and he frowned ruefully. "N-no, sir!"

"You expect me to believe you without any proof?"

"Y-yes, sir!"

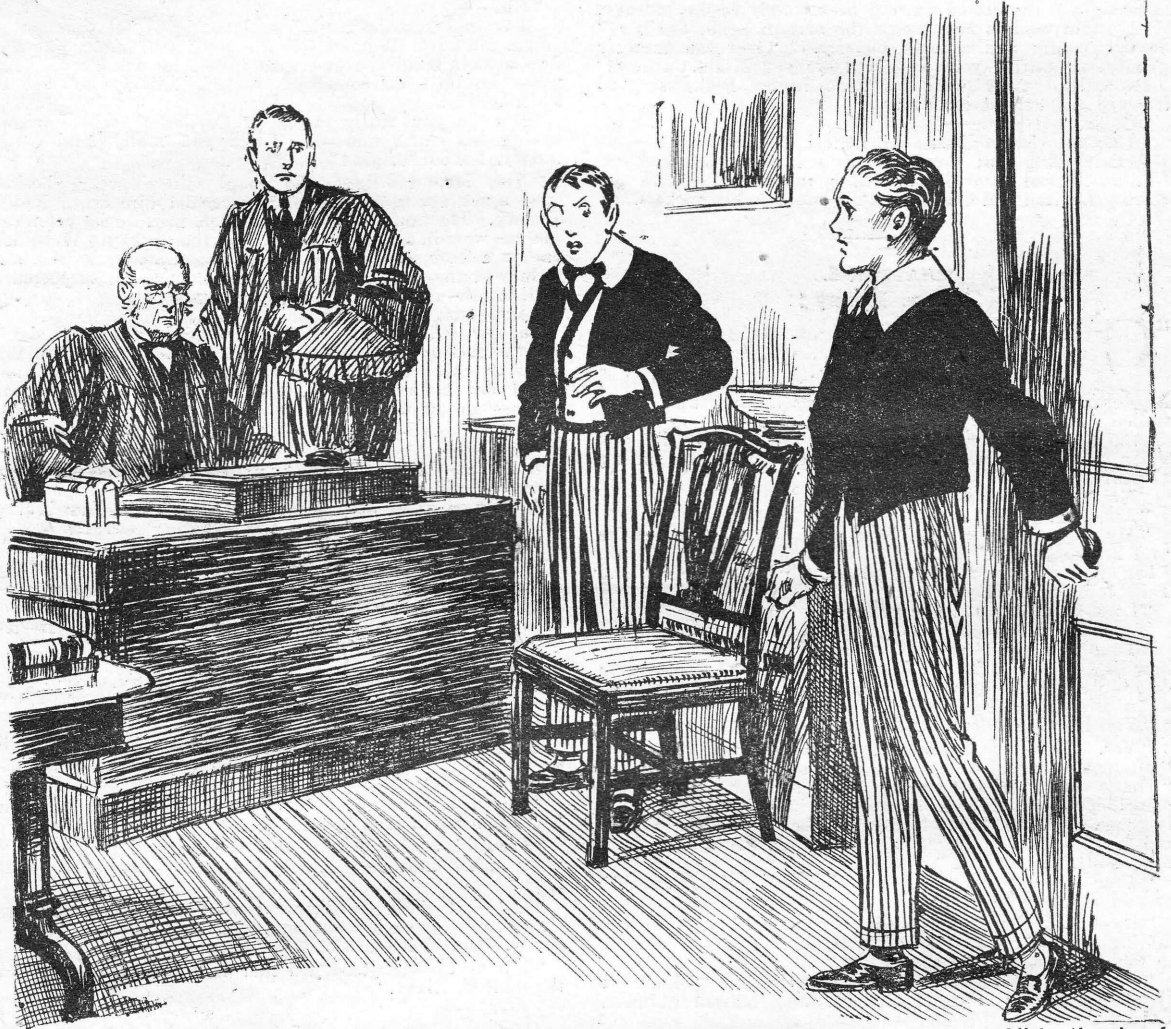
"Does it not occur to you that such an admission on your part places you in a serious position—that if you are believed, then suspicion naturally falls upon you?"

"Oh, quite, sir!"

"Yet—assuming that you did lend the money to D'Arcy—you refuse to state how you came by it?"

"I'm sorry, sir—yes!"

The Head looked helplessly once again at Mr. Railton, whose brow was perplexed. The attitude of the two juniors



Dr. Holmes stared angrily as Ralph Reckness Cardew walked almost leisurely into the room. "Cardew!" he thundered. "How dare you intrude in this careless, impudent manner? Leave the room this instant!" "Excuse me, sir," said Cardew coolly, "but as it was I who lent D'Arcy the fifty pounds—" "What!" (See Chapter 2.)

"Bless my soul!"

The Head looked at Mr. Railton, whose eyes were fixed upon Cardew's calm, half-mocking features.

"Levison and Clive will bear me out that D'Arcy asked me for a private interview this afternoon, and they left us together, sir!" added Cardew.

"Did they know you had lent D'Arcy the money, Cardew?"

"N-no, sir!"

"Did they know you had such a sum in your possession, Cardew?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then I decline to believe your statement, Cardew!" snapped the Head icily. "You are known to be an extraordinary boy who takes a delight in doing unexpected and reckless things, and it seems quite obvious to me that you are making this statement solely to shield D'Arcy, who is a relative of yours. I will, however, ask you to prove your statement. Can you give me any proof that

had placed them in a quandary—indeed, the Head was obviously dumbfounded and bewildered. Yet his kindly face was stern and harsh now.

Kind as the old gentleman was, he was scarcely likely to brook such defiance from two Lower School boys.

"And you, D'Arcy," he went on sternly, "do you still persist in your refusal to tell me how you obtained that fifty pounds?"

"Yaas, sir! I havv no othah wecourse."

"Very well! Your silence can have only one meaning to me, I am afraid; while Cardew's statement that he lent you the money is open to doubt. I strongly suspect, however, that he put forward the claim solely to save you, or to make a mystery of the matter in order to defeat justice; it seems to me possible that you are in league together in the matter, though only you, apparently, had a strong motive for requiring the money."

The Head paused and scanned them each in turn closely. "I will discuss the matter with Mr. Railton, and in the

meantime you may go. You will, however, consider yourselves under grave suspicion, and must not on any account leave the school. Go!"

"Oh, y-yaas, sir!" stammered Gussy.

"Thank you, sir!" said Cardew calmly.

The two left the study, Arthur Augustus pale and in a great state of agitation. Not until he had found himself before the Head had Gussy realised fully what Cardew's share in the matter might mean.

Now he felt almost physically sick with dismay, and he gave Cardew a rather bitter, reproachful look as they got outside. Cardew smiled at him.

"Go it!" he remarked encouragingly. "Tell me what you think of your lovin' cousin, dear man; lendin' a fellow stolen money, what? That's what it looks like, doesn't it?"

Arthur Augustus opened his mouth and closed it again as he sighted the crowd waiting breathlessly in the passage.

"I would wathah not discuss the mattah heah, Cardew!" he said coldly and a trifle bitterly. "I—I can scarcely grasp the position yet. I—I will see you latah, Cardew!"

He walked away with his head high. Blake stepped forward and caught his arm.

"Gussy, old man—"

"I do not wish to discuss this mattah, Blaké!"

Arthur Augustus shook his arm free and walked on. Cardew looked after him, with a smile, and joined the staring Levison and Clive, with his hands in his pockets.

CHAPTER 3.

A Deep Mystery!

"CARDREW—"

"What's happened?"

"What's happened to D'Arcy?"

Several fellows had tried in vain to stop Arthur Augustus, but Cardew did not attempt to walk away. He smiled round at the excited, staring faces.

"Cardew!" exclaimed Levison quietly. "What did you mean by what you were saying just now? Are you rotting as usual, you ass?"

"Not at all, Ernest, old bean!"

"Then, what—"

"My dear men, you shall hear all the sordid story as far as I am concerned," said Cardew blandly. "Don't crush, I beg of you. Someone be good enough to boot our friend Trimble away, will you?"

"Look here, Cardew, you rotter— Yooooop!"

Someone had evidently obliged Cardew.

"Thanks!" said Cardew. "Well, my beloved 'earers, here is the yarn. This afternoon, D'Arcy of the Fourth came to me with the request for a loan of fifty quid. As a dutiful relative, I obliged him. I—"

"You lent him fifty pounds?" almost yelled Clive.

"Yes. He thanked me kindly, and used the money for the purpose for which he required it," said Cardew yawning. "That's about all—excepting that, by an unfortunate coincidence, Mr. Linton appears to have lost sixty quid, or something like that. Naturally, the Head, like a wise old bird, wants to know how dear old Gussy got hold of the fifty he wanted."

"Then—then D'Arcy did get the money he wanted?" gasped Rake. "Oh, my hat!"

"Haven't I already said so once or twice," said Cardew, raising his eyebrows. "I lent it to him. I've just been in to the Head to explain that I did."

"But what about you?" said Levison slowly. "Didn't the Head ask how you came to have fifty blessed quidlets, Cardew?"

"Alas! Yes!" Cardew shook his head sorrowfully. "The dear beak was rather pressing in the matter. Unfortunately I was unable to oblige him with the information. Matters are therefore at a standstill for the time bein' with dear old Gussy and myself 'confined to barracks' with smudges on our characters until the tiresome bizney is cleared up."

There was a silence. Every eye was turned on Ralph Reckness Cardew curiously. He did not seem to mind.

"I don't jolly well believe a word of it," said Rake at last, his lip curling. "You've told that yarn just to clear D'Arcy—to throw dust in the beaks' eyes, Cardew."

"Have I?" murmured Cardew.

"Of course. Any fool can see that!"

"Well, you have, anyway, old chap. And probably there are more about like you!"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Rake. "You never lent D'Arcy a penny, Cardew. It was just a yarn to shield that cad D'Arcy. But it doesn't wash with me, my pippin."

"Not really? You think I'm telling yarns, Rake?"

"Yes, I jolly well do!"

"And that dear old Gussy pinched Linton's dibs?"

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"Of course. If D'Arcy got hold of fifty quid, then I think that's pretty plain."

"Right!" said Cardew pleasantly. "Then here's somethin' for callin' me a liar, and somethin' else for callin' my giddy relative a thief behind his back, Aubrey dear! Take that—and that!"

"Yarroooooogh! Oh, you— Yoooooop!"

A strong grip on Rake's collar twisted him round, and Cardew's boot was planted twice behind him—hard. Rake jumped away yelling, his face like a fiend's.

"Here, hold on, Cardew!" growled Gore. "Dash it all, Rake's only saying what most of us think, I bet!"

Cardew sighed.

"Does that mean I've got to go round bootin' everybody?" he said plaintively. "It's goin' to be a frightful bore, in that case!"

"But—"

"I've told you the truth," said Cardew. "Rather a rum thing, ain't it? When a fellow's got a bad name, like me, he's always bein' charged with things he doesn't do. An' when he does do somethin' wicked, nobody believes it. Such is life!"

"But do you really mean it, Cardew?" said Levison, eyeing his chum uneasily. "Did you really lend Gussy money, honour bright?"

"Yes, honour bright, old chap. Gussy's very shocked and upset about it. He thinks I've let him down badly, I fancy. He won't admit it, however, because he promised me he wouldn't say where he got the money. Well, it's rather a bore repeatin' oneself. Come along, Ernest and Sidney—unless you'd rather give a chap who's suspected a wide berth—ch?"

"You—you ass! Come on!"

Cardew, Clive, and Levison walked away, Cardew's chums looking very uneasy indeed. Cardew had given his word to them that he was speaking the truth, and they could doubt no longer. With all his faults—which were many—Cardew was a fellow of his word. Though he had spoken lightly, almost jestingly, they knew he meant what he had said.

And Tom Merry & Co. knew the same, though many obviously did not.

"What on earth does it mean, Blake?" said Tom Merry, as they walked away from the crowd. "Cardew wasn't leg-pulling this time."

"He wasn't," said Blake, his face puzzled. "It beats anything. If Gussy's innocent, where does Cardew come in? It isn't likely he'd have fifty quid about him—not to hand out at a moment's notice like that. It—it's queer!"

"Jolly queer!"

"And—and it's rotten!" said Blake glumly. "Let's go and tackle that awful ass Gussy, anyway."

"Yes, rather!"

They found Arthur Augustus seated in the armchair in Study No. 6, his face strained and anxious. He did not look up as the juniors entered.

"Gussy, old man," said Blake, stepping over to him, "what on earth does it all mean?"

"I would wathah not discuss the mattah, Blake. I am vevy upset indeed. Kindly do not wowwy me, deah boys."

"But—but dash it all, we must!" said Blake, raising his voice in his excitement and dismay. "This can't go on, Gussy. Did that fool Cardew lend you the money?"

"I have already told you that I do not wish to discuss the mattah, Blake."

"Yes; but—"

"Gussy," interrupted Tom Merry almost pleadingly, "tell us all about it, and perhaps we can help you."

"You cannot help me, Tom Mewwy, though I am much obliged for your offah," said Arthur Augustus. "I wish to wefwain fwom discussin' the vevy unpleasant mattah, howevah."

He shook off Tom Merry's detaining hand, and, rising to his feet, left the room quickly.

Outside the door he hesitated a moment, and then, setting his lips, he went along to Cardew's study and looked in, after tapping the door. He found Cardew lounging in an easy-chair, with Clive and Levison standing in front of him, their faces grave.

"Come in, old scout," said Cardew affably. "Another private interview, Gussy?"

"I wish to speak to you in pwivate certainly, Cardew," said Gussy stiffly.

"Then you shall have your wish," said Cardew gravely. "I'm quite sure that brother Ernest and brother Sidney won't object to doin' the disappearin' trick once again—what?"

"Very well, Cardew," said Levison quietly. "Come on, Clive."

Sidney Clive looked more inclined to stay and finish

his conversation, but Levison dragged him outside and closed the door.

"Dear man," said Cardew, eyeing Gussy's flushed face cheerily, "what a life! Sidney and Ernest are very inquisitive and very borin' this evenin'. I trust you are not goin' to bore me with a discussion of this tiresome loan binney, Gussy?"

"Weally, Cardew, I felt obliged to come heah to discuss that mattah with you," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust you will not wefuse to ansawah my questions?"

"Run on, old son," said Cardew encouragingly. "I'm listenin' like anythin'."

"Vewy well." Arthur Augustus seemed to be speaking with an effort. "You appweciate my position, I twust, Cardew, in this w'etched mattah?"

"I do, old bean. It was through no fault of mine that the beaks refused to believe me, Gussy."

"I am well awah of that, Cardew. You came forward in a vewy stwaightforward mannah in an attempt to put mattahs wight for me. None the less, I think that an explanation is due to me, Cardew."

"I agree with you, Gussy," assented Cardew.

"When I accepted that monay fwom you, Cardew, I was uttably ignowant of the fact that Mr. Linton had been wobbed of sixty pounds."

"So was I, old bean!"

"Bai Jove! I—I am vewy glad to heah that, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, colouring a little. "You must forgive me puttin' things like that. But I twust you see that mattahs appeah vewy stwange to me?"

"I do," assented Cardew, his eyes glimmering a little. "Now you know about Linton's loss, you've reached the conclusion that I must have robbed him, and that I did a dirty trick in lendin' you money stolen from someone else. That the idea, dear man?"

"Bai Jove! Not—not exactly, believe me, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus hastily. "I have come now, howehav, he added with some dignity, "to wewquest you to tell me how you got that monay—just to weliieve my mind, you know."

"Quite so. Unfortunately, I can't oblige, Gussy."

"Bai Jove!"

"I can tell you no more than I could tell the giddy beaks," said Cardew. "I'm afraid you'll have to look upon me with deep suspicion as before, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! There is no need to do that, Cardew," said Gussy unhappily. "All I need is the assuwance that the monay was your own pwoperty. I will accept your word without question."

"You will?" Cardew's mocking manner left him, and he looked at the dignified Arthur Augustus strangely. "You'll accept my word if I say it was my own money?"

"Certainly, deah boy. You must forgive me bein' wathah blunt and indelicate in my way of puttin' things. But this has upset me vewy much, and I weally must know the twuth. If you assuah me to that extent, then I am satisfied and gweately weliieved."

"Right, Gussy!" Cardew's tone was strangely sincere. "The money was my own—that I swear. I can't tell you from whom I got it, but I can tell you that it was not Linton's money, and never had been or was likely to be. When I lent it to you I hadn't the faintest idea that Linton owned such a sum, and still less that he had been robbed of it. You have my word on that, Gussy, old man!"

"Bai Jove! I believe you without hesitation, Cardew, deah boy. Then that is all wight. A gweat load has been lifted fwom my mind."

And Arthur Augustus shook hands solemnly with Cardew and left him. But his face was quite bright now. Of his own serious position Arthur Augustus seemed quite unconcerned. He had a clear conscience, and, though the charge had filled him with overpowering indignation, he was not afraid of the consequences. He had only been shocked and afraid of Cardew's position in the matter. Now Cardew had given his word, however, Arthur Augustus was satisfied.

Unfortunately, so far as other people were concerned, the respective positions of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Ralph Reckness Cardew were far from being satisfactory.

CHAPTER 4. Trouble!

"ROTTEN!"

"It is!" assented Jack Blake gloomily.

"Blessed if I can make it out at all!"

"Where is Gussy now?" asked Tom Merry.

"Just cleared out before you came in. We tried to get something out of him, but it was no go. You fellows done any prep?"

"Not yet," said Lowther, who had looked in at Blake's study with Manners and Tom Merry. "We're too jolly

worried about this affair to think of prep. Won't Gussy say anything?"

Blake shook his head.

"No. But it's pretty clear there's something in what Cardew says. We know Gussy couldn't possibly have had anything to do with Linton's rotten money. And—well, why should Cardew say it if it isn't true? And why shouldn't Gussy deny it if it isn't, either?"

"That's how I look at it. But— My hat! It beats me! If it's so, where on earth has Cardew got the cash from at a moment's notice?"

"Goodness knows!" groaned Blake. "Oh, great Scott! I know trouble would come over that Stiggins' business! That awful ass Gussy ought to be shoved in a home for having anything to do with the thieving spoofer! Even now Gussy, the silly owl, still believes that the rascal saved his life!"

"It—it's hard lines on Linton, anyway," said Tom slowly. "He's awfully cut-up about his loss—and I don't wonder. It's no joke for a chap like Linton to lose a sum like that. The other fellows are pretty sick about it, too. And—and the trouble is they don't believe in old Gussy as we do."

"You can't blame them really," said Manners quietly. "After all, the fellows know now that old Rigg's been paid the money by Gussy. You can't wonder that they think things. Who wouldn't—"

"Who wouldn't?" said Blake angrily, his face flushing. "If you've got any suspicions about Gussy, Manners, you can jolly well say so—"

"Hold on! No need to get waxy, Blake," said Tom. "We don't suspect Gussy for one instant. But we know Gussy, and the other fellows can't be expected to know him so well. They probably wouldn't dream of suspecting he'd pinch the cash for his own use. But they knew he was frightfully upset on old Rigg's behalf. Well, they're upset on Linton's behalf, and they're saying things."

"Hang them! Let the cads say what they like!"

"I know. But— What the thump—"

Tom Merry started as the door suddenly crashed back. It revealed Grundy standing in the doorway, a determined expression on his rugged face. Behind him was a crowd of fellows, foremost of whom were Racke, Crooke, Mallard and Gore.

"Here, outside!" shouted Blake, glaring at them. "Get out of this study, you cheeky owls! What do you want?"

"I'll jolly soon tell you!" said Grundy. Grundy was a fellow who never minded telling anyone anything. He was evidently in the mood now to tell a great deal. "We want to know where D'Arcy is?"

"Find out! He's not here! What d'you want him for, anyway?" snapped Blake.

"Eh? What the dickens do you think we want him for, excepting about that money of Linton's?" said Grundy meaningly. "Look here, Blake, it's all very well backing your dashed pal up! But what about poor old Linton?"

"Shut up, and get out!"

"Rats! Look here, Blake, what d'you know about this affair? If you know that cad D'Arcy's pinched the money you ought to speak out!"

"Ought I?" said Blake, in a dangerous voice. "To please you, Grundy?"

