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The

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

LIBRARY



A STIRRING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.—

Bound BY HIS Promise!

by Martin Clifford



CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy Obliges!

"I SAY, Merry—" responded Tom Merry of the Shell at St. Jim's, cheerily. "What's up with you, fatty?" Baggie Trimble, the fat boy of the Fourth, blinked at the captain of the Shell, with a pained expression.

"Oh, really, Merry!—I think you ought to be a bit grateful when a fellow goes out of his way to do you a favour! It's a bit thick."

"A favour?" echoed Tom in surprise. "What favour have you done me, Baggie? First I've heard of it!"

He halted and stared at Trimble curiously. Monty Lowther and Manners stopped, too.

The three chums of the Shell had been strolling under the elms in the old quad after dinner. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday, and that afternoon there was a footer match on against Figgins & Co. of the New House. But the match was not due to start for half an hour yet.

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"A letter's come for you," explained Baggie Trimble. "You know what a kind, obliging chap I am. I thought I'd save you the trouble of getting it from the letter-rack by bringing it to you myself."

And Trimble took from his pocket an envelope which he handed to the captain of the Shell.

Tom Merry took it, and gave an exclamation at sight of the handwriting.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's from Miss Fawcett!"

Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom's old governess, was a dear old lady well known by most of the fellows at St. Jim's. She was devoted to Tom Merry, and Tom was devoted to her.

"I am always jolly glad to do any chap a favour," went on Baggie Trimble, with a wave of his "podgy hand." "Especially an old pal like you, Tom Merry."

"Thanks!" said Tom dryly.

"I'd do a little thing like that for you for nothing, any day," pursued Trimble. "In fact, even if you offered me a bob for doing it, I should jolly well refuse to take it."



"That's all right then," grinned Monty Lowther. "No one has offered you a bob, you fat cadger!"

"Oh, really, Lowther! I certainly wouldn't take money for doing a chap a good turn, you know. But, of course, if Tom Merry cared to offer me the loan of a bob or two, just from one pal to another, that would be different. I'm expecting a postal-order to-morrow from Trimble Hall—"

But Tom Merry was not listening. He had ripped open the letter, keen to read the contents. But suddenly his face went grim.

"How long have you had this letter, Trimble?" he demanded.

"Eh?" gasped the fat junior. "How long? Oh, it—it's only just arrived!"

He blinked nervously at the captain of the Shell, and moved back a little. Tom Merry stepped forward and grasped him by the shoulder.

"You little fibber!" he snapped.

"Oh, really, Merry!" Baggy Trimble squirmed and gasped in Tom Merry's powerful grip, "Surely you know me better than to doubt my word—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Tom angrily. "This letter is dated over a week ago! You must have had it in your pocket all that time!"

"I haven't!" squeaked Trimble. "I—I've only just brought it up from the letter-rack! Honest Injun! And, anyway, even if I had picked it up a week ago to bring to you, I must have stuck it in a pocket and forgot it! But it's only just come, so—"

"Cheese it!" snorted Tom. "I suppose you thought you could raise a bob by bringing it to me, you fat rotter! Well, I'm going to teach you to leave my letters alone in future."

"Ow! Keep off!" howled Baggy in alarm. "I—I dare say it got delayed in the post! The post-office is beastly careless. I once had a letter from Trimble Hall delayed

Little does Tom Merry dream of what lies ahead of him as a result of his promise to stand by George Bloom, the new fellow in the Shell at St. Jim's. But he keeps his word, even when Bloom reveals himself in his true colours!

over a month. You ought to write to the Postmaster-General and tick him off—"

"Lend a hand, you chaps!" exclaimed Tom.

"What-ho!