"No!" snapped Grundy. "Somebody's pinched old Linton's money. We're not standing it! The poor old chap's nearly off his chump about it. We mean to tackle that cad D'Arcy about it, and we mean to get the truth out of the sweep!"

"You seem to have already made up your mind that D'Arcy is the thief?" asked Blake.

"Eh? Of course! It stands to reason he is. He's pinched old Linton's cash just to pay that dashed tradesman! If I had— Here, what— Yarooooogh!"

Crash!

Grundy was lying on his back in the fender, wondering what had struck him. Very slowly he realised it was Blake's right fist, and as he did he jumped up, roaring with rage and amazement.

"You—you howling cad!" he shouted furiously. "Why, I'll smash you! I'll—I'll—"

He rushed at Blake, who met him quickly enough. Blake's own face was red with rage.

But the first swift blows had scarcely been exchanged before they were grabbed and held back.

"No, you don't, Grundy!" snapped Tom Merry. "You're not going to do just as you like, old bean!"

"Let me get at him!" bellowed Grundy. "I'll smash him! Going for a fellow like that all for nothing!"

"Nothing!" gasped Blake. "Let the cad come on! I'll teach him to call my pal a thief! Let him come on—and any more who think like him!"

"Cheese it, Blake!" said Racke, from the doorway. "Dash it all, what are the fellows to think? It's plain enough—"

Aubrey Racke broke off and backed hastily through the

crowd in the doorway, as Herries and Digby made a rush for him.

Apparently D'Arcy's chums had no intention of hearing Arthur Augustus called a thief in Study No. 6. There was a hurried scrimmage in the doorway, and then Herries and Digby were flung back. For once the crowd was with George Alfred Grundy to a man.

But Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three were backing up Blake in his support of the honour of the absent Gussy.

"Come on!" gasped Herries. "Chuck the cads out of our study, you fellows! Out you go, Crooke, you cad!"

Followed by Digby, Herries made another rush at the crowd in the doorway. Manners and Lowther hesitated a brief instant, and then they joined in the scrimmage.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry, in alarm. "Hold—stand back, Grundy, you fool!"

But Grundy was raging, and the next instant Blake and Tom had their hands full with George Alfred, while Herries, Digby, Manners, and Lowther tackled the rest, amid an uproar.

"Stop that! What the dickens— Stop, you young rascals! You hear me?"

It was Kildare's voice from the passage. The next moment the St. Jim's skipper had charged into the scrimmage, wielding an ashplant, amid a chorus of yelps of pain and surprise. In two or three seconds the study was cleared of the invaders—all excepting Grundy, who stood his ground.

"Out you go, Grundy!" said Kildare grimly. "You're always on the spot when there's trouble, I notice! Get out!"

"Look here—"

"Get out!"

"Look here, Kildare— Yoooop!"

Kildare brought his cane into play; and Grundy hesitated no longer. He howled and flew through the doorway. Kildare looked grimly at the Terrible Three, and then he pointed to the door.

"You Shell chaps had better clear, too," he said. "What was the trouble about, Merry?"

Tom hesitated. Blake spoke up, however.

"That fool Grundy called D'Arcy a thief, if you want to know, Kildare!" he said thickly. "And those other cads backed him up. That's what it was about—and it'll happen again if the same thing's said in this study!"

"Oh! That's rather thick," said Kildare, frowning. "Nobody's any right to say anything of the sort yet. Report to me if anyone says anything like that again, Blake. I'll deal with them. Now get on with your prep."

The Terrible Three went out, and Kildare followed them, going back to his study. In the Shell passage the three chums came on Grundy, Gore, Racke, and several other fellows talking in a group.

"You—you silly owls!" snorted Grundy, glaring at Tom. "What d'you want to back those cads up for, Merry? Nice thing when the junior skipper backs up a thief!"

"Hold your silly tongue!" snapped Tom. "I'll believe D'Arcy's a thief when I've got proof—not before!"

"What more proof d'you want?" snorted Grundy, glowering. "He admits he's taken fifty quid to old Rigg in the village. Nice thing, ain't it? I'm sorry for Rigg; but I'm sorrier still for Linton. That cad D'Arcy—"

"The less you say on the subject the better, Grundy!" said Tom angrily. "Wait until you get proof—"

"That's all very well, Merry!" said Gore grimly. "But what about Trimble? You don't wait for proof from him, I notice. You've called a blessed meeting to deal with that fat rotter. There's no proof that he's the chap who's been raiding grub and things wholesale lately. Yet you're taking it for granted it is Trimble!"

Tom was silent at that. In a way it was true enough. For some nights now study cupboards had been raided of food; even loaves of bread and cheese and things like that had been taken—things Trimble usually turned up his nose at. Yet few had doubted that it was Trimble; that fat youth, having the reputation for grub-raiding.

"It must have been Trimble, I suppose," said Tom Merry quietly. "Anyway, I only suggested that we should try Trimble—give him a fair trial, of course. We know what he is, and things are getting a bit too thick altogether. You can't deny that!"

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"Hallo, here he is!" said Wilkins of the Shell. "Talk of angels—"

"Oh, really, Wilkins— I say, you fellows, I swear it wasn't me!" added Trimble, in a dismal voice. "Everybody seems to think it's me, and it jolly well isn't this time—I mean at any time. What do I want with bread and cheese and rugs—"

"Rugs?"

"Yes, rugs," said Trimble warmly. "Somebody's pinched a travelling rug from Cardew's room. That ain't all, either. Lots of fellows have lost things lately, and they're

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all blaming it on me," added the fat youth almost tearfully. "Somebody's pinched a ten-bob note from Cutts' table drawer, and he's been bullying me about it, the awful beast!"

"Phew! That's queer!" said Tom Merry, eyeing Trimble's dismal features keenly. "There's a spirit stove missing from our study, too. I never thought much about it, but now—"

"Never mind Trimble now!" interrupted Gore grimly. "I only mentioned him to show that you're not so jolly particular when it comes to fellows who aren't pals of yours. We think something ought to be done about Linton's cash, anyway. As junior skipper you ought to tackle D'Arcy, and make him own up."

"Oh, shut up! You can go and eat coke, the dashed lot of you!" snapped Tom angrily; and he went into his study, Lowther and Manners going in after him, Manners locking the door. But Tom's face was clouded as he took out his books and started prep. It was only too clear that the general opinion was that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was guilty. Nobody seemed to attach much importance to Cardew's staggering statements at all. They knew Cardew of old—they knew that he was capable of doing the most reckless things out of sheer desire to cause a sensation—not counting upon the possibility that he made his amazing claim in order to shield his relative, or to make it difficult for him to be condemned. And the captain of the Shell could not help wondering very gloomily how it was going to end.

CHAPTER 5.

The Ultimatum!

"WELL?"

Ernest Levison spoke gruffly as Cardew strolled into the study. Both he and Sidney Clive eyed their whimsical study-mate uneasily. Clive and Levison both looked and felt very uncomfortable. Cardew's strange behaviour was worrying them. They simply could not understand the strange affair at all.

Cardew had given his word of honour that he had lent Arthur Augustus the sum of fifty pounds, and they simply had to believe it, knowing their chum as they did. Yet it seemed impossible for Cardew to have had such a sum in his possession without having acquainted them with the fact.

Why hadn't he mentioned it to them, and why had he sworn Arthur Augustus to secrecy in the matter? Other fellows seemed to think Cardew was just spoofing in his unexpected, whimsical way; it was just a whim on his part to try to take the blame of the matter off the shoulders of Arthur Augustus. That was undoubtedly the general view, despite Cardew's word.

But Clive and Levison did not know what to think. It was as impossible, in their view, to suspect Arthur Augustus of theft as Ralph Reckless Cardew.

So far, Cardew had met all their demands for an explanation with bland statements that told nothing. Yet they were determined to get the truth from him.

"Well?" repeated Levison. "I suppose you've been down to the Common-room?"

"Yes, I have, Ernest."

"You've heard, then, I should imagine, just what the fellows think of this business, Cardew?"

Cardew groaned pathetically.

"Go in' to begin again, Ernest?" he said plaintively. "I did think I should get a bit of peace in this study, at all events. Can't you let a poor fellow alone?"

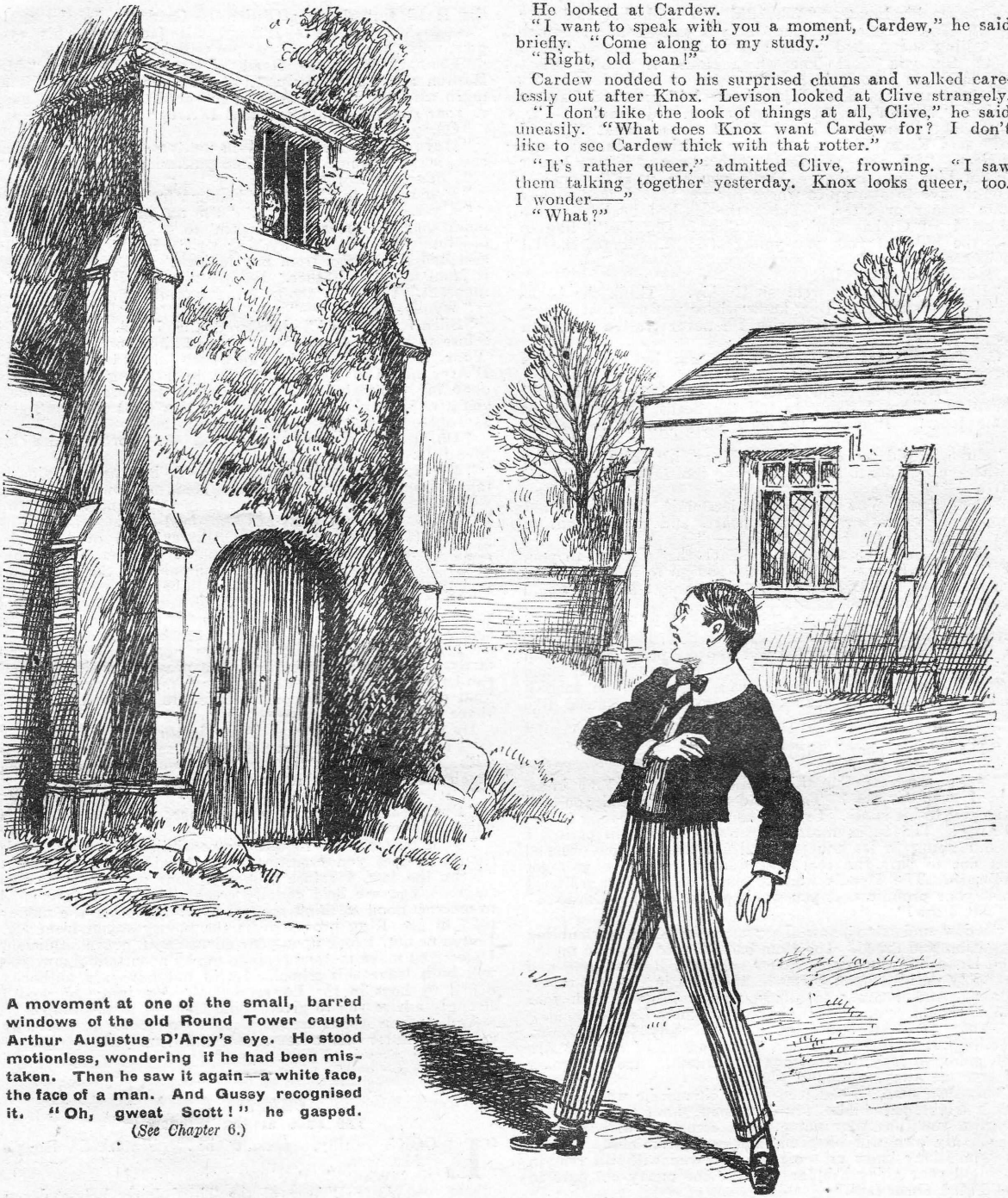
"No good putting things off by talking rot like that," said Clive bluntly. "The fellows want to know, and they ought to know. You've said that you lent D'Arcy fifty quid, and we believe you—though nobody else seems to. But in saying that, in telling the Head that, you've either said too much or too little. You don't appear to realise the position, Cardew. Do you think for one moment the beaks will be satisfied with what you've told them? Can't you see that they'll want to know where the money came from, and if you refuse to say it'll be the boot for you?"

"I can see it, Ernest!" assented Cardew gravely. "It fairly hits a chap in the eye, in fact. Unfortunately, it can't be helped. You fellows finished prep?"

"Don't try to change the subject," said Levison, his voice rising a little. "You ought to tell your chums the truth, at all events. And is it fair to D'Arcy to leave things just as they are? If anything, you seem to have made matters worse for Gussy by saying what you have."

Cardew's smile left him for a moment.

"I'm afraid you're right, old bean," he said seriously. "I didn't realise it until I got to the Common-room just now. The fellows are asses! The beaks are bigger asses! But what can a fellow do when he's dealin' in asses? I ask you."



A movement at one of the small, barred windows of the old Round Tower caught Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eye. He stood motionless, wondering if he had been mistaken. Then he saw it again—a white face, the face of a man. And Gussy recognised it. "Oh, gwreat Scott!" he gasped. (See Chapter 6.)

He looked at Cardew.
 "I want to speak with you a moment, Cardew," he said briefly. "Come along to my study."
 "Right, old bean!"
 Cardew nodded to his surprised chums and walked carelessly out after Knox. Levison looked at Clive strangely.
 "I don't like the look of things at all, Clive," he said uneasily. "What does Knox want Cardew for? I don't like to see Cardew thick with that rotter."
 "It's rather queer," admitted Clive, frowning. "I saw them talking together yesterday. Knox looks queer, too. I wonder—"
 "What?"

"You can tell the whole truth instead of half of it, Cardew."
 "Alas! There's the rub," said Cardew sadly. "I can't. Still, if you fellows are only worryin' about Gussy—" "We're worried about both of you."
 "I'm afraid you'll have to go on worryin' about little me," said Cardew. "As for dear old Gussy—I'll tell you this. If there's any danger of Gussy gettin' into serious trouble, then I can promise you that I'll tell the whole of the truth. An' the whole of the giddy truth will let Gussy out right away. But it won't let me out, alas! You'll have to go on worryin' about me, old beans."
 "Oh! What d'you mean by that, Cardew?" said Levison blankly.
 "Just that—no more and no less for the present, old top! Now I fancy I'd better be thinkin' about prep. No good—Hallo! Another visitor!"
 It was Knox of the Sixth who looked into the study at that moment. Cardew's bland smile left him as he saw him. Knox's face looked curiously strained and white.

"Oh, nothing! Let's drop the whole rotten subject for goodness' sake! I'm fed-up with it!"
 "Same here!"
 And Levison and Clive settled down to belated prep—though their minds were not given much to work that evening. They were feeling uneasy, and their uneasiness would not have been lessened had they heard what took place in Knox's study.
 Inside the door Knox faced Cardew. His face was white with anxiety, and his eyes were burning.
 "You—you fool, Cardew!" he hissed. "You young fool!"
 "Thanks, old top!" said Cardew coolly. "Got me here to give me your opinion of me, what?"
 Knox gritted his teeth.
 "You know why I've brought you here, you young fool!" he said thickly. "What the thunder do you mean by it? Are you mad?"
 "I hope not. But what exactly do you mean, Knox?"
 "You know jolly well what I mean," said Knox furiously,
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under his breath. "Why did you lend that fool fifty quid? And why in thunder did you make matters worse by telling the dashed beaks and everyone else you lent it him? Oh, you fool! The whole House is gassing about it—the whole school, in fact."

"My dear man, don't I just know it?" returned Cardew easily. "Nothin' to get excited about, old bean."

"What? You young idiot! Don't you see what it'll lead to?" said Knox, his thin features working with fury and anxiety. "Oh, you—you fool! This comes of letting Lower School kids into things. Can't you see what'll happen? You'll have to own up to where you got that dashed money from sooner or later. Think the dashed beaks will be satisfied with what you've told them? Oh, I—I'd like to lick the hide off you, you young cad! You'll get the lot of us sacked now!"

And Knox groaned.

"I'm a prefect," he went on thickly. "Think the beaks will let me stay when they know where you got that money from? Oh, I dashed well wish I'd never trusted you, you young rotter!"

Cardew did not seem a bit put out by the prefect's furious tirade. He smiled.

"You seem to be takin' a lot for granted, Knox," he said smoothly. "Am I likely to tell the beaks where the dibs came from? It means the long jump for me as well as you."

"But why did you do it?" said Knox, his voice trembling with rage. "Just to help that young fool D'Arcy! Why on earth—"

"Dear man! You wouldn't understand! Just a whim, I suppose. I've rather a tender heart, and the thought of old Rigg losin' his bit of capital—"

"Bosh! Don't be an idiot! What's that old fool to you, or D'Arcy? In any case, why did you go to the beaks and tell them you lent D'Arcy the dashed money? D'Arcy would never have given you away."

"I know it. Dear old Gussy's worth a few dozen of certain fellows I could name," said Cardew, looking straight at the prefect. "He's worth you and me put together, you know, Knox. Anyway, I'm a bit of a blackguard, but when I heard about Linton's loss I wasn't goin' to be such a blackguard as to let dear old Gussy face the music like that."

"Fool!"

"Thanks, old chap! Anythin' else?"

Knox gritted his teeth.

"Yes; there is something else, Cardew! You know why I went for you? The Head sent me to find you and take you to his study. I've already taken that young hound D'Arcy! The beaks mean to get to the bottom of it. I wasn't going to let you go until I'd warned you—warned you not to play the fool and split as to where you got the cash. The Head's waiting now, but he can wait. I want your promise that you won't give me away, Cardew?"

"Oh, I see!"

Cardew understood now the reason for Knox's trembling agitation and dread. The time had come to face the music. The Head had discussed matters with Mr. Railton, and had probably decided upon a course of action in the mysterious affair. And Knox was almost beside himself with fear lest it should come out—the secret he knew Cardew held.

"You—you've said far too much already!" said Knox, watching the junior's features in an agony of fear. "Are you going to play the fool again, Cardew? Are you going to give me away, confound you?"

"My dear man," Cardew spoke as though he was addressing a frightened child—"my dear man, don't be afraid! I promise you that your name won't come out in our interview. My own will be prominent—too prominent, I fear! St. Jim's may know me no more, but you will still remain to wield your giddy ashplant and be the merry old ogre to the Third Form fags."

"You swear you won't tell where you got that money?"

"Just that, old bean!"

"Right!" Knox drew a deep breath of relief. "Come along, then, and for Heaven's sake be careful what you say. You'd better deny now what you told the Head—swear you were acting the goat or something. What does it matter if that young fool D'Arcy's sacked?"

"Nothin' at all!" said Cardew urbanely. "Lead on, Knox, old son!"

Knox's eyes glittered, but he ignored the junior's "cheek," and led the way from the study and along to Masters' Corridor. He tapped on the door of the Head's study and pushed Cardew into the room.

"Here is Cardew now, sir," he said.

"Thank you, Knox!" The Head was evidently angry at the delay, and his voice was sharp. "You may leave him with me!"

"Very good, sir!"

Knox withdrew, his eyes sending a message of warning to the cool and iron-nerved Cardew. The door closed, and

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the Head turned his attention to Cardew. In the study was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his face pale, his eyes gleaming. Mr. Railton was also with the Head.

"Cardew," said the Head in an ominous tone, "Mr. Railton and I have discussed this matter. The affair is as much a mystery to us as ever, however. Do you still keep to your statement that you lent D'Arcy the money?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Have you decided to explain matters—to tell us, in that case, how you yourself came into possession of such a sum?"

"I'm sorry, sir; no!"

"You refuse to obey your headmaster's orders?"

"Y-yes, sir!" said Cardew. "I'm not in a position to say more than I have said—exceptin' to swear that D'Arcy is absolutely innocent of anything wrong in the matter! He accepted the money from me, believin' that I had received it from my grandfather. Believe me, sir, D'Arcy is quite innocent. I wish to accept full responsibility."

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!" thundered the Head. "Cardew, I refuse to allow you to accept responsibility, as you term it! Your impudence and defiance are beyond all bounds! D'Arcy has also defied authority by refusing to speak—to obey my commands. The position is intolerable! Unless you give an explanation, or until further facts come to light, I propose to hold you equally responsible!"

"Oh, gad!" Cardew murmured the words under his breath in dismay.

"Mr. Linton's money has gone—it has been obviously taken from his room," said the Head in tones trembling with anger. "It is quite clear to me that one of you two boys, or both, know what has happened to it. Whether the money stolen was that which D'Arcy paid over to Mr. Rigg or not, we shall discover sooner or later. Unfortunately, Mr. Linton did not take the number of the notes, and it may take some time to get the numbers."

"If you compare the numbers with those of the notes paid to Mr. Rigg you'll find that they're not the same, sir!" said Cardew, a look of relief coming over his face.

"I sincerely hope that they are not!" said the Head tartly. "However, though for the present nothing further can be done, the matter will very soon be made clearer. For your own sakes I urge you to confess to the truth while yet there is time. Otherwise—"

He paused and eyed each junior in turn.

"I have nothin' to say, Dr. Holmes," said Arthur Augustus with great dignity. "If my word cannot be taken then theah the mattah ends as far as I am concerned, sir!"

"Cardew—"

"I've nothin' further to say, sir—exceptin' that D'Arcy is quite innocent, sir!"

"Your anxiety to remove responsibility from D'Arcy's shoulders does you credit, Cardew," said the Head icily. "None the less, I refuse to accept your statements at this stage. You are held equally responsible. You have until to-morrow noon to think matters over. Whether the money paid to Mr. Rigg proves to be the money stolen from Mr. Linton or not, I look upon your silence with grave suspicion. Unless you make matters clear to me by noon to-morrow, you will both leave this school. I will not have my authority defied by boys in the Lower School. You may go, and I strongly advise you to give careful thought to my words."

And Arthur Augustus and Cardew went, the former icily calm, the latter—for once—rueful and dismayed.

CHAPTER 6.

The Face at the Window!

"LOOKS guilty, doesn't he?" remarked Reggie Manners.

"What?"

Wally D'Arcy of the Third fairly bellowed out the word.

It was before morning lessons the following day, and the chums of the Third were strolling round by the chapel, Wally having just been to feed his dog, Pongo. As they came round the corner of the chapel they sighted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, strolling ahead of them, his face downcast and gloomy.

It was then Reggie Manners had made his rather tactless remark, considering the fact that the young brother of Arthur Augustus was present.

As a matter of fact, D'Arcy minor was not in the best of tempers that morning. Moreover, he had a swollen lip, a suspiciously puffed and shady eye, and an altogether battered appearance. He looked as if he had been in the wars—as actually he had.

It had taken some time for the story to filter through to the faggery, but when it had it had caused no little excitement. Being the brother of Arthur Augustus, young Wally had naturally been amazed beyond measure and very indignant also. And as the young gentlemen of the Third were not given to wrapping up their views in tactful words, Wally

had had more "scraps" on his hands than he usually had in a month.

Like everyone else, Wally D'Arcy did not know what to make of the strange mystery; but he did know one thing, and that was that his major had not taken Mr. Linton's money! It was a stout and unchanging belief that Wally expected everybody else to hold.

Unfortunately, they didn't—which led to endless trouble in the Third Form quarters.

Up to now Wally's own personal chums, realising how their leader felt in the matter, had been very tactful indeed; they had kept off the painful affair as much as possible. But now the sight of Arthur Augustus "mooning" along by the Cloisters had brought that almost involuntary statement of opinion from the incautious Reggie Manners.

"What?" repeated Wally, glaring pugnaciously at Manners minor. "Say that again, young Manners!"

"Look here——"
"Say it again!" hooted Wally, his eyes gleaming, "and I'll punch your rotten head! I'll smash you, pal or no pal! So that's what you really think, is it?"

"N-nunno, old man! Keep your hair on, Wally," stammered Reggie, backing away. "Dash it all, I only said he looks—I didn't say he was guilty."

"Well, doesn't that mean practically the same?"
"Oh, go easy, Wally," urged Jameson pacifically. "Dash it all, can't you see how it looks to other people? Why the thump doesn't your silly major speak and clear the rotten matter up, if he knows nothing about the blessed money?"

"Why, you—you— Oh, you rotters!" spluttered Wally. "Can't you see why? That rotter Cardew's let him down, of course. And my major, the burbling chump, won't give him away. It's as plain as a pikestaff!"

"U'm"
"If you don't believe it I'll——"
"Oh crumbs! Look here, Wally——"
"Rot! You dare to call my major a thief!"
"Oh, my hat! Nunno, you silly ass! Look here," urged Jameson, "why the thump don't you tackle him? There he is! If he was my major, I should jolly well want to know what it means."

"I'm going to," said Wally, glaring over at the figure of Arthur Augustus pacing by the Cloisters. "I haven't had the chance before. I was hunting for the fathead last night, wasn't I? Anyway, here goes. You chaps can come and hear me do it."

"Yes, rather!"
Wally scudded across to Arthur Augustus with his chums at his heels.

"Oh, here you are, Gus!" snapped Wally.
Arthur Augustus started and looked at his minor.
"Pway what do you want, Wally?" he said coldly. "I do not wish to be bothahed this mornin'. Wun away!"

"Rats! Look here, Gus——"
"I am lookin', Wally. There is ink on your collah already, and your face is a tewrible sight. Bai Jove! You have been scwappin', I do believe!"

"Go hon!"
"Weally, you young——"
"Bow-wow! Cheese it, Gus," said Wally impatiently. "This isn't the time for your funny lectures. What about it? What the thump does this business over Linton's sixty quid mean?"

"I do not wish to discuss the mattah with you, Wally. Pway wun away, and don't bothah!"

"Not likely! Look here," said Wally warmly. "What about me? What about the family? What about our good name? Nice thing, ain't it, bringing disgrace on us all like this? What the thump do you mean by it?"

"Bai Jove!"
"What about it?" hooted Wally in great wrath and indignation. "Just to shield a dingy, sarcastic rotter like Cardew. Disgracing the family name. Bringing scorn and suspicion on everybody like this. Oh, you—you idiot!"

"Bai Jove! You you checkay young wascal! How dare you——"

"How dare you, you mean," snorted Wally wrathfully. "Why can't you speak out and clear yourself? What the thump does it all mean, anyway? Here's me——"

"Bai Jove. You should say 'Heah am I,' Wally, you young wapsallion. Or else 'Heah I am.'"

"Rats! Here's me," went on Wally stubbornly, "got to face all sorts of sneers and insults in the Third. All because you won't clear your silly self. Bosh! Look here, Gus—— Hallo, who the thump's let old Pongo loose?"

Wally ended with a startled yell as a small terrier, a mongrel of mongrels, came rushing up to them, his tail wagging at a great rate. It was Pongo, Wally's pet; and evidently Pongo had broken loose, for a second glance showed that his chain was trailing behind him, broken off at one of the links.

(Continued on next page.)

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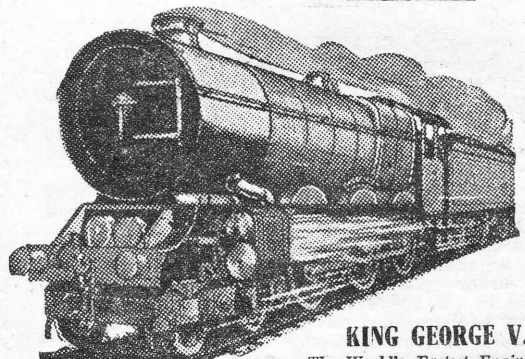
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Pongo sprang up joyfully at his master, and then, suddenly recognising Arthur Augustus, he turned his attention promptly to him.

Possibly it was only playfulness on the part of the mischievous Pongo. At all events, he always seemed to take a delight in leaving the imprint of his muddy paws on the elegant trousers of Arthur Augustus. Moreover, he seemed quite aware of the fact, and proud of it, that he was the worry of Gussy's life.

He sprang up at him now with a yelp of recognition.

"Oh, gweat Scott! Take him off, Wally!" shouted Arthur Augustus, staggering back in great alarm and wrath. "Call him off! Call the w'etched animal off, you gwinnin' wascal! Call— Look at my twousahs! Look— Oh, gweat Scott!"

After making a pattern of muddy paw-prints on Gussy's elegant trousers, Pongo next leaped and snatched at Gussy's glossy silk hat. In a flash he was tearing away with it.

"Oh, bai Jove! Gweat Scott! The little bwute has taken my new toppah!" roared Gussy. "Aftah him! He will wip it to shweds! Oh, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Instead of going in chase, Wally and his chums roared with laughter. Arthur Augustus, his monocle dangling on its silken cord, scudded away at top speed after Pongo, who was just vanishing round the end of the chapel. Unlike the fags, Gussy saw no humour whatever in Pongo's playfulness.

From long experience, Arthur Augustus might have known that it was useless to chase the slippery Pongo. But hope springs eternal in the human breast—according to the poet—and Arthur Augustus had the hope that he would catch Pongo before he started to worry the silk hat.

It was a vain hope. When Gussy rounded the chapel there was no sign of Pongo—or the topper.

"Oh, bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "The—the w'etched bwute! This is weally the limit!"

For a moment Arthur Augustus looked about him, and then he started off for the kennels. But Pongo was nowhere to be seen, and, turning off, Gussy proceeded at top speed for the ruined part of St. Jim's. This was a very quiet, unfrequented spot, and on more than one occasion Pongo had taken refuge there when sorely pressed by the irate Gussy.

But again the swell of St. Jim's drew blank. There was no sign of Wally's pet, nor did any sounds of worrying greet the anxious ears of Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove!" panted the swell of the Fourth in great indignation. "I am weally gettin' absolutely fed-up with that wotten animal. That is the second toppah he has wuined in a fortnight, not countin' those slippahs he wovvied to bits. It is weally too bad. Howevah—"

Arthur Augustus turned to retrace his steps, realising at long last the uselessness of carrying the pursuit any farther. It was just as he turned that something caught his eye—something strange and startling.

It was a movement at one of the small, barred but unglazed windows of the old Round Tower!

Gussy stood motionless, his eyes fixed on the window, wondering whether he had been mistaken. Then he saw it again—a white face, the face of a man! And Gussy recognised it.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped. "Oh, gweat Scott!"

CHAPTER 7.

"Slippery Alf" Again!

"Oh, bai Jove! Mr. Stiggins! Can it weally be possible?"

In dumbfounded wonder Arthur Augustus stared and stared at the little window. But the face had gone now—the window was empty.

Had he been dreaming? Mr. Alf Stiggins, the dingy gentleman who claimed to have saved his life, who had claimed Gussy's five-pound reward by bringing back his "lost" watch—the watch Blake & Co., in their base suspicions, suggested Mr. Stiggins had stolen himself when Gussy lay unconscious in the road. "Slippery Alf," who was wanted by the police for more than one reason, and whom Gussy had imagined was miles away.

"Oh, bai Jove!" panted Gussy.

He was really startled. Was it possible that the face he had seen could indeed belong to Mr. Stiggins? It seemed absurd, and yet, hadn't Slippery Alf vanished round by the ruins when being chased, and hadn't he been missing ever since, leaving the police utterly baffled? Yes, it was more than possible.

"Oh, bai Jove! I—I wondah—"

murmured Gussy. Vague and strange thoughts were moving in his mind now. He had completely forgotten the very existence of Pongo, or his owner. He stood thinking for some moments,

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his eyes still fixed on the window. But he saw no further movement, and suddenly he made up his mind.

He ran across to the tower and tried the heavy door. It was locked, of course, and the key was in the possession of Taggles, the porter. It was useless to think of asking him for it. The ruins, including the old tower, were strictly out of bounds, a fact that Gussy had quite overlooked while chasing Pongo.

But Gussy was only baffled for the moment. When he got an idea into his head, and when he made up his mind to anything, there was no hanging back. He took a careful look up the ivy-clad wall of the tower, and then, taking his stand below the small, barred window, he started to climb, clinging on with hands and feet to the old, gnarled ivy-roots.

It was not a difficult job to an athletic fellow like Arthur Augustus, and soon his head was on a level with the window-sill.

He knew perfectly well that anyone inside could scarcely have failed to hear the rustling of the ivy as he climbed. But he cared nothing for that. He was determined to find out if his eyes had deceived him or not, though he felt quite certain they had not.

He held on to the rusted bars of the window and peered inside.

Nothing was to be seen at first—the early morning sunlight scarcely penetrated that gloomy cell-like apartment. But as his eyes became used to the gloom he saw several things that surprised him.

On the floor a rug was spread—rather a smart travelling-rug, though sadly dusty now; it was a rug that D'Arcy fancied he had seen before. There were certain other things in the room that seemed familiar to him—a spirit-stove, and various other items of a domestic nature. There was also a loaf of bread, a tin of biscuits, and other foodstuffs, including tinned fruit and meat.

At Gussy's first glance round the room appeared to be unoccupied. Crouching closer to the bars, however, the junior soon glimpsed a crouching form right beneath him under the window.

He recognised it in a flash, and he gave a gasp.

"Bai Jove—Mr. Stiggins!"

Arthur Augustus gasped the words aloud, and, realising that he had been seen, the man below straightened himself and gave the junior a savage, evil glare.

He stood up, muttering fiercely.

"You—you spyin' little rat!" he hissed.

"Bai Jove! Mr. Stiggins—"

Arthur Augustus almost lost grip on the bars, so astonished was he at being addressed thus by his "friend" Mr. Alf Stiggins.

"You—you spyin' little rat!" repeated Mr. Stiggins savagely. "Well, you've bowled me out, but you ain't got me collared yet! I s'pose you're goin' to give me away to the cops now?"

"Bai Jove! I shall do certainly nothin' of the sort, Mr. Stiggins!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I am vewy sowwy that you should have tweated Mr. Wigg in such a wascally mannah, and I am vewy, vewy disappointed in you altogether, bai Jove! None the less, I cannot forget that you have saved my life, and for that weason I am reluctant to give you away, as you term it."

"Oh! You ain't goin' to give me away?" gasped Mr. Stiggins.

"Not if you agwee to my conditions," said Arthur Augustus, a trifle coldly. "You saved my life, and you found my gold watch, and for those weasons I will do whatever I can for you!"

"Crikey!" Mr. Alf Stiggins stared at Gussy, and then grinned. "Oh, I—I see, Master D'Arcy!" he said. "Look ere, you come down an' have a chat with me. I'll let you in. The door ain't locked; it's jest fastened from inside."

"Vewy well. I was goin' to suggest that you should give me a few moments to discuss the position, Mr. Stiggins. I will come down at once."

Arthur Augustus took grip of the ivy again, and began to descend. It was more difficult than going up, but he reached the ground safely at last, and ran round to the great, iron-studded door.

Mr. Stiggins was there, waiting with the door half open. He held it wide, and Arthur Augustus slipped through without hesitation. Mr. Stiggins closed the door again and fastened a heavy balk of timber across, making it secure.

At any time "Slippery Alf" could not have been called handsome, but just now he looked particularly unprepossessing. He was unwashed and he was grimy, and he was unshaven.

Arthur Augustus looked at him a trifle uncertainly now. Mr. Stiggins eyed him with eyes that glittered strangely.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, rather nervously. "There was no necessity to fasten the door again, Mr. Stiggins. I shall only be able to spare you a few moments, as it is almost time for mornin' lessons. Howevah, I am

amazed to find you hidin' heah. I pwesume you have been heah since you were chased out of our study?"

"Do you? And what d'you mean to do now you've found me 'ere, Master D'Arcy?"

There was something in the tone of the hunted man that made Arthur Augustus feel strangely uneasy.

"I—weally do not quite know, Mr. Stiggins," he said coldly. "I must confess that I am vewy disappointed and disgusted with your conduct. I trusted you, and you have deceived me and got me into vewy sewious twouble. I considah you have acted in a heartless mannah in wobbin' poor old Mr. Wigg!"

"Who's robbed the old bloke?" said Mr. Stiggins, with a return of his usual ringing manner. "Not me; I ain't touched a penny of 'is bloomin' money!"

"I am afwaid I am unable to accept that statement, Mr. Stiggins," said Arthur Augustus. "The mattah is onlay too cleah! I demand to know, heah and now, what you have done with the monay, also with the things you took fwm the studies that aftahnoon?"

"I knows nothin' about no things, either!"

"Wubbish! I am still more disappointed to find that you wefuse to admit what is quite obvious. But for the fact that you saved my life that day and tweated me with great kindness, I should wush off at once and bwing the police on your twack!"

"Oh, would you, my lad?"

"Yaas! Even now I know that it is my dutay to expose you and to acquaint the police with your whereabouts. But I have good weason to know that you are not weally all bad, othahwise you would nevah have saved me fwm bein' cwushed under the wheels of that dweadful motah-lowwy! I am vewy— Bai Jove, I see no weason why you should gwin in the circs, Mr. Stiggins!"

Apparently Mr. Alf Stiggins did, however—it was an evil grin.

"Was I grinnin'?" he said. "No, not me, Master D'Arcy! Look 'ere, what're you goin' to do?"

"I will tell you!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "Theah is only one possible course for me to take in this mattah—that is, to insist upon you weturnin' ewewythin' you have stolen. If you will hand ovah to me Mr. Wigg's fifty pounds—which you can scarcely have disposed of as yet—and also the things you have taken fwm the studies, I will allow you to go fwee; I will give you sevewal howahs in which to make your escape. If you wefuse, then—"

Arthur Augustus paused, but his pause was eloquent. The unspoken threat, however, did not seem to disturb Mr. Stiggins.

"So I got to do that, 'ave I?" he said thickly. "Arter all my trouble—eh? Arter riskin' chokey and goin' through what I gone through, I got to hand all over to you, 'ave I?"

"Certainly! I must insist upon it, Mr. Stiggins. It is the only possible course I can take! It is also the only possible course you can take if you wish to escape the consequences of your wascality!"

"Is it?" asked Mr. Alf Stiggins, the evil grin returning to his face. "I reckon not, Master D'Arcy!"

"Then, whatevah othah course do you pwopose to take, Mr. Stiggins?"

"This!" snapped Mr. Stiggins; and, without warning, he clapped a dirty hand full over the mouth of the startled Arthur Augustus, then, wrapping his other arm round the junior, he lifted the swell of St. Jim's clean from his feet, his hands trapped by his sides.

"Quiet, you spyin' little rat!" he hissed through his teeth, his eyes glittering. "Think I was goin' to let you go to give me over to the durned cops? Not likely! Quiet, or I'll bash you, durn you! Muck my game up, and get me copped, would you?"

Only a gurgle answered him from Arthur Augustus, who, now the first shock of surprise was over, began to struggle furiously. But he was like a child in the hands of Slippery Alf, who carried him easily up the stone steps to the chamber above through the trapdoor.

A blow sent that slamming into place, and then the amazed Arthur Augustus realised the truth. He was to be a prisoner in the tower. He had found the elusive Mr. Stiggins, but it was to cost him his liberty. If the dismayed Arthur Augustus had been disappointed and disgusted with his "friend" Mr. Stiggins before, he was doubly so now. Even the thought that Mr. Stiggins had been so kind to him and had saved his life, did not prevent Arthur Augustus from feeling very angry indeed and from struggling furiously for his liberty. But it proved in vain. Mr. Alf Stiggins was strong as a tiger, and he had not earned the name of "Slippery Alf" for nothing. In a few brief seconds he had the hapless swell of the Fourth safely trussed-up and tied to a ring in the old stone wall of the tower.

CHAPTER 8.

Missing!

"D'ARCY! Where is D'Arcy?" Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, frowned as he blinked round the Form-room in search of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Morning lessons were just beginning. But one junior was missing from the Form-room.

"D'Arcy does not appear to be here!" said the Form master sharply. "Does any boy know where he is?"

There was a low buzz. Nobody seemed to know where Arthur Augustus was, however. Mr. Lathom fixed his eyes on Jack Blake.

"Do you know where D'Arcy is, Blake?"

"No, sir. I last saw him in the quadrangle."

"You do not know if Mr. Railton or Dr. Holmes has sent for him?"

"Oh, no, sir! I hardly think so, sir," said Blake.

He was looking rather startled. Blake knew quite well that it was a very rare thing indeed for Arthur Augustus to be late for classes. Arthur Augustus took the view that being late for classes showed great disrespect to the master in charge. And disrespect was the last thing of which the swell of St. Jim's was likely to be guilty.

Yet he was late now, undoubtedly.

"Blake," rapped out Mr. Lathom sternly, "kindly look for D'Arcy!"

Blake hurried out of the Form-room. He went up to the study, feeling quite certain Gussy would not be there—nor was he. For five minutes Blake searched up and down and round about for Arthur Augustus—in vain. He seemed to have vanished.

Blake returned to the Form-room and reported. Mr. Lathom frowned.

"It is very strange, Blake. However, the Form cannot be kept waiting any longer. If he has dared to set at defiance his headmaster's orders not to leave the precincts of the school he will be severely punished."

Blake returned to his place and the lesson went on, Mr. Lathom looking very disturbed. Actually the little master of the Fourth felt very keenly the trouble that had fallen on two of his pupils. He glanced over at Cardew's place, and he seemed quite relieved to find that junior still there.

There was no little excitement in the Form-room that morning. Morning break came and went, but Arthur Augustus did not put in an appearance, and faces were very grave indeed by dinner-time. Mr. Lathom had consulted with Mr. Railton, and Mr. Railton had consulted with the Head, and Kildare and several other seniors had searched for the missing junior.

It was all in vain. Arthur Augustus was not to be found. At noon Wally D'Arcy was sent for by Mr. Railton, and it was he who seemed to have seen Arthur Augustus last—he and his chums. But his information led to nothing.

To the school it was another mystery—unless—

It was not long before a very simple possibility had occurred to someone, and by tea-time the theory was held by a good many.

"He's bunked, of course!" said Lumley-Lumley, when the Fourth came out of afternoon class. "He couldn't stand facing the music!"

"Don't talk piffing rot!" snapped Blake, his eyes gleaming. "Why should he run away, you fool?"

"Why?" echoed Racke, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "What a question! Ask Mr. Linton, somebody?"

"What's that?" shouted Blake.

The suggestion was too obvious to be missed.

"Easy on, Blake!" said Grundy gruffly, as Blake took a step forward with clenched fists. "No good getting ratty about it. Racke's only saying what nearly everyone thinks! D'Arcy's bunked right enough!"

"Blake knows it as well as anyone does!" said Racke; now he saw Grundy was likely to back him up, Aubrey Racke became quite brave and outspoken. "D'Arcy was always supposed to be a dashed saint. He's proved himself now to be a rotten funk as well as a hypocrite! He's bunked because he can't face the sack. It's no good—Yooooop!"

Racke crashed back against the passage wall, his hands to his nose. Blake stepped back and looked round, panting. Herries, and Digby took their stand beside him, their eyes gleaming, their fists ready.

"Any more got anything to say?" said Blake, in a trembling voice. "Let him say it if he has!"

"What is this disturbance?"

Mr. Railton came along the passage—there was no chance for anyone to accept Blake's invitation had they wanted to. He frowned round at the excited group.

"What has happened here?" he said sternly, his eyes fixed on Racke.

Aubrey Racke did not reply in words, but he fixed his eyes savagely on Blake.

"Why did you strike Racke, Blake?"

"Because he called my chum, D'Arcy, a thief!" said Blake with Yorkshire bluntness. "He said D'Arcy had bolted because he dared not face the sack."

"Racke had no right to say anything of the kind," said the Housemaster, after a pause. "The less said about this unfortunate affair the better. You will both—the Housemaster paused as if he had thought better of what he intended saying. He turned abruptly to Blake—"Blake, D'Arcy is still absent, and there is not the slightest clue to his whereabouts. You are quite sure, my boy, that you can throw no light on the matter?"

"Quite, sir!" said Blake, in a low voice. "I don't believe he's bunked—I mean, run away—for an instant. He would never go without saying anything to us, either personally or by leaving a message behind."

"Then how can you account for his absence at such a time?"

"I can't account for it, sir; it's a complete mystery to us in No. 6 Study."

"H'm! D'Arcy minor seems to have been the— What- ever is the matter now?"

The Housemaster broke off suddenly and jumped. Something was obviously the matter, for at that moment the fat form of Baggy Trimble came tearing along the passage, and he was yelling at the top of his voice.

"Help! Stop the beast, you fellows! Oh dear! Stop him! Help! Murder! Yaroooooh! Oh dear!"

He charged full into the juniors, scattering them, before he realised that a master was present. Mr. Railton hooked a strong hand in his collar and pulled him up violently. At the same moment Gilmore of the Fifth came charging up, his face red with rage.

Gilmore stopped just in time as he sighted Mr. Railton. "What does this mean, Gilmore?" said Mr. Railton angrily. "Are you out of your senses? I am amazed to see a boy of your position in the school chasing a junior boy along the passages!"

"I—I—I—" Gilmore stammered and stopped, flushing to the roots of his hair. Then he gave Trimble a savage look and went on angrily.

"I was chasin' Trimble because he's been up to his thievin' tricks again!" he said, with furious bluntness. "It's gettin' a bit too thick altogether, sir! All the fellows will tell you that they've lost something or other. There's a tin of biscuits and some apricots gone from our study since teatime yesterday."

"Bless my soul! Do you mean to say that there have been wholesale thefts in the school—of foodstuffs, I mean?"

"Yes, sir—and other things as well," said Gilmore, with a grim look at the shaking Trimble. "Cutts has lost a ten-shilling note even. And several fellows are complaining of havin' lost various things lately. I believe Cardew has lost a travelling-rug!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton seemed thunderstruck. He looked at Trimble, and that hapless junior trembled.

"It isn't true, sir!" he wailed, on the point of tears. "It ain't true that I know anything about the things, anyway. Everybody seems to think it's me, but it isn't. I swear it isn't. Oh dear! I'm speaking the truth, sir—I know absolutely nothing about it! It's somebody else! I'm as innocent as a baby, and I've had an awful time lately—everybody punching and kicking me because they think it's me. Oh dear!"

There was a silence. More than one fellow was looking curiously at Trimble now. At first everyone had taken it for granted that the unknown raider was Trimble. But several of the keener fellows were beginning to wonder. Now they looked at Trimble strangely. Somehow his fearful, desperate denials carried conviction.

"You have amazed me, Gilmore!" said Mr. Railton. "This matter should have been reported to me before."

"I believe Kildare was going to report it, but this affair of D'Arcy's has made him put it off, I suppose," said Gilmore sullenly. "But Trimble—"

"I don't believe it can be Trimble," interrupted Tom Merry quietly. "What would Trimble want with rugs and a spirit-stove, and things like that? Besides even Trimble wouldn't dare to go to such lengths—especially after he's been warned and threatened so much lately."

Mr. Railton nodded, his eyes fixed keenly on the shivering Trimble.

"That seems obvious," he said. "I have never heard of such a thing. I will see Kildare at once and go into the matter thoroughly. Meanwhile," he said, looking at Gilmore, "Trimble is on no account to be bullied by anyone. You understand, Gilmore?"

"Y-yes, sir!" said Gilmore sulkily. "But—"

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"That is enough! Trimble, you will go to my room and await me there."

"Ow! Oh, yes, sir! Oh dear!"

The unhappy Trimble rolled away dismally. Mr. Railton walked away, Gilmore also taking his departure scowling. Apparently the Fifth-Former still had no doubts about Trimble's innocence.

"Dear old Thomas!" said Cardew, looking admiringly at Tom Merry. "I'm glad to see you've got a bit of sense, anyway."

"Oh, cheese it, Cardew!" snapped Tom. "Anyone in their senses ought to see that it isn't Trimble by this time. If you're trying to be funny—"

"I'm not. I'm quite serious," said Cardew. "If dear



old Trimble had a fancy for masticatin' travellin'-rugs I should follow the crowd in my opinion, perhaps. As it is—"

"You think it isn't Trimble, too?"

"I'm quite sure it isn't," yawned Cardew. "In fact—"

He paused.

"Then who the thump is it, then?" demanded Levison, eyeing his chum curiously. "I can see you've got some idea—"

"That's the question!" drawled Cardew. "If we knew that we might also have an idea who really boned Linton's sixty quids!"

"What?"

"Think it over, dear men!" said Cardew. "Come along, Ernest and Sidney! I can see these men don't quite approve of my questionable company. Like dear old Gussy, I'm still under a cloud, y'know."

Cardew strolled away with his chums. The rest looked after him, curious and irritated.

"The silly ass!" grunted Tom Merry. "What the thump did he mean by that? He's talking—"

"My hat, I've got it!" said Grundy excitedly. "What about D'Arcy?"

"Eh? What d'you mean, ass?"

"It's D'Arcy, of course!" said George Alfred excitedly. "Don't you see? He's hiding about the school somewhere, and he's raiding grub and stuff to live on!"

"Wha-at?"

"Don't you remember? He did something of the sort some time ago when he was up against the beaks—lived on the roof, you remember. That's it. It's that rotter, D'Arcy! Phew! Why didn't we—"

"You—you ass! You—you fooling duffer!" hooted Blake. "Say that again, and I'll—I'll—"

"Oh, let the silly ass run on!" said Tom Merry, half smiling. "Come on, Blake. No good having more trouble; there's trouble enough."

Taking Blake's arm Tom Merry led him away. It was



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy struggled furiously for his liberty—but in vain. Mr. Alf Stiggins was as strong as a tiger, and in a few seconds he had the hapless swell of the Fourth safely trussed up and tied to a ring in the old stone wall of the tower. (See Chapter 7.)

just as well he did, or there would certainly have been trouble between George Alfred and Blake. They left Grundy enlarging volubly on his remarkable new theory, while the rest of the crowd listened with grins on their faces. George Alfred was often entertaining if he was nothing else.

CHAPTER 9.

The Night Watchers!

"YOU fellows tired?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew asked the question carelessly as he looked in at Study No. 6 a little before bed-time. He found the Terrible Three with Blake, Herries, and Digby, and the faces of the six juniors were grave.

It was no wonder, perhaps. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still absent, and the mystery seemed deeper than ever. The general view was, of course, that Arthur Augustus had bolted, and even Blake could not help wondering a little. On a certain occasion before, Arthur Augustus, his noble dignity sadly injured by a charge of dishonourable conduct, had "retired" from school for a period as a protest.

Had he done so again?

It really began to look very much like it.

As bed-time approached there were some even who began to incline towards Grundy's remarkable theory.

When Cardew looked in at Study No. 6 the chums of the School House were discussing the matter hopelessly. Strangely enough, Cardew's curious words had had no little effect on Tom Merry. Was there any connection between the affair of Linton's banknotes and the strange disappearance of foodstuffs and other items—items that made the raids so mysterious?

Tom Merry wondered.

He looked at Cardew rather strangely as that junior strolled carelessly into the study, with hands in pockets, and asked that question:

"You fellows tired?"

"Yes, we are tired," grunted Blake. "Tired of discussing this rotten business, Cardew! Why?"

"Nothin' much, dear men." Cardew carefully closed the door and came further into the study, seating himself on the table edge. "Only I wondered if you chaps would care to join me in a little detectin' to-night?"

"Detectin'? What the thump—"

"After lights out," explained Cardew coolly. "I'm rather keen to catch the merchant who's raidin' the giddy studies, you know. It isn't Trimble, an' it isn't Gussy, an' it isn't the Head."

"Fathead!"

"Thanks! I tried to persuade dear old Ernest and Sidney to come. But, alas! they told me to go and masticate a certain domestic article of fuel which is most objectionable as an article of diet. So I thought I would ask you fellows."

"Well, you—you ass, we'll jolly soon tell you the same, Cardew!"

"Hold on, Blake!" said Tom Merry, whose eyes were gleaming. "That—that's not a bad idea of Cardew's."

"Thanks, Thomas!" drawled Cardew. "I had an idea that I should find in you a fellow with ideas of his own. Well, are you on?"

"To keep watch to-night, you mean?"

"Just that."

"Well, yes, I'm on," said Tom Merry slowly. "It may come to something. Blake—"

"If you think it worth while," said Blake hesitatingly, "then you can count me in, too, of course. Yes, perhaps Cardew is right; we may catch the rotter, whoever he is. Have you got any suspicions, Cardew?"

Cardew smiled.

"Nothin' really definite," he said. "Only I'm no end keen to test a certain theory of mine. I won't say what it is for the present. I fancy to-night will supply me with somethin' to go on. I'll tell you my ideas then, dear men. If we only prove dear old Trimble innocent it'll be something. The poor chap will be a positive wreck if he gets ragged much more, you know. By the way"—Cardew changed the subject abruptly—"do you chaps happen to have heard if that Stiggins merchant has been captured yet?"

"Eh? Not that I've heard of," said Tom Merry frowning. "Why?"

"Nothin', dear men. Just what might be expected, considerin' the intellect of the local bobbies, y'know! As I lent dear old Gussy the tin to replace the fifty quid that merchant pinched, I'm naturally interested. I'm still hopeful of gettin' it back if our friend Stiggins is apprehended."

"Some hopes!" grinned Blake.

"Exactly! Still, one never knows. Well, what about to-night? Eleven-thirty should be safe enough."

"Right! Eleven-thirty," said Tom, nodding. "You Fourth chaps be ready in the passage, and we'll join you there."

"Good men!" Cardew slipped from the table. "Well, so-long!"

He strolled out cheerily.

Blake frowned and looked at Tom Merry.

"I was inclined to think that chap had let old Gussy down badly," he grunted. "I was even ready to believe he'd taken old Linton's rotten money. But—"

"That's absurd when you think things over," said Tom.

"If Cardew had pinched it, was he likely to show his hand by immediately lending it to someone else? Rot! Cardew's far too keen a chap to do that, even under a pledge of secrecy. It's no end queer altogether; but I fancy Cardew's on the scent, or believes he is. I'm backing him up to-night, anyway."

"It's worth trying," said Herries. "I'm on!"

"Same here."

Manners and Digby and Lowther were also "on." They had not very much respect for Cardew himself, but they

had a great deal for the whimsical dandy's keen reasoning powers.

St. Jim's retired to bed that night seething with excitement. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still absent. All searching and all inquiries had led to nothing. He had not been seen at either Wayland Junction or Rylcombe Station, nor had he boarded a bus in the vicinity. He had just vanished.

In the Fourth dormitory especially the sensation was discussed breathlessly, and it was some time before the fellows began to drop off to sleep, to the disgust of Blake & Co. But there was silence at last, and as the last notes of the three-quarters after eleven rang out on the still night air Blake slipped out of bed.

"You fellows asleep?"

There was no answer, but as Blake slipped from the sheets there was a movement from Cardew's bed and from Herries'.

"All serene! Warn that ass Digby, someone."

Digby had fallen asleep; but he was soon roused again, and in a very few minutes all four were stealing from the quiet dormitory. They found the Terrible Three waiting for them in the passage outside.

"Slackers!" murmured Lowther. "Come on!"

"Sorry! Our chaps were late going off," whispered Blake. "What now?"

"Better watch from the studies," said Tom.

"Hold on." Cardew spoke quietly. "I don't agree, old bean. I vote we watch from the lower box-room."

"What?"

"My dear men, don't shout! Whoever the merchant is who's raidin' us, he comes from outside, in my humble opinion."

"My hat! You—you mean the New House?"

"Not at all. But from the outside, all the same. And the lower box-room is about the only place where anyone could get in, isn't it—as far as we know, at all events? But, if you like, some of us could hang about the studies. The box-room isn't far away, and a low whistle would soon bring us together. How's that?"

"Lowther, Manners, and I will take the studies, then," said Tom Merry grimly. "I think it's safest—I mean, we might miss the chap altogether otherwise."

"Right-ho! Come on!"

They started downstairs, moving without a sound in their slippers. It was a cold night, and they felt thankful they had put trousers and jackets over their pyjamas. Gas-jets were always kept burning low in the corridors during the night at St. Jim's, and it was not a difficult matter to find one's way. The juniors, indeed, could easily have found their way in the darkness.

They reached the studies, and Tom Merry & Co. were just about to part from the rest when Cardew gave a low hiss.

"Someone comin'! Hide—quick!"

They were standing by the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage at the moment, and hurriedly they followed Cardew inside, Tom Merry gently pushing the door almost shut. Through the crack they watched the corridor.

They could hear soft footfalls now, and suddenly a figure loomed up in the passage. It went swiftly past, moving almost soundlessly.

Blake and all but Cardew would have rushed out, but Tom Merry held the door firmly and gave a breathless warning.

"Quiet, you asses!"

Opening the door, he peered swiftly out. As he did so the unknown passed under a dimly-burning gas-jet. Tom grunted.

"All right!" he said in some disgust. "It's—"

"Who—who?"

"Cutts of the Fifth. I thought as much when I spotted him passing. He's fully dressed and carrying his boots."

"But—but dash it all!" gasped Herries. "It couldn't be Cutts! And why—?"

"Fathead! Of course it's Cutts!" said Tom. "The rotter's going out on the razzle as usual, I suppose! We'd better give him a few minutes!"

"A good hiding would do him more good!" chuckled Lowther. "What a lad he is! I suppose he's gone to pay a visit to his pals at the Green Man."

In silence the juniors waited for three or four minutes, and then Cardew led Blake, Herries, and Digby along to the box-room. It was only a short distance, and cautiously Cardew pushed the door open and peered inside.

The room was empty; Cutts had obviously gone. The window was left open a couple of inches—evidently for his return.

"Dear man!" murmured Cardew. "Cutts has gone to win ten bob at the giddy cards to make up for the ten bob he's lost. What a hope!"

"What now?"

"Get behind cover and wait, that's all!" murmured Cardew.

There were plenty of boxes and packing-cases in the room, and the juniors crouched down behind them to watch and wait.

CHAPTER 10.

Struck Down!

"Q U I E T!" breathed Cardew.

There was a sound of someone moving stealthily outside the box-room window. Feet scraped on the leads of the outhouse below. In the silence of the night in the slumbering school the sounds came clearly to the watchers.

Midnight had long ago chimed out from the clock-tower. In the dusty, half-empty room the investigators had waited and watched, shivering with the cold, as the long minutes passed. No sound of warning had come from Tom Merry and his chums, nor had they heard until now any suspicious sounds. It was a tiring wait in the chilly room, and more than once the idea of giving up the vigil had been mooted. But Cardew would not hear of it, and as he refused to give up, the rest decided to stick it. But they were obliged now and again to move about to keep themselves warm.

Then had come the sound of someone moving stealthily on the leads outside. Cardew thrilled. In his view the unknown would come from this window; but he was quite prepared had anyone come upstairs from the regions below. To reach the studies they would have to pass the box-room door, unless they knew of the back staircase—which was unlikely, in Cardew's view. Cardew had his own ideas as to the identity of the midnight prowler.

"Quiet!" breathed Cardew. "It may only be Cutts, but we'll take no chances. If it's a stranger, we'll follow him. He's bound to make for the studies, as before. We'll collar him there, with the others to help us. Quiet!"

There was a sound at the window now; it moved upwards with a faint creak. A dark figure appeared against the sky. It moved through and dropped to the floor of the room. Then came a faint bump and a low, savage exclamation.

In the darkness the juniors could not help smiling. It was Cutts—and Cutts had obviously struck his shin against something in the darkness. He was also in a very bad temper by the tone and depth of his vicious exclamation. Possibly Cutts was just realising that his nocturnal excursions were scarcely worth while; possibly he had lost heavily that night.

At all events, he was clearly not in a happy mood.

They heard him remove his boots, and then he left the room—cautiously this time.

"Gad!" breathed Cardew, his tone showing disappointment. "I'm afraid we've struck a blank to-night, you men. I—I fancied the merchant, whoever he is, had seen Cutts or someone leaving the school at night, and he slipped in while the dashed window was unfastened. It looks now—What the—Quick!"

It happened in a flash.

From somewhere outside, in the passage beyond the door, had sounded a startled shout, followed instantly by sounds of a furious struggle.

Then, even as Cardew broke off in alarm, came a cry—a half-stifled cry—followed by the crash of a fall.

In a flash Cardew was leading the way out of the room.

"Help! Quick! This way!"

It was Tom Merry's voice.

With Cardew leading, they dashed pell-mell from the room. Cardew had scarcely started to run along the passage, however, when he pulled up short. At the same moment Tom Merry's voice rang out again urgently:

"Stop him! Look out, Cardew! Stop him!"

It was too late, however.

As Cardew pulled up and Tom Merry's voice rang out, the racing figure they suddenly glimpsed ahead was upon them.

Crash!

To right and left the man—for it obviously was a man—sent them sprawling, and the next instant he was past, Cardew's hand missing him by a hair's-breadth.

"After him!" hissed Cardew savagely.

"Yes, rather!"

Along the dim passage and downstairs into the kitchen regions the chase led them, and it ended in the cellar, a low grating wrenched from its place at the window showing how the unknown had got in and out.

But he was gone; and Cardew growled his disgust as they raced back again.

"I was wrong, then!" he snapped. "The merchant didn't get in by the box-room window, after all. Come on, let's see what happened!"

They soon reached the scene of the encounter. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were bending over a figure on the floor. It was Cutts of the Fifth, and he seemed half-stunned.

"I worked right to the brute," he panted, his hand to a big bruise on his head. "I thought it was a master at first, and then—then the brute went for me! We struggled, and then—then he hit me with something, and I went down."

"But who—?"

"A dashed burglar, I think!" groaned Cutts. "Good gad! There's somebody coming, I think! I'm done—done! I'm fully dressed! It's the sack this time!"

He groaned aloud. From up the stairs came sounds of opening doors. No wonder Cutts of the Fifth groaned with dread in addition to pain. If he was found fully dressed at that hour of the night—

"Quick!" rapped out Tom Merry. "Off with your collar and tie, Cutts!"

"But—but—"

Tom did not wait. He tore at Cutts' collar and tie, and in a trice he had them off. Then Cardew and he wrenched off his jacket and boots. The latter were hidden in the nearest study.

"Quick!" panted Tom again.

Little as the blackguard of the Fifth deserved it, Tom saw a way of saving him, and he was determined to try it. The captain of the Shell could feel only pity for the white-faced and despairing Fifth-Former.

Cutts was, to all intents and purposes, helpless. He was still dazed from the blow he had received. But Cardew had grasped Tom's idea now. In less time than it takes to tell the captain of the Shell had ripped off his own jacket and then his pyjama coat. He helped the bewildered Fifth-Former into the latter. It was much too small for him, but in the gloom that fact was scarcely likely to be noticed.

Cardew helped him to button it up, and the collar and tie were rammed into Cutts' jacket pocket. Then Cutts was helped into his own jacket again.

"It's up to you now, Cutts!" said Tom curtly. "We've done what we can, and we're leaving the rest to you. Under—Hallo! Phew! Just in time!"

They were! A light flashed at the head of the staircase; the noises upstairs from the dormitories were louder now—voices were questioning. The next moment Mr. Railton, with Kildare, Darrell, and several other seniors at his heels, came dashing downstairs.

They stopped and stared as they sighted the group in the passage. Mr. Railton carried a lamp, and the light soon revealed to the newcomers the alarming scene.

"What—what— Good heavens! What has happened here? Why are you boys— Oh, Cutts! Are you hurt, my boy?"

"I—I'm all right now, sir!" panted Cutts, staggering, as Blake and Tom Merry helped him to his feet. "I—I've had a knock on the head! I—I—"

Kildare and Darrell took the places of Tom and Blake in a moment.

"But what has happened?" gasped the Housemaster.

"I—I heard a noise, sir!" panted Cutts, pulling himself together with a desperate effort. "I heard something downstairs and I came down to investigate. It was foolish of me, I know; but—but I was curious, and didn't think to call anyone else. Then—then I ran into him—a man—I suppose he was a burglar. We struggled for a second, and then—then he hit me with something—a stick. I went down, and he got away, sir."

"Good heavens!"

There was a silence. Other fellows were coming downstairs now. Mr. Linton appeared, and next moment Mr. Lathom. They crowded breathlessly round the group amid a buzz of excited questioning.

"But—but what are you boys doing here?" snapped Mr. Railton. He seemed to become aware suddenly that Tom Merry & Co. were half-dressed. "Did you come down with Cutts, Merry?"

"Oh, no, sir!" He glanced at Cardew and the rest, and they nodded. There was nothing else for it but either lying or telling the truth. Tom Merry & Co. were not likely to choose the former course. "No, sir," he went on, "we—we got up after lights-out to watch."

"To what?" articulated Mr. Railton.

"To watch in case anyone came prowling again to-night, sir!" said Tom frankly. "We came to the conclusion it must be someone outside St. Jim's who was raiding the studies and rooms—or, at least, Cardew did, and he told us his views. We decided to keep watch to-night and try to catch whoever it was."

"Well, upon my word!"

There was a buzz. Mr. Railton set his lips.

"Very well!" he snapped. "We will go into that in the morning. Cutts, did you not see who the prowler was?"

"I—I just caught a glimpse of him!" muttered Cutts. "He was a stranger—a burglar without a doubt. He was short and slim—scarcely bigger than myself. His face I didn't see, but he was unshaved, I think—I struck him on the chin, and it was bristly, anyway. I got no chance to see him clearly."

"Did you boys see him?"

"No, sir!" Tom answered for them all. "When we heard Cutts cry out we rushed to the scene. But the man was too quick for us. He dodged us and got away."

"How had he got in? Do you know?"

"Through a grating in the cellar, sir!" said Cardew coolly. "We chased him downstairs, but he gave us the slip. We found one of the cellar gratings out of place."

"He had obviously been in the House before, sir!" said Blake. "He seemed to know the place well enough, even in the dark. It—it's pretty clear he's the fellow who's raiding the studies."

"I told you fellows it wasn't me!" came in a triumphant, excited squeak from Trimble, who was hovering on the fringe of the crowd. "You wouldn't believe me!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Railton, as a chuckle was heard. "It is undoubtedly someone outside the school! I will inform the police of the amazing affair in the morning. Cutts, do you feel fit to return to your dormitory, or—?"

"I'm all right now, sir," said Cutts hurriedly. "Just a knock—it isn't even bleeding!"

"Very well! Kildare, Darrell, Rushden, and North will remain behind with me to search the House downstairs. The rest of you return to your dormitories as quietly as possible."

"Yes, sir!"

Buzzing with excitement the crowd broke off and streamed upstairs again. Cutts caught Tom Merry by the arm. He was almost gasping with deep, overwhelming relief. Mr. Railton had obviously accepted his account of the affair without a shadow of suspicion that Cutts was not telling all; he obviously did not suspect that Cutts had been breaking bounds at night. Had he done so— Cutts shivered.

"Thanks, Merry!" he breathed. "You—you're a good kid, and so are your pals. If I can ever do you a good turn I will; I mean it, kid. Thanks! You saved my bacon that time!"

"All serene!" said Tom. "Only I shouldn't act the goat again, if I were you! You may not have the same luck next time!"

Cutts did not answer that. He was grateful at the moment, but Cutts was not likely to remain grateful to Tom Merry & Co. for long. The juniors left him and went into their dormitories.

"Well?" whispered Tom Merry, as they were parting at the door of the Fourth Form dormitory. "What do you make of it, Cardew? You were right—absolutely right! It is someone outside, and I fancy you know who—and I fancy I do myself, or I can guess!"

(Continued on next page.)



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"I thought you would!" smiled Cardew. "But keep it to yourself until mornin', old bean. It will keep! An' to-morrow we'll carry on with the giddy investigations, eh?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom; and his eyes were gleaming as he went to bed.

CHAPTER 11.

Cardew's Theory!

"EXCUSE me, sir!"

Mr. Railton halted, and bent rather a sharp glance on the cool face of Cardew of the Fourth.

It was after breakfast the following morning. Mr. Railton had just been to visit the Head, and Cardew met him in Hall. Mr. Railton's face was grim—and with good reason! No traces of the intruder of the night before had been found—that is, of the man himself; but he had left plenty of traces.

Evidently the raider was getting bolder and more daring, for this time everything that was missing was of some value—money, watches, trinkets, and silver articles had vanished from certain studies in the night, and it was plain that matters would have been worse but for the intervention of Cutts and Tom Merry & Co., who had quite clearly interrupted his work.

More foodstuffs had also vanished in the night—the most amazing and yet the most interesting part of the whole mysterious happenings.

It was only too clear now that the culprit was certainly not Baggy Trimble. Indeed, the fellows wondered now how they could have suspected the fat junior, in view of the peculiar circumstances.

But there was another reason why the Housemaster looked so grimly at Cardew. Mr. Railton, like Dr. Holmes, was quite at a loss to make head or tail of the strange affair of Mr. Linton's sixty pounds. Everything seemed to point to the fact that Gussy was guilty—and that Cardew knew a great deal about it. It was this latter fact that irritated the Housemaster. He felt certain that Cardew could have told something had he chosen to do so. That Cardew actually knew anything of the missing money, or had actually lent Arthur Augustus the money, he did not believe for one moment.

Both the Head and the Housemaster were puzzled and quite undecided how to act since the disappearance of Arthur Augustus. They could scarcely deal with the defiant Cardew under the circumstances, and the matter had had to be held over until such time as the missing junior returned or was found.

"Well, Cardew" snapped Mr. Railton.

"I suppose nothing's been heard about D'Arcy, sir?"

"Nothing, Cardew! Have you anything to tell me in regard to him?"

"Oh, no, sir! I was only goin' to ask you if the numbers of the missin' banknotes had been compared with those returned by D'Arcy to Mr. Rigg?" said Cardew coolly.

Mr. Railton frowned.

"Not yet, Cardew! We have the numbers of some of the notes handed to Mr. Rigg by D'Arcy; but Mr. Linton has not obtained the numbers of his notes yet. When he does the mystery will be solved, of course, and," added the Housemaster grimly, "justice will take its course as regards that wretched boy, D'Arcy."

"I think not, sir!"

"What?"

"I think you'll find that the numbers do not agree, sir!" said Cardew, smiling. "You see—"

"Nonsense, Cardew. It is quite impossible for D'Arcy to have obtained fifty pounds at such short notice from anywhere else. I do not, for one single moment, believe your absurd story that you lent him that amount. You—"

"But it happens to be true, sir!" said Cardew, unmoved. "Hasn't another possibility occurred to you, sir?"

"What do you mean, Cardew?"

"I'm thinkin' about the man who broke into the school last night, sir!" said Cardew. "It isn't the first time—everyone can see that now! Supposin' it was this man who stole Mr. Linton's banknotes? I think," added Cardew musingly, "that he would be more likely to do so than either D'Arcy or myself."

The Housemaster started. It was clear that that point of view had never even occurred to him.

"Don't you think so, sir?" added Cardew innocently.

There was something approaching impudence in Cardew's way of asking the question, but the Housemaster did not seem to notice it, or if he did he ignored it. He stared at the junior and then he frowned again.

"It—it is possible, of course!" he muttered. "But there still remains the question of how D'Arcy obtained the fifty pounds which he handed to Mr. Rigg. I—I must confess that you have raised a point that cannot be overlooked, Cardew. It is more than possible, and yet— However, I

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will think over your suggestion, Cardew! Have you"—his voice took on a sterner note—"have you anything more to say to me? I am convinced that you can clear up this wretched matter as far as D'Arcy is concerned."

"Nothin' at all, sir," answered Cardew.

"Very well! The suggestion you have made shall have the attention of Dr. Holmes, Cardew."

He nodded and passed on, Cardew looking after him with a curious smile on his handsome features.

"Dear man!" he murmured. "Wouldn't he just like to know just where that fifty quid came from! I—Hallo, there's dear old Knoxy on the giddy horizon; I think I'll steer clear of him for a bit."

Cardew moved off, strolling until he got round the corner of the passage. Once round, he scudded away and went upstairs, knowing quite well that the Sixth-Former was anxious to speak to him. He made his way to Tom Merry's study, and, after tapping at the door, he went inside.

The Terrible Three were at home. They looked at Cardew expectantly.

"Oh, here you are," said Tom Merry. "You're the chap I want to see."

"The want happens to be mutual, Thomas," said Cardew. "Well, have you tumbled to the probable identity of the giddy mysterious raider yet?"

"I think so," said Tom.

"Dear old Gussy—what?" smiled Cardew blandly.

"Don't be an ass! You know jolly well who it is," retorted the captain of the Shell. "You think it's that merchant Stiggins. Am I right?"

"Dear man!" Cardew slapped Tom Merry on the back. "What brains, what deduction! Marvellous! My dear Watson—"

"Don't be an idiot!" said Tom Merry. "It seems jolly wild to say it, but—well, that's what your giddy hints have led me to think. I'm right, then?"

"Right as rain, old bean," said Cardew. "At least, you're right as regards sharin' my valuable opinion. Look at the facts. Our dear, heroic friend, Slippery Alf, after pinching various things from our studies—and earlier, robbin' old Rigg, of course—is chased from the School House and vanishes utterly from mortal ken. The police can't find him, though they were on the job almost at once, and though they've raked the woods and every dashed possible hidin'-place in the district."

"Go on. That's right enough, anyway."

"Well, he vanished. Just afterwards it's discovered that about sixty merry quids are missing from Linton's desk-drawer—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Tom Merry, a startled look coming over his face. "You—you don't jolly well suspect Slippery Alf of that business?"

"My dear man, why not? Most certainly I do, old bean."

"Phew! But—but—" Tom paused, and then he went on, his face flushing a little. "Look here, Cardew, it's no good beating about the bush. If Slippery Alf did steal those banknotes of Linton's, then—then—"

"Go on!" Cardew smiled cheerily. "Finish, old chap. You want to know where I got those I lent to dear old Gussy, eh? Funny thing, Railton wants to know just the same. Well, he won't get to know just yet—nor will you, Thomas. I think we'll leave that out of the discussion for a bit, if you don't mind. We'll just assume that Slippery Alf did pinch Linton's merry notes. Now where was I? Oh, just after Gussy's brave rescuer vanishes Linton's cash does the same thing, and very, very soon after that all sorts of things begin to vanish—grub of all kinds—a bit here and a bit there, obviously so as not to arouse too much suspicion and outcry; and also small articles, one here and one there. A travellin'-rug from my study, a spirit-stove from yours, not to mention certain articles of value. Now, what does it look like? I ask you."

"Phew!" breathed Lowther. "It almost looks—"

"As if Slippery Alf is hiding somewhere not far from here," finished Tom Merry grimly.

"Just that," said Cardew, smiling cheerily. "Well, to resume. The merchant gets more darin' and starts pinchin' cash and more things at night. Then, last night, he gets nearly collared, and proves to be a short, thin chap, not much bigger than Cutts."

"Slippery Alf, right enough."

"Exactly, my dear Watson. Moreover, he was unshaven, which points to a chap in hidin', unable to get a giddy shave. Moreover, we've got reason to know that he is, indeed, a jolly slippery customer—what?"

"Yes, rather!"

"So that clears that up to our satisfaction, at least, I think," murmured Cardew modestly. "The matter of Mr. Linton's missin' notes we'll deal with another time, if you don't mind. The next point is dear old Gussy. I don't want to frighten you, but I fear old Gussy has come a bit cropper, and is in the soup."

And Cardew's face became grave.

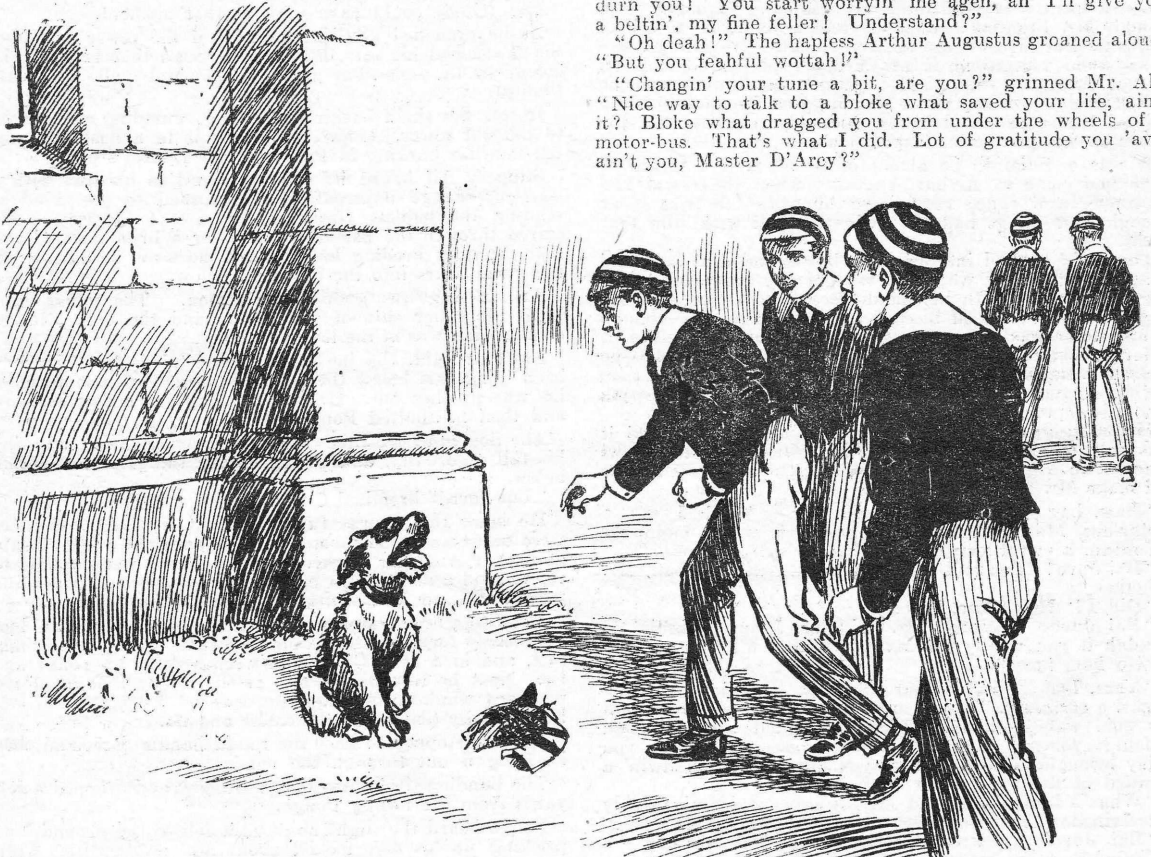
"What do you mean?" said Tom Merry. "You—you think—"

"To put it quite briefly," said Cardew emphatically, "I believe that Gussy's accidentally stumbled on Slippery Alf's hidin'-place and been nobbled by the rascal. Naturally, he wouldn't dare to let Gussy come away to give him away as it were. Either that has happened, or else Gussy has been backin' him up out of gratitude for savin' his life—which, of course, the rotter never did—and havin' found him a hidin'-place, discovered what Alf was playin' at, and threatened to blow the gaff. Slippery Alf would then nobble Gussy to prevent that happenin'."

"Phew!"

"M-mum-my hat!"

"Well, that's how I've figured it out, my beloved 'earers,"



Pongo came streaking up to Wally D'Arcy & Co. with something gripped in his mouth. He reached Wally in a flash and dropped the bundle, eyeing his master warily. The three Third-Formers blinked at it in amazement. "Great pip!" roared Wally. "It's old Gussy's collar and tie!" (See Chapter 13.)

smiled Cardew. "And if you're inclined to agree with my theory, then I vote we start our giddy investigations without delay."

"But—but where—"

"We've got to find that out, dear man. There's the giddy pavilion to begin with. Chap could easily get into the loft and hide there, frinstance; and there's the boathouse, likewise, and there's the vaults even, and the giddy ruins. But as it's so close on morning lessons, I vote we start on the giddy school itself. If you're on, say the word."

"My hat! Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were "on," there was no doubt about that. On Tom's suggestion, they went along to Study No. 6, and laid the matter before Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"Great Scott!" gasped Blake. "And you really think that thieving rotter's hidden at St. Jim's?"

"Yes, old bean."

"And—and he's keeping old Gussy a prisoner?"

"Exactly. A merry old prisoner," said Cardew. "And we're goin' to be his giddy rescuers. And we're also goin' to surprise a few people at St. Jim's. What do you say?"

"I—I—" Blake seemed too bewildered to answer for the moment, then he nodded, his eyes glinting. "I believe you've hit it, Cardew!" he snapped. "Yes, we're game for anything. I'm blessed if I don't believe you're a second-giddy Sherlock Holmes, Cardew! I used to think you had bats in the belfry, but you've got something else there as well, old chap."

"Thanks," said Cardew gravely. "Praise from you is praise indeed. What a pity dear Ernest and Sidney aren't here to listen to your kind words of praise. However, we're wastin' valuable time, old beans. If you're ready—"

Blake & Co. were only too ready, and in a couple of seconds the seven investigators were hurrying out of doors.

CHAPTER 12.

A Bid for Freedom!

"B AI Jove! This is weally dweadful! Mr. Stiggins, I weally—"

"Shut up, you spyin' young 'ound!" snapped Mr. Alf Stiggins. "You only got yourself to blame, darn you! You start worryin' me agen, an' I'll give you a beltin', my fine feller! Understand?"

"Oh deah!" The hapless Arthur Augustus groaned aloud. "But you feahful wottah!"

"Changin' your tune a bit, are you?" grinned Mr. Alf. "Nice way to talk to a bloke what saved your life, ain't it? Bloke what dragged you from under the wheels of a motor-bus. That's what I did. Lot of gratitude you 'ave, ain't you, Master D'Arcy?"

And Mr. Alf Stiggins chuckled

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, looking in rather a suspicious way at Mr. Stiggins, who was sprawling on the floor, with a cigarette between his thin lips. "Bai Jove! I was undah the impession, Mr. Stiggins, that it was a motor-lowwy that vevy neahly wan ovah me?"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Mr. Stiggins doubled up in an effort to stifle his merriment. Arthur Augustus eyed him with growing suspicion. As a matter of fact, suspicion had been growing in the noble breast of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for some time now. Since being captured by Slippery Alf Arthur Augustus had learned a great deal more of the man's character than he had dreamed of suspecting. Mr. Stiggins was no longer the kind, humble, unemployed individual whose wife and family were starving, and who had been so very respectful to Arthur Augustus. Indeed, the swell of St. Jim's was even beginning to shelter a lingering, faint doubt as to the truth of Mr. Stiggins' claim that he had saved his life.

Mr. Stiggins' laughter now certainly did not tend to allay his suspicions.

Moreover, Arthur Augustus was beginning to dislike Mr. Stiggins intensely. His manners were most unpleasant, for one thing. And since the previous day when he had been imprisoned in the tower, Arthur Augustus had seen a great deal of Mr. Stiggins' manners.

It had been a dreadful time for the fastidious swell of the Fourth. To begin with, the rascal had crammed a dirty

handkerchief into his mouth, only removing it at intervals to allow his hapless prisoner to eat.

At first Gussy had refused to touch a scrap of food, though Mr. Stiggins had laid plenty of things before him; potted meat, shrimp-paste, sardines, biscuits, and even chocolate. But hunger had forced the swell of the Fourth to give way towards evening, and he had made a meal as best he could, Mr. Stiggins, untying his hands for that purpose.

Very soon Arthur Augustus understood where the food had come from, and he realised how unjustly the unfortunate Trimble had been treated and charged. Moreover, Mr. Stiggins made no effort to conceal any of his plunder—at least, any of the small articles he had stolen from the school. But if he still had Mr. Rigg's fifty pounds in his possession he did not allow Gussy to see it.

Gussy spent a fearful night. It was cold, to begin with, though Mr. Stiggins had given him a blanket—a school blanket. For his own use the rascal had a travelling-rug—Gussy soon recognised it as Cardew's property. In fact, Arthur Augustus recognised a good many things, and he was scarcely surprised when Mr. Stiggins, as midnight had chimed from the school tower, suddenly rose and left the tower on his plundering expedition.

It was a relief to be alone for a bit, and a gleam of hope had come to Arthur Augustus when the rascal had returned in a rage, cursing to himself. It was clear enough that things had not gone too well with him that night.

The night seemed interminable, but it ended at last, and Gussy was thankful when the rays of the sun peeped into his prison cell. With his hands free, and relieved of his gag, he breakfasted off biscuits and potted tongue—though it was stolen food, poor Gussy was too hungry to refuse it. After breakfast Mr. Stiggins had started to smoke—he seemed plentifully supplied with cigarettes. It was then Arthur Augustus made the most of his opportunity to speak with his captor.

Mr. Stiggins was in a very bad temper, however, and it was only on Gussy mentioning his heroism that the scowl changed to a grin. Mention of his rescue of Gussy always did make Mr. Alf Stiggins grin.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he guffawed now. "Did I say a motor-bus, Master D'Arcy? Of course it was a motor-car—I mean, a motor-lorry. A big brewer's dray, it was."

"Bai Jove! You told me it was loaded with timbah, Mr. Stiggins."

"Did I? Haw, haw, haw!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Mr. Stiggins, I am beginnin' to wondah if you weally did save my life at all."

"Go hon, now!"

"Yaas, I am!" said Arthur Augustus, suspicion becoming almost a certainty. "And I weally do not believe you found my gold watch, eithah. Blake suggested that you had stolen it yourself when I lay unconscious, and that you only brought it back because you knew I was offahwin' a weaward of five pounds for it, bai Jove!"

"What a brain!" grinned Mr. Stiggins, evidently highly entertained. "You only jest seein' that, Master D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove! Then it is true? You—you wascal!"

"What? Arter me savin' your life like I did?"

"Bai Jove! I do not believe you did save my life at all, you feahful wascal and spoofoah!" said Arthur Augustus, red with wrath and indignation. "I see now that I have been wediculously twustin', that I have been deceived all along, bai Jove!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"You—you wascal! You deceived me fivom the vevy beginnin'!" said Arthur Augustus, his voice trembling with indignation. "You told me your wife was sewiously ill, that you weaquired monay for the opewation, and also that your children were starvin'. I have since learned that you are not even mawwid, and that you are a wascal who lives by beggin' and stealin'. You are known to the police as Slippahwy Alf! I weally do not know how I could have been so deceived in you, you wottah!"

Mr. Alf Stiggins looked at Gussy—it was an ugly look. He had stopped laughing suddenly.

"That's enough, you little rat!" he snarled. "If you wants to know it—well, I'll tell you, young toff! Of course I didn't save your bloomin' life, you young fool! I came along just arter those village kids had downed you, and I lifted your watch neatly enough—trust me for that, me lad! If you'd 'ad the sense of a bunny-rabbit you'd a' seen as no lorry 'ad been along there that day. You begged an' prayed to be took in, an' I took you in! And I'm glad I did," he added, with an ugly chuckle. "I done well outer this lot! And when I gets clear—"

"You—you scoundrel!" panted Gussy. "I see you for the wascal you are now! How long are you goin' to keep me a prisionah heah? I shall be missed—"

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"You're stayin' 'ere a bit longer vet!" grinned Slippery Alf. "It ain't quite safe for me to move yet, and I'm pretty comfy 'ere—better than the stone jug, anyway. An' I got all the grub I want, and I'm featherin' me nest nicely, thank you. No, I ain't movin' yet. Now, jest you shut up, or I'll smash you, you sneakin' little rat!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus groaned and relapsed into silence. His feelings at that moment were bitter. What a fool he had been! Why hadn't he listened to Blake and the rest, who had doubted Slippery Alf from the very beginning? He wondered how on earth he could have been so blind, so trusting, and so innocent. Now he came to look closely at Mr. Stiggins he saw only the crafty features, the sly, shifty eyes, and the unmistakable look of the slacking wastrel about his whole appearance.

Poor Gussy could have wept at that moment.

As he crouched against the wall of the tower a sudden sound reached his ears, however—a sound that brought the colour to his somewhat grimy cheeks and made his heart thump.

It was the shrill barking of a dog, sounding quite close to the old tower. Gussy recognised it in a flash. It was the familiar barking of Pongo, Wally D'Arcy's pet.

Slippery Alf heard it, and he leaped to his feet with a startled, savage imprecation. He rushed to the window, sending the hapless Gussy rolling out of his way. He stared through the barred window for a brief instant, and then, without heeding his prisoner, he went dashing down the stone stairs into the basement below.

Arthur Augustus guessed the reason. The sound came from the other side of the tower, and the only window on that side was in the lower chamber.

Swift as light, the junior scrambled to his feet. He had been lying just below the small window, and in a moment he was peering out. He saw nothing for a few seconds, and then he spotted Pongo.

The dog came trotting round the ivy-clad tower, wagging his tail vigorously, and nosing among the grass and stones below.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Gussy.

He knew that it was futile to shout for help, but there were other ways and means, and for once the mighty brain of Arthur Augustus worked swiftly. There was no time to try to send a message on paper, had he possessed paper and pencil. But an idea swiftly occurred to him.

Mr. Stiggins, careful and crafty as he usually was, had apparently forgotten to tie up his hands again since breakfast, and in a flash Gussy had wrenched off his collar and tie. Next he tore desperately at the ivy curling in at the unglazed window. A tough tug tore off a length, and this he hurriedly tied round the collar and tie.

He only stopped to knot the rough bundle once, and then he flung it out through the window.

The bundle sailed through the window and dropped a few yards from the nosing Pongo.

Pongo heard the slight noise as it fell to the ground, and pricking up his ears looked about him in surprise. Then quite abruptly he sighted the bundle.

It was really difficult to miss seeing, for the tie was of rather a startling hue if the collar was not particularly noticeable. At all events, Pongo did see it, and he was on it in a flash. And just at that moment a shrill whistle sounded, followed by a youthful yell.

"Pongo, where are you, you bounder? Pongo! Here, Pongo!"

Pongo blinked a brief second at the bundle, then he snatched it up and tore away with it.

It was not the first time the mischievous Pongo had taken off one of Gussy's best ties in his teeth. But on this occasion Arthur Augustus did not roar with wrath, or shriek in horror. He drew a deep breath of thankfulness.

Pongo would take what he had found to his master without the shadow of a doubt—he would never dream of doing otherwise. If it was a dead rat, a piece of stolen meat, or somebody's slipper, or anything else, Pongo would take it as a present to Wally of the Third.

The rest depended upon the sagacity of D'Arcy minor or the fellows with him, if any.

Trembling with relief and hope, Gussy turned from the window. He had scarcely done so when he heard his captor move below—evidently he had been watching Wally & Co. on the far side of the tower. He was for it now. Slippery Alf would miss the junior's collar and tie at once, and would immediately guess what had happened. And Gussy knew the scoundrel's evil temper only too well.

Yet he had sent the message, and that was all that mattered to Arthur Augustus just then, and he turned and faced the rascal calmly and pluckily.

CHAPTER 13.

A Raid and A Rescue!

"PONGO! Pongo, you bouncer! Pongo! Where the thump are you?"

Wally D'Arcy was exasperated and wrathful. Pongo had let him down again. After giving the dog his breakfast, Wally had decided to take him for a little run, as he often did before morning lessons. And just as he was fastening the lead to his collar Pongo had calmly wrenched himself free and bolted.

It was really very exasperating—especially as Wally was already upset and not in the mood for Pongo's playful tricks. That morning, indeed, Wally D'Arcy was, perhaps, the most miserable fag in all St. Jim's. Though he cheeked his major on occasion, and affected to look upon him with lofty scorn, Wally was very fond indeed of Arthur Augustus.

The trouble his major was in had been bad enough. But now Arthur Augustus had gone—was missing. It was no wonder that Wally of the Third was not in the mood to take any nonsense from Pongo.

Yet there was really nothing else for it. Pongo had gone tearing round by the chapel and was already out of sight.

"I told you so!" said Jameson, with a chuckle. "I knew just how it would be if you let go of him for a sec!"

"Oh, rats! Dry up, you footling idiot!" snorted Wally. "Why the thump didn't you grab him, then? It was your dashed fault!"

"What? Well, I'm blowed! Why, the—"

"Oh, cheese it! Come on—after the little beggar! He'll have us late for class at this rate! You know how he is when he once gets on his giddy own!"

Wally pelted away on the instant, and Jameson and Curly Gibson, who had been with Wally, followed more leisurely, chuckling as they trotted.

They had not far to go. After rounding the chapel Wally had sighted the troublesome Pongo making for the ruined part of the school.

"He's after those blessed rats again!" breathed Wally. "I know there are rats round the giddy ruins, and we'll jolly well come on a rat hunt some time and prove it. Hallo, here you are!"

"Where is he?" gasped Jameson, trotting up with Gibson. "Where is the footling little tyke?"

"If you call my dog a footling tyke, young Jameson—" "Footling mongrel, then, if you like that better!" grinned Jameson cheerfully.

"Why, I'll jolly well punch your nose, young—"

"Oh, cheese it!" interrupted Curly Gibson. "Isn't time for a scrap now, you asses! Better find old Pongo!"

"He's gone after rats round by the ruins!" grunted Wally.

"Rats!" said Jameson, with a chuckle. "There ain't any rats there, you ass!"

"I tell you— Oh, you silly owl! I'll punch your nose afterwards, young Jameson, you see if I don't! I tell you— Hallo, here come Blake and his lot! What the thump are they doing round here? Hi! You fellows seen old Pongo?"

"We haven't had the honour this morning, so far, my young friend," answered Cardew gravely, as he came up with the Terrible Three and the rest of the "investigators." "It is very nice to see your fresh young face so early in the morning, however. I'm glad to see you've washed at last, kid. That smudge of ink I noticed on your neck three days ago seems to have gone—perhaps it's worn off, though."

"You silly owls! Think you're funny, don't you!" snorted Wally. "We jolly well wash as often as you fellows do, so put that in your pipe and smoke it! And go and eat coke!"

With that scornful retort Wally turned away and began to whistle Pongo. Then he started to shout:

"Pongo! Here, Pongo! Where are you, you little villain! Pongo, Pongo!"

"Here he comes!" chuckled Curly Gibson. "Hallo, what the dickens has he got this time?"

Pongo came streaking up to the trio of fags. He reached



"Now! On him, chaps!" Tom Merry was nearest to Mr. Stiggins, and as Cardew gave the word the captain of the Shell leaped full on the man's back, sending him crashing down on his face with a startled howl. In a moment the juniors were pouring over him in a vengeful swarm. (See Chapter 13.)

Wally in a flash, and jumped up at him with something gripped in his mouth.

The three Fourth-Formers blinked at the collar and tie and the ivy in Pongo's mouth. As Wally made no effort to take it from him, Pongo dropped the bundle, eyed his master warily for a moment, and then began to worry the bundle.

"Hold on, you little chump!" roared Wally, finding his voice at last. "Well, my only topper! Don't you fellows see what it is? It's old Gussy's collar and tie! I know that tie! Oh, great pip! Blake! Hi! Blake!"

Wally bellowed at Blake and his companions, who had gone on some yards by this time. They turned and came back, startled by the excitement in the fag's voice.

"What's the thumping matter now, young Wally?"

"Look!" yelled Wally.

He held up the collar and tie which Pongo had reluctantly parted with. Pongo would willingly have parted with it as a present; he didn't like it being taken from him, however.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Blake, hardly able to believe his eyes. "That—that's Gussy's collar and tie; I know that tie, anyway. What the merry dickens—"

Cardew took the bundle from the fag's hand. Wally seemed too startled at the find to attempt to stop him. The strand of ivy took Cardew's eyes at once.

"This looks jolly queer!" he breathed, looking the find over keenly. "You've just taken it from Pongo, Wally?"

"Yes, he's just rushed up with it! We've been hunting for the little beggar. He's been round by the ruins somewhere!"

Cardew and Tom Merry exchanged glances.

"Phew! Looks as if you're right, Cardew!" said Tom Merry, almost below his breath. "That—that looks to me like a message—a message from old Gussy!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You think that?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes, I do!" broke in Cardew. "Pongo's found it—that's obvious. The ivy has been tied to it purposely—to give us a clue to the whereabouts of Gussy. My hat! My giddy opinion of Gussy's intellect will need revisin' after this. Whether Gussy was able to see Pongo and able to throw it at him or not I don't know; but I'm quite certain this is a message from him."

"By jingo!"

"I think so, too," said Tom Merry quietly. "This was the tie Gussy was wearing yesterday, I know. Probably the ivy was tied round to keep collar and tie together; but it's more likely Gussy tied it on in order to give us a clue. He's somewhere—either a prisoner or otherwise—where there's ivy."

"But there's ivy on nearly every building at St. Jim's," objected Digby. "The New House hasn't got any, or very little, but—"

"We're not takin' the actual school buildings into consideration just now," said Cardew coolly. "It isn't likely we'll find a chap who's missin' in the school itself. We've got to look for a buildin' with ivy on it and in an unfrequented spot."

"That's so!"

"Another point. Wherever Gussy is, he's in a buildin' that's pretty dirty and dusty. If you fellows can't guess where there's a buildin' that answers—"

"Phew! The Round Tower!" It was Manners this time.

Cardew smiled again and nodded.

"You've hit it!" he said. "At least, that's the giddy place I plump for! So if you're ready we'll go and have a quiet squint round there."

"But what the thump are you fellows gassin' about?" said Wally D'Arcy, who had been listening in amazement to the conversation. "What's it mean? You don't mean to say—"

"Yes, we do, old top!" yawned Cardew. "We're just goin' along to try to prove it now. If you'd care to see the fun, you can come along. But mind you keep to the giddy background, and mind you keep that dashed bundle of cotton-waste quiet!"

"You—you cheeky ass!" snorted Wally. "If you call old Pongo— Well, the cheeky asses!"

Tom Merry & Co. had not waited to listen to Wally's wrathful remarks. The leader of the Third was utterly bewildered by their conversation, and he could not make head or tail of it—excepting that Tom Merry & Co. were bent on finding his major. That alone was enough for Wally.

In a flash he had grabbed up Pongo, and then he rushed off for the kennels, and fastened him up. It was rather hard lines, considering what Pongo had brought about; but Wally realised that it was not a time to take chances.

He rejoined his chums a moment later, and the trio soon came up to Tom Merry & Co., who were scouting round the old tower by this time.

Carefully and stealthily they encircled the tower, and drew up to the grim stone walls, with their masses of gnarled ivy-roots. Tom Merry was about to start to climb up the ivy to the little window, when a voice came down to them—a voice hoarse with rage.

"You young hound!" The savage tones sent a thrill through the juniors. "If you don't tell me, I'll—I'll smash you! What you done with your durned collar an' tie? You done summat with it—you must 'ave done!"

"Find out, you feahful wuffian!" came the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clearly. "I uttably wefuse to tell you anythin', bai Jove! I am not afwaid of your thweats, you wascal!"

"Are you goin' to tell me or not?" came the voice, loud and menacing. "You little rat! You done somethin'. You ain't took off your durned collar and tie for nothin'. It ain't down on the grass. I've looked through the winder, and I can't see it, anyway. You got some game on! I 'eard that there dorg, an'—"

"I shall tell you nothin', you scoundwel!"

Gussy's reply came clearly, his voice calm.

"Good old Gussy!" breathed Tom Merry. "Plucky as they make 'em. So—so we were right, Cardew—or you were at—"

"Quiet!" hissed Cardew. "I believe—yes, he's comin' downstairs. Quiet! Not a sound, and don't move until I give the word. He's comin' to hunt round, I expect."

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Cardew's warning was justified very quickly. The juniors heard a savage exclamation from the man up above, and then the sound of his boots faintly on the stone stairs within the tower.

A moment later they heard something at the door, and soon afterwards the door was opened cautiously.

Peering from their hiding-places among the blocks of broken masonry, the juniors saw the man clearly as he stepped cautiously out into the open air.

It was Stiggins, of course, and the juniors recognised him at a glance, despite his dishevelled appearance. With gritted teeth and clenched fists they watched the rascal stand listening and looking about him for a moment, and then he came boldly out, and began to search the grass just below the window. His unshaven, grimy face showed his rage and anxiety, and it was clear that he meant to find out what Gussy had done with the collar and tie.

Tom Merry was the nearest to the rascal, and quite abruptly Cardew gave the word.

"Now! On him, chaps!"

"What-ho!"

Tom was the first to move, and he leaped full on the rascal's bent back, sending him crashing on his face with a startled howl.

In a moment the juniors were pouring over him in a vengeful swarm.

Not for an instant did Stiggins get the ghost of a chance, strong and slippery as he undoubtedly was.

Even Wally & Co.—guessing the meaning of it now—piled in to help. Mr. Alf Stiggins, panting and emitting a stream of savage imprecations, went down flat at last, helpless and harmless.

"Hold him!" panted Tom Merry. "Don't give him a chance. He's as slippery as an eel, remember!"

"No fear!"

Tom leaped up, and a moment later he was rushing up the stone steps to the top apartment of the old tower. There he found Arthur Augustus, grimy, haggard, but almost beside himself with joy. He had heard the sounds of the struggle and recognised the voices of his chums.

"Gussy, old man—"

In a flash Tom had his knife out and was slashing through the bonds. They fell away, and Tom caught the hapless Gussy in his arms. The swell of St. Jim's tottered and would have fallen, but for his help.

"Hold up, old fellow. All serene now, Gussy!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy! Thank you vevy much!" stammered Gussy weakly. "Bai Jove! I am vevy, vevy glad to see you, Tom Mewvy! Did you get my collah and tie? I weally twust that w'etched Pongo has not wovvied them to wibbons, though I'm afwaid I shall nevah be able to weah eithah again!"

"I'm afraid not, Gussy!" laughed Tom Merry. "But never mind them, old chap. Let's get you out of this hole. Phew! That merchant's made himself comfortable here, and no mistake!"

Once on his feet Arthur Augustus soon recovered himself, and a few moments later Wally & Co. came rushing up; and, after greetings had been exchanged, they went down to the little crowd below.

Cardew and the others had tied Slippery Alf's hands behind him, and the dandy of the Fourth tapped the rascal's pockets.

"Now we'll see what we shall see, I fancy," he said calmly. "Quiet, you ruffian!"

"Durn you!"

Cardew laughed, and placed his hand in the jacket pocket of Slippery Alf. He withdrew it with difficulty, for his hand was full. It held a little bundle wrapped in newspaper.

Cardew opened the paper with a smile, and as he did so his chums heard a crisp, crinkling sound. Then Cardew held up the little packet—a packet of banknotes.

"These are dear old Rigg's, I fancy," he said, scanning them swiftly. "Now what about Mr. Linton's little lot?"

He tried the rascal's other pocket next, and again his hand came out with difficulty. It was a slightly larger packet this time.

"Phew! Great Scott! You—you were right, Cardew!"

It proved to be banknotes again—Mr. Linton's property without a doubt. A glance at them was enough to show Cardew that.

"Sixty quid, if a penny," he murmured. "That's well over a hundred quid, you've netted, my friend. Quite a decent little haul—eh? We'll find the rest of the giddy stuff in the tower, I expect, though we can leave that for the beaks to find—eh, Thomas?"

"Right!" grinned Tom Merry. "Won't they stare, and won't they look small! They thought—"

"Go on!" smiled Cardew. "Don't mind either Gussy or me. They thought Gussy had pinched 'em, and that I had aided and abetted the dear old chap. It was an error I am goin' to have the pleasure of pointin' out to

the dear men presently. I vote we take this johnny back in triumph—not to mention dear old dirty Gussy."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Cardew—" began Gussy indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They could afford to laugh now.

"All cleared up now," laughed Jack Blake, patting Arthur Augustus on the back. "All cleared up—that is, excepting where—"

"Go it!" said Cardew coolly. "Exceptin' where I got my fifty quid from—eh? Well, perhaps I'll tell you that some day. But you'll have to wait, and the beaks will have to wait longer. Now come or! March, my friend!"

And Mr. Alfred Stiggins did march, though much against his wish. But the application of sundry boots and shoes behind helped to persuade him. He went, looking like a fiend. And so the cheery procession—all cheery, that is, excepting Mr. Alf Stiggins—wended its triumphant way to the School House.

CHAPTER 14.

All Clear!

"BLESS my soul! What—what—"

Dr. Holmes was simply astounded.

He was sitting quietly in his study talking to Mr. Railton when a sudden commotion in the quadrangle outside caused him to frown and glance out through the window.

of excited fellows, and others—seniors and juniors—were rushing up from every quarter of the quadrangle, for plenty of fellows were about yet, though it was but a few minutes from morning school.

Cardew smiled as the two masters appeared at the top of the School House steps. Cardew rather liked a good audience.

"Boys, what does this mean?" said Dr. Holmes, stepping out beside Mr. Railton. "What ever does this mean, Merry? Who is that man?"

"The chap who boned—I mean, stole Mr. Linton's banknotes, sir!" said Tom Merry meekly.

"Wha-at?"

"Yes, sir! We've also brought D'Arcy back, sir!" said Cardew, almost apologetically. "He hadn't run away, sir! This gentleman captured him, and has kept him a prisoner in the Round Tower!"

"D'Arcy!" gasped Mr. Railton. "Are we to understand that Cardew's statement is correct? If so—"

"Oh, yaas, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "I happened to dwop on him there, and he kept me a pwisonah, knowin' I should have him awvested othahwise! The wuffian has twated me with gwoss wudeness and diswespect; indeed, he has been weally bwutal! I twust my absence has not caused you much distwess, Dr. Holmes?"

"Bless my soul! I—we have been very concerned indeed in regard to your absence, D'Arcy," said Dr. Holmes. "This is most amazing. I—whatever is that, Cardew?"

"LOWTHER'S LOVE AFFAIR!"

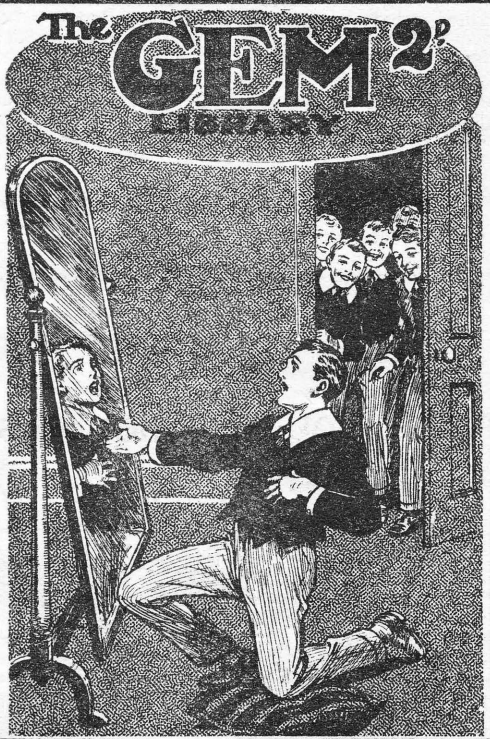
Can you imagine Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, falling a victim to the charms of the fair sex? Can you picture Monty blushing and stammering in the presence of a pretty girl? Can you see him writing poetry to the "girl of his heart"? Can you imagine him proposing? Rather a change, isn't it? Yet all these things come to pass in next week's delightful story of the chums of St. Jim's. If you miss

"LOWTHER'S LOVE AFFAIR!"

By Martin Clifford,

you will regret it, boys! Remember, this is the yarn you have all been waiting for.

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NOW—SAVES DISAPPOINTMENT.



"Bless my soul!" he repeated blankly. "Mr. Railton, I— Will you kindly look out of the window? Something—something appears to have happened, and— Good gracious! Those boys—they have a man with them, and— Bless my soul! It is D'Arcy! That wretched boy has returned!"

Dr. Holmes, amazed as he was at the sight he had seen, drew a deep breath of relief. He had been very worried and harassed indeed over the unaccountable absence of the swell of St. Jim's.

But Mr. Railton was at the window now, and he stared out as blankly as had Dr. Holmes.

"It is D'Arcy, without a doubt, sir!" gasped the House-master. "What ever can have happened? Those boys appear to have a prisoner. That man is certainly a prisoner. I think I had better go and investigate at once."

"Yes, yes! I will also come, Mr. Railton," said the Head quickly. "That—that wretched boy! I am exceedingly glad—"

But Mr. Railton was already hurrying out, and the Head followed hastily. They arrived at the School House steps just as Tom Merry & Co. arrived with their scowling prisoner. Behind them was a staring, questioning crowd

"A packet of banknotes, sir!" said Cardew blandly. "You'll see that they belong to Mr. Linton! D'Arcy did not steal them, nor did I; the merchant who stole them is here before you, sir. Mr. Alf Stiggins is his name—though the police know him as Slippery Alf, I believe, and they're looking for him now!"

"I recognise the scoundrel, of course, Cardew!" said Mr. Railton. "He is the man who caused the disturbance last week in the School House! He is also the man who robbed Mr. Rigg, the village outfitter, I believe!"

"Exactly, sir! And here's the money itself! Fifty pounds, I think! It will have to be refunded to me, sir, now, won't it, as I lent the money to D'Arcy?" asked Cardew meekly.

Mr. Railton took the packet of banknotes dazedly.

"You see, sir," explained Cardew, "this fellow simply slipped round by the chapel the other day and took refuge in the tower. No wonder the police couldn't find him! He's been there ever since. It was he who broke into the school last night!"

"Then—then—" began Mr. Railton helplessly. "He's the chap who's responsible for all the missing things—food, and everything else, sir!" went on Cardew. "I

think the things are pretty certain to be in the tower now. There are the banknotes, anyway!"

The Head was eyting the group almost dazedly, but after a pause he spoke.

"Very well," he said grimly. "I think I understand the position now, boys! I feel very sorry that you, especially, D'Arcy, should have been unjustly suspected in this matter. You had better come with Cardew to my study at once, where you can give me the full story in private. Kildare, will you kindly take charge of that—that man until the police can come to take him away? You had better then make a search of the Round Tower at the earliest moment!"

"Very good, sir!"

The prisoner was marched away, followed by a gaping crowd.

Cardew grinned at Tom Merry, and, with Arthur Augustus, followed the Head and Mr. Railton. Knox of the Sixth was standing in the doorway, and Cardew smiled as he caught the look of anxiety on the prefect's face.

"Well, and how did you get on?"

Tom Merry asked the question anxiously, as Cardew and Arthur Augustus emerged from the Head's study at last. The face of Arthur Augustus was flushed as well as grim, but he seemed very "bucked," as Lowther expressed it.

"Oh, very nicely," said Cardew cheerily. "The Beak asks rather embarrassing questions at times, but he's not a bad chap! We're discharged without a stain on our giddy characters, aren't we, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! The Head climbed down wathah well, and he was vewy decent about it! Howevah, I am vewy glad indeed that the w'etched affair is now ended, bai Jove! But—but weally, Cardew, I am still vewy wowwided indeed to know how you came to have fifty pounds in your possession, deah boy? If it is not bein' wude to pwess the question—"

Cardew smiled rather ruefully.

"An' if I tell you," he said sadly, "you'll not dismiss me without a stain on my giddy character, I know! Well, as the danger seems to be past, I don't mind explainin'," he added. "I got the money from—"

"Your gwanddad, Lord Weckness, I pwesume?"

"Not at all! Try again, Gussy!"

"Fwom your Uncle Libburn—"

"Nunno! Not from dear old Nunky, either!"

"Then who the thump—"

"Knox, old chap?"

"Wha-at?"

"Knox of the Sixth!" said Cardew, smiling. "I can see the dear man waitin' at the end of the passage there for me now. He's nearly frantic to know how I've gone on with the beaks, I bet! He'll sleep better to-night than he has done for some time when I do tell him!"

"But—but—"

"Mum's the word, of course!" said Cardew. "But Knox and I have done a triflin' bit of business together. Behold in me the giddy punter! Here's the yarn: A certain friend of mine got a certain tip—straight from the horse's mouth, you know! Well, I believed in it, an' I told Knox, and Knox offered, if I'd finance him for a little, to put the cash for both of us with a certain bookie he knows who's pretty straight and reliable. So the deed was did, an'—well, it duly came off. Knox netted a nice little bit of cash, an' your humble servant netted a cool fifty odd quid!"

"Oh, bai Jove! You—your feahful wottah, Cardew! I gasped Arthur Augustus. "You—you actually loaned me monay that had been won at bettin'?"

"Alas! Yes, old bean! It's too true, Gussy! I knew you'd be shocked—that's why I didn't tell you at the time—at least that's one reason. The chief is, though, that I couldn't without givin' dear old Knox away!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Cardew—"

"So that's why you kept silent, Cardew?" breathed Tom Merry. "That's why you refused to tell the Head or Railton or anyone? You were ready to be sacked rather than give Knox away?"

"My dear man, it would have meant the long jump for me, I fear, if I had spoken," murmured Cardew. "How-ever, I didn't, an' luckily the Head's decided not to press the question of where the giddy money came from. What does it matter now, anyway? Old Linton's got his, an' now all is merry and bright!"

"And what are you going to do with that money, Cardew?" said Tom sharply. "If you'll take my tip—"

"I'm takin' no more tips for a bit," grinned Cardew. "My dear man, haven't I had enough trouble over that one I took? As for what I'm goin' to do with the money—if you fellows would care to come along with me before lessons this afternoon to the Cottage Hospital at Rylcombe, you shall have the pleasure of seem' fifty quids added to their giddy funds! That satisfy you, Thomas dear?"

"I see!" said Tom, nodding. "Yes, that's good enough, Cardew! You—you're a rum card, but—but you're not a bad sort! Yes, I'll come with pleasure!"

"Good man! An' now I think I'd better ease dear old Knox's mind before he busts or somethin'!"

Cardew strolled away towards the fuming Knox, with his hands in his pockets.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That fellow weally is the limit, you know! I had weally made up my mind on first heavin' his explanation to give him a feahful thwashin' for twickin' me into acceptin' the monay. Howevah, on second thoughts, I wathah think I will let him off."

"I should, old man!" said Tom Merry cordially. "Second thoughts are best! But I know what I should do in your place, old chap."

"Bai Jove! What is that, deah boy?"

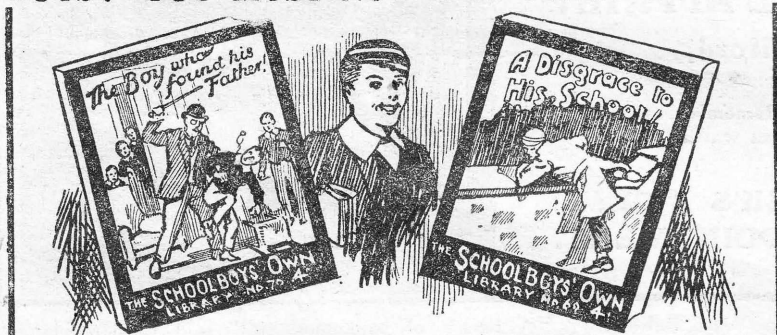
"I should go and have a wash!" said Tom Merry. "And I should put a collar and tie on, and I should change my clothes after a bath, of course; and then—"

But Arthur Augustus had gone. In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten his dreadful appearance, but he remembered it now, and he flew. And very soon he was again under a cloud—but this time it was a cloud of steam in the bath-room!

THE END.

(What ever you do, chums, don't miss: "LOWTHER'S LOVE AFFAIR!" next week's topping tale of St. Jim's. It's the yarn you've all been waiting for.)

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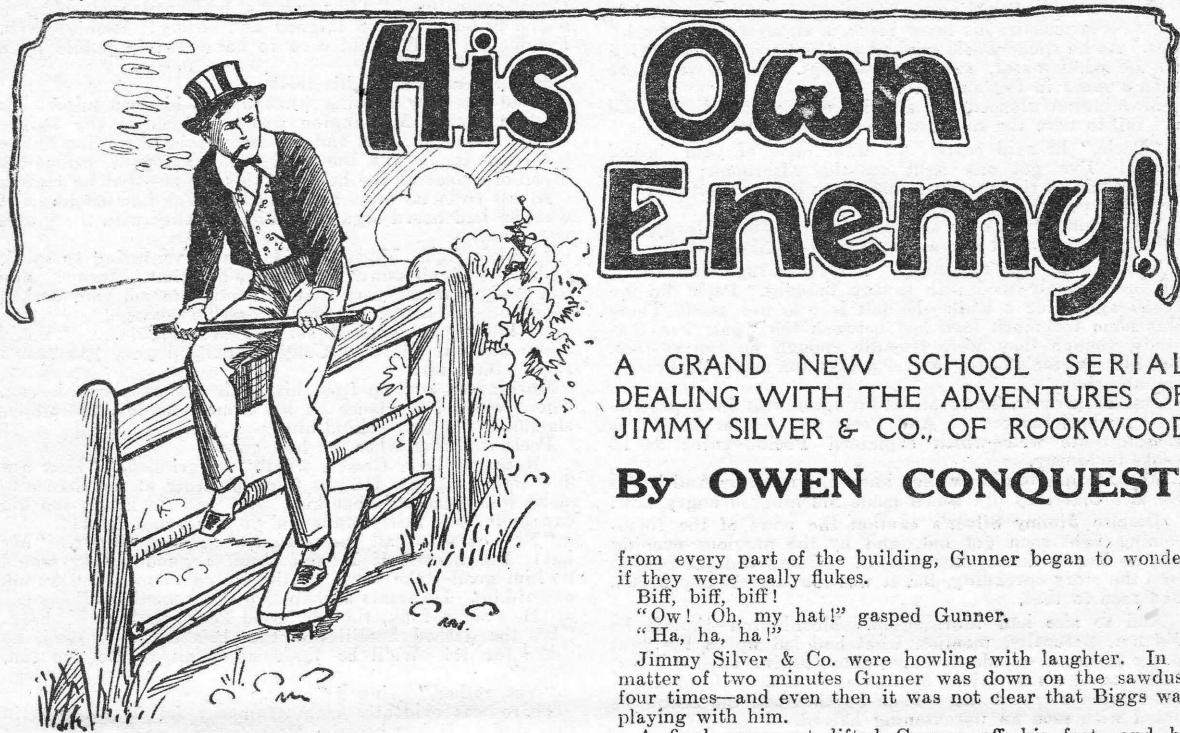
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"COLD FEET!" It is unlike Mornington to funk a scrap. Yet, from the shady method he employs to dodge his forthcoming fight with Biggs, the gardener's boy, it would seem to suggest that Mornington, for once in a way, is suffering from cold feet!



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

KIT ERROLL befriends an old acquaintance in Albert Biggs, a one-time waif of the slums, who comes to Rookwood and takes up a post as gardener's boy. Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, appeals to Erroll to "drop" his ragged friend, but Kit refuses. In consequence of this Mornington plots with Peele & Co., three shady rotters, to get Biggs sacked from the school. Their efforts prove of little avail, however, for Jimmy Silver & Co. chip in, and bring their rascally scheming to nought. Not to be beaten, Mornington challenges Biggs to a fight with the gloves. Fearing the result of such an encounter, Cuthbert Gunner, in his high-handed manner, decides to coach Biggs. He receives a rude shock, however, when the "coaching" starts, for the gardener's boy sends him floundering to the floor with a hard drive to the chin that shows he knows how to use the mittens.

(Now read on.)

Asking For It!

"MAN down!" called Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cuthbert Gunner scrambled up.

"Another fluke?" inquired Raby.

"Ow!" Gunner gazed at Albert Biggs rather fixedly.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Dickenson; it was dawning in on his mind that Albert Biggs had handled a pair of gloves before.

"Then—then you really tried to hit my chin!" gasped Gunner, feeling his chin to make quite sure it was all there.

"Yessir! I'll aim for your nose next time, if you like!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Dickenson; it was dawning in on his mind that Albert Biggs had handled a pair of gloves before.

But Gunner didn't see it—or wouldn't see it! He gave Biggs a little more kindly advice, telling him exactly how to go about things.

"If you can get near my nose, do it!" he said. "But mind you don't leave your guard open."

"Orl-right, sir! Thank you, sir!"

"Now go ahead again!" said Gunner. "And don't stop if you do have any more flukes like that—just go ahead and pile in for all you're worth. Stop when I give the word. Ready! Go!"

They started. Biggs had said he would go for Gunner's nose, and he did so—bringing a stream of red from that organ. He did not stop. Following the tap on the nose, Biggs tapped Gunner's ear, his eye, his chin, and then his nose again—and he obeyed orders and tapped hard.

Gunner's face was a picture of astonishment. That any fellow could have such a remarkable series of flukes astounded him. But after being driven round and round the gym once or twice, with gloves hitting him, seemingly

A GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD By OWEN CONQUEST.

from every part of the building, Gunner began to wonder if they were really flukes.

Biff, biff, biff!

"Ow! Oh, my hat!" gasped Gunner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were howling with laughter. In a matter of two minutes Gunner was down on the sawdust four times—and even then it was not clear that Biggs was playing with him.

A final upper-cut lifted Gunner off his feet, and he sat and blinked up at the fellow he was "coaching."

"Ow!" he gasped, blinking rapidly. "Oh, my hat! That—that's enough, kid!"

"Very good, Master Gunner!"

"Is the first lesson over, then?" asked Jimmy Silver. "It's all right, Gunner, old chap! Don't look so worried—I don't think you've hurt your pupil a bit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner staggered up, feeling various parts of his face. He felt as if he had been through a coffee-grinder in those whirling few minutes.

"Well, my hat!" he stuttered. "I—I believe that kid knows as much about the game as I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I think that will do for now!" panted Gunner, eyeing Biggs not a little admiringly. "You can hit and no mistake, kid!"

"Thank you, Master Gunner!"

"I don't think I can teach you much—scarcely time in any case!" said Gunner approvingly, mopping his nose.

"I think, after all, you'll be able to hold your own with Morny without any further coaching from me. Of course, I was only giving you a chance to let yourself go. Still, you're not so bad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly duffer!" laughed Jimmy Silver. "Biggs was only playing with you, Gunner! He was having boxing lessons when he first walked! His pater was a pro. boxer, and he taught him nearly all he knows."

"Is—is that so?" stuttered Gunner. "And—and you silly dummies let me go on—pulling my dashed leg, you cheeky owls."

"Just that. Chiefly to take some of the silly swank and conceit out of you!" smiled Jimmy. "You asked for it, you know!"

"You—you—"

Gunner broke off suddenly, and his wrath changed to a grin. He held out his hand to Albert Biggs.

"Good man, Biggs!" he said, patting his shoulder. "If you can do that to me, then you'll handle that cad Morny all right! I'm going to be your second, and I jolly well hope you mop the ground up with that scheming cad!"

"I'm goin' to try, Master Gunner!"

"Good man!"

Gunner marched out of the gym to clean himself up a bit. He was a sportsman, and now he saw how Biggs could shape, Gunner was of the opinion that Valentine Mornington was booked for a surprise!

Mornington's Fear!

FEELING fit, old man?" Cyril Peele asked the question as he entered the study after dinner. Mornington was seated in the armchair, his brow black, a cigarette between his lips. As he spoke Peele winked at Gower, who was seated on the window-seat, swinging his legs. There was more than a sneer in Peele's voice.

Mornington glanced up, and his eyes glittered. He did not fail to note the sneer, and he did not like it.

"Peele," he said curtly, "I want none of your dashed cheek! I've got one fight on this afternoon; but I'm quite ready to thrash you if necessary before that one!"

Peele's grin vanished abruptly. "All right, I was only askin' a civil question, Morny," he said. "You needn't bite a chap's head off like that!"

Mornington did not reply. He sat savage and sulky, his brow deeply-lined with savage thought. Peele did not speak again for a while—he felt it was not safe. There was none too much love lost between the "pals" in that study, though they were friendly enough on the surface. But Mornington's bitter temper proved too much for Peele & Co. at times.

Just at present, however, Mornington was in a particularly vicious humour. And Peele and Gower knew the reason quite well—which explained Peele's sneer as he spoke to Morny.

And Mornington knew they knew the reason. And it was the fact that they did which made Mornington angry now.

Despite Jimmy Silver's caution the news of the forthcoming fight soon got out, and by the previous evening all the Lower School knew of it. Jimmy did his best to stop the story spreading, but it was too late—Tubby Muffin had seen to that.

And so also had Mornington. Mornington—though he did not, naturally, mention what had led up to the fight being arranged—made no bones about letting anyone know. In his savage exultation, he was anxious for all to know. He wanted a crowd there when he thrashed the fellow he hated with such an unreasoning hatred.

But that was before he heard the news that Albert Biggs was no duffer at boxing!

When he did know that interesting fact, Valentine Mornington ground his teeth with helpless, mortified rage. The affair in the gymnasium was soon common property, and Gunner's "coaching" of Albert Biggs caused a great deal of hilarity.

Mornington, however, saw no fun in it. He knew Biggs was bigger and heavier than himself, and had a longer reach. But he had relied absolutely on the fellow knowing nothing whatever of boxing. He had fully expected a fight—he knew Biggs would fight like a wild-cat—but he had expected his superior knowledge of boxing would make up for all that. He had been supremely confident of thrashing the fellow. Such a possibility that he might be licked himself had never crossed Mornington's mind.

But it did now. And the thought—the dread—that he might be licked, after all, filled Mornington with savage apprehension.

He could not bear to think of it. After all that had happened—after being beaten again and again in his efforts to bring his enemy down, Mornington felt he could not stand a thrashing at his hands. It was not to be thought of. Mornington regretted bitterly now that he had agreed to fight. He would have given anything to withdraw.

But it was too late for that now. He knew only too well what the fellows would think if he did. He would be scorned on all sides as a funk—as a coward! Yet in his pride and haughty arrogance, Mornington felt he could never bear the bitterness of defeat at the hands of the gardener's boy.

Mornington was thinking of it all now, and Peele and Gower were quite aware of what was in his mind. Peele spoke again after a pause.

"Morny," he said hesitatingly, "what's the good of gettin' ratty with your pals like this? You'll want someone to back you up this afternoon. But—but if you'll take my tip, old man, you'll back out of the scrap before it's too late!"

Mornington did not answer. "I believe the little sweep's a bit of a wonder!" said Peele, eyeing Morny curiously. "I believe he handled Gunner like handling a baby! It won't do you any good to get licked, old man. Back out, that's my advice!"

"When I want your dashed advice I'll ask for it, Peele."

snapped Mornington. "Think I don't know I'm up against it? You know dashed well I daren't back out!"

"Well, backin' out's better than gettin' licked!" said Peele cynically. "After what's happened that chap is bound to let you have it good and strong! Besides—well, I'm blessed if I should care to be licked in public by a chap like Biggs!"

Mornington gritted his teeth.

Peele was only echoing what was in his own mind. To do him justice Mornington was not finking the fight—he had plenty of pluck and was not afraid of getting hurt—far from it. It was the hurt to his arrogant pride—the dread of defeat at the hands of this fellow—that he feared.

At all costs he must avoid that. Yet how could he if what he had heard regarding Biggs' ability with the gloves was true?

"Peele's right, Morny," said Gower, venturing to speak at last. "Climb down now you've got time, Morny! You can easily spin the yarn that you refuse to soil your dashed hands on the brute. I would, quickly enough."

"I know you would," sneered Mornington. "You'd climb down if Clarence Cuffy challenged you, you rotten funk. Shut up!"

Mornington got up from his chair and reached his cap. Then, without a glance at his chums, he left the study, slamming the door behind him.

Peele chuckled when he had gone.

"Rather a lark, Gower, what?" he grinned. "How are the mighty fallen! He was fairly gloating at the chance to make mincemeat of that kid. An' now he knows the kid can fight, he's fairly wallowin' in miserable funk!"

"Nice chap to call me a funk!" grinned Gower. "My hat! I'm blessed if I don't think a good licking would do him good—take some of the rotten bounce and swank out of him. He treats a chap like dirt sometimes!"

"He's not a funk, though," said Peele, shaking his head. "It's the dashed humiliation that he's funk'in'. Well, he asked for it! We'll be there all right to see the fun, what?"

"Yes, rather," grinned Gower.

There was evidently little sympathy for Mornington in that study. It was because Mornington's wallet was "well-lined" that Peele & Co. "stood" Mornington—not because they liked him by any means.

Meanwhile Mornington had walked out into the quad. There was plenty of time before the fight was due to start, and he meant to go for a stroll to think things over. He wanted to be alone. Tubby Muffin and several fellows were lounging by the gates. Tubby chuckled as Morny came along.

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows," he grinned, "Morny's going out of gates! What price suddenly discovering he's got another appointment somewhere else? He funks that chap—yoooooop!"

Tubby's cackling observations ended in a sudden howl as Morny made one quick stride and, before the fat youth could dodge, a vicious smack sent him spinning.

Tubby finished spinning, and sat down with a bump and another howl. Mornington walked on, his face showing the state of his mind.

"Serves you jolly well right, Tubby!" grinned Tom Rawson. "Morny's a bad-tempered rotter, but he isn't a funk. You asked for it!"

"Yow-ow!" wailed Tubby. "Oh, the beast! I believe he's gone off to dodge the fight, anyway."

"Rats!"

Tubby Muffin rolled away, dismally rubbing a burning ear, and Rawson, Van Ryn and Pous strolled away chuckling.

Mornington walked on, his brow blacker than ever. He knew only too well the state of the general feeling in regard to the fight. Some held that it should not be allowed; but he knew that nearly everyone hoped he would get thrashed. He wondered bitterly what Erroll's hopes were. If only he hadn't taken the fight on!

As he walked through the gates and along the lane, a tradesman's tricycle came out of the tradesmen's entrance of Rookwood, with a big, burly youth, with a red, ugly face on it. He wore a butcher's striped apron, and he had a big basket on the carrier.

He rode past Mornington, giving the junior a far from genial glare. It was "Butcher" Bagnall, the son of the local butcher—a youth who was the leader of a gang of village youths who were always more or less "up against" the Rookwood fellows. Jimmy Silver—and Mornington himself, for that matter—had more than once come to blows with Bagnall.

But as he sighted him now Mornington's eyes gleamed. Morny was in an evil mood now, and all that was bad in

his nature was uppermost. At all costs he meant to escape a hiding at Biggs' hands—or the risk of one.

He shouted after Butcher Bagnall, and the red-faced youth jumped off and waited for him.

"What's up?" he said sullenly and suspiciously.

"A chance to earn a quid!" said Morny coolly. "Shove your bike in the hedge out of sight, and come behind the hedge with me."

A Rascally Scheme!

BAGNALL stared at him.

"It's—a genuine offer," said Morny, "an' it's a chance for you to get some of your own back on some of the fellows at Rookwood—fellows you're up against."

"Well, if it's like that, I'm on!"

Bagnall rammed his bike under cover. Then he followed Morny behind the hedge, after the latter had taken a quick glance round. Bagnall felt he had nothing to fear—Mornington was alone, and he knew he was a match for Mornington if that junior was up to trickery.



Biggs had scarcely landed on the other side of the hedge, when a figure sprang out on him suddenly. As Biggs went crashing into the grass an apron was flung over his head by the unknown attacker. (See this page.)

"What's the game?" he demanded. "If you're pullin' my leg, mister—"

"I'm not!" said Morny, showing two Treasury notes. "The game's this! There's a fellow from Rookwood I want putting away in a safe place for the afternoon, Bagnall. He'll be coming along this lane about two or after. It's your half-day off this afternoon, isn't it?"

"Just done me last round now."

"Good! I want you to get some pals—a couple will do—and collar this chap when he comes along, and take him into the woods as far as you can. Then tie him to a tree or somewhere, and leave him to it. Got that?"

"Crikey! What you take me for?"

"You've done worse than that many a time," said Morny impatiently. "Don't be a fool, Bagnall. A quid's a quid, anyway! It'll just be taken as a village rag—you can disguise yourselves if you like. Anyway, are you on?"

"Who is the bloke fust?"

"It's not a Rookwood chap," said Mornington. "He's on the staff—works in the garden with old Babbage; you must have seen him—"

"I know the chap," grinned Bagnall, grinning as he jerked his thumb towards Rookwood. "I seed 'im jest now workin' in the garden. New chap, he is—"

"That's the fellow!" said Mornington. "You needn't ask any questions—I shan't answer them if you do. But you can take it from me that you'll be doin' somethin' against Silver and that gang if you do this for me!"

Bagnall eyed him grinningly, and then he nodded.

"I'm on," he said. "I can 'andle that chap meself."

"You'll need two more, I tell you!" snapped Mornington. "He's a handful, I believe! But, remember this, you'll have to be careful. He'll be crossing the stile on to the woodland path. But there'll be plenty of fellows about. You'll have to be smart and slippery. If anybody happened to see you—"

"I'll watch that!" grinned Butcher Bagnall. "You leave it to me, Master Mornington. What about the quid?"

"Here's ten bob now," said Mornington, his eyes glinting with satisfaction. "You'll get the rest when the job's done. You understand? You—"

He broke off suddenly. A footstep had sounded in the

lane. Peering through the thin hedge, Mornington sighted a youth hurrying along from Rookwood. His eyes blazed with sudden excitement as he recognised Albert Biggs, his green apron tucked round him.

"Phew!" Mornington gripped the butcher youth's arm fiercely. "Here he is! Take your apron off—sharp! We'll do it between us here and now! Down him and wrap that dashed apron over his head!"

"But—but—"

"Quick, you fool!" snarled Mornington, snatching out his handkerchief and tying it round his face below the eyes. "I'll chip in when you've got his head covered! Right! Now call him!"

Bagnall suddenly understood, and he ripped his apron off and held it ready, his pig-like eyes gleaming. Mornington jumped for the shelter of a thicket and dodged down behind it.

The butcher lad stepped to the hedge.

"Hold on, kid!" he shouted excitedly. "Jest a minute! Help!"

Albert Biggs almost jumped out of his skin. He stopped and stared at the hedge. Then he sighted the village youth, though he could not see his face.

"What—" he began; and then he hurried to the hedge. It suddenly occurred to him that there had been an accident. He had not the slightest suspicion of treachery, and without hesitation he squeezed through the hedge, jumped the shallow ditch beyond it, and landed safely on the grass.

Biggs' feet had scarcely touched the ground when a form suddenly sprang upon him—too swiftly for him even to glimpse what or who it was.

He crashed down, struggling furiously, but the apron flung round his head blinded and hampered him, and the next moment he knew he was in the hands of more than one attacker.

The sheer unexpectedness of the attack dazed Biggs; but he was a quick-witted youth, and an instant later he was struggling with a strength and ferocity that must have given his attackers more than enough to contend with.

Over and over they rolled, fighting furiously. But the

apron was now firmly wound round Biggs' head, and he was fairly panting for breath, and could see nothing. But he fought on, kicking and hitting out furiously.

It could not last, however. Mornington alone was more than his match in the present circumstances, while Butcher Bagnall was a couple of years older, and big and powerful to boot.

After several whirling seconds of sultry fighting Biggs was held powerless, his own apron being torn into shreds and used to bind his arms to his sides. The other apron was right over his head now, the strings tied round his neck. It was impossible for Biggs to see anything, though he could breathe better now.

"Who his attackers were he could only guess as yet. But he had seen the butcher's bicycle, and he knew by the smell of the apron that it was a butcher's apron. And as he had seen Butcher Bagnall riding up the tradesman's drive, he guessed who one was.

"You—you rotters!" panted Biggs. "What's this game? I know one of you, anyway! I see that bike, and I can smell this 'ere apron! I'll report this lot, you see if I doesn't!"

There was no reply. Butcher Bagnall grinned at Mornington, who was mopping a streaming nose. It was not the first time that nose had been into contact with Albert Biggs' fist, and Mornington's eyes were savage and vengeful.

Mornington pointed into the woods and nodded.

"Right!" grinned Bagnall.

He was a reckless rascal, and he did not think of consequences. Indeed, he had taken part in far worse affairs than this. He finished tying the knots of the thick strips of green felt that had formed Biggs' apron, and then he gave Biggs a kick.

"March!" he said. "This way, my lad!"

"I won't!" panted Biggs. "If—if you 'adn't shoved this over my 'ead you wouldn't 'ave beaten me so easy. Let me get me 'ands free, anyway!"

"You won't, eh?" grinned Butcher Bagnall.

He grasped the lad's arms in a cruel grip, and twisted them, pushing him a few steps into the wood. Biggs writhed and struggled, but he gave it up at last. He knew it was foolish to resist in his helpless state, and he realised he was in the hands of ruthless enemies.

Amazed and seething with helpless rage, he allowed himself to be led into the woods, deeper and deeper. Brambles and branches tore at him as he stumbled blindly on for fully five minutes. Then he was halted and placed with his back to a tree.

"You 'owling ruffians!" he panted, writhing in his attempts to break the tight bonds. "I'll make you sit up for this, Mister Butcher. I knows you, anyway!"

Mornington drew Bagnall aside.

"I'm off now!" he said coolly. "Here's the other ten bob! You can take your apron off him now—he knows you, and it's no good losing it. Besides, if it does come to trouble you don't want to leave evidence. You can easily swear black's blue that it wasn't you! Give me two minutes, and then you can take it off!"

"Hold on!" said Bagnall, with an evil grin. "You mean to leave the bloke like this 'ere all night? A bit too thick, ain't it?"

Mornington bit his lip. He realised he could not do that. "You can cut him free at about six o'clock," he said. "It'll be dark enough then; only I warn you to have somebody else with you. You see what a handful he is!"

"Right, mister! Leave it to me!" said Bagnall, grinning again. "But—but what's the game?" he added curiously. "I can't see what—"

"That's my bizny!" snapped Mornington curtly. "You're doin' the job, an' bein' well paid for it. That's enough for you, Bagnall."

And Mornington plunged into the woods and tramped away. He felt no disgust—no remorse for what he had done. His bitter, evil temper and desire for revenge had full control of him now, and his better feelings were in abeyance. There was undoubtedly more good than evil in the headstrong, wilful dandy of the Fourth, and yet the evil had the upper hand now.

Instead, he felt only triumph. He would turn up at the appointed time for the fight, but Biggs would not. Certainly the friends of Biggs would demand that the fight should be fought another time if Biggs himself did not. But he had saved his face; he now had a good excuse to refuse to fight Biggs another time. And he would. The fellows knew his passionate, arrogant temper—Mornington did not hide his faults from himself—and they would not be surprised if he refused to postpone the fight. Mornington was wearing his old mocking smile as he entered the gates of Rookwood.

He would not have felt so satisfied, however, had he seen what happened to Biggs after he had left him.

Butcher Bagnall gave Mornington a few minutes, after which he unwrapped the apron from his prisoner's head. Then, with a mocking grin, he hurried away. Biggs, blinking dazedly, called furiously after him, but he did not heed.

A curious, startled suspicion had occurred to him at last.

Was this yet more of his enemy's work? He had not seen nor heard a word from the second attacker. Yet it was quite possible that it was Mornington. Biggs knew nothing of the feud between the village roughs and Rookwood, and he could think of no other motive for the assault. The fellows at Rookwood were not likely to suspect Mornington, as Mornington well knew. Such a trick, futile as it would seem, was quite in Butcher Bagnall's style.

As Biggs stood blinking there was a rustling in the bushes; and then, to his amazement, a figure stood before him. He was a Rookwood junior—a quaint-looking figure with a round, queerly-shaped head and big spectacles, through which blinked mild, benevolent eyes. His head, indeed, seemed too big for his body and legs.

It was Clarence Cuffy, the duffer of Rookwood—a relative of Tommy Dodd's, and a member of the Modern House.

"Dear me!" stammered Clarence, blinking at Biggs. "You appear to be in a very unpleasant predicament, my friend. Can I be of any assistance to you? I beg you not to hesitate to request my aid if you should require it."

"Blow me!" said Biggs, unable to help grinning. "I should jest think I did, young gent! I seen you knockin' about Rookwood! Cut me loose, young gent, if you'll be so kind!"

"Most certainly—most decidedly I will!" said Clarence, with trembling eagerness. "I was looking for Mornington when I blundered here, and I was most astounded—nay, shocked and horrified—to see you tied to this tree, and that brutal fellow, Butcher Bagnall, standing before you. I fear the misguided fellow is very wicked indeed! As I found a gold cuff-link belonging to Mornington, I thought I would do my fellow-pupil a good turn by returning the same to him. You see—"

"If you wouldn't mind cuttin' me loose——" hinted Biggs, eyeing the eloquent junior curiously.

"Dear me! I was forgetting your unpleasant predicament, my friend!"

And Clarence, after much difficulty, cut Biggs loose.

"Thanks, young gent!" said Biggs, rubbing his cramped arms. "Now I'll be off, if you don't mind! I got to go to the nurseries in the villidge for Mister Babbage, and I got to 'urry back for an appointment at two-fifteen or so. Excuse me, young gent; I'll thank you properly agen when I see you."

With that Albert Biggs nodded gratefully to Clarence and dashed away through the woods at top speed.

"Dear me!" murmured Clarence, blinking after him. "What a very strange circumstance! But where can Mornington be? I imagined I was following him. I had better return with all speed to Rookwood."

Which Clarence promptly did. He was feeling disappointed that he had been unable as yet to complete his good turn to Mornington. But he felt very thankful that he had been able to do a good turn to Albert Biggs, the gardener's help. Clarence Cuffy little dreamed, however, what a very bad turn he had done Mornington.

(For the continuation of this grand serial, chums, see next week's GEM.)

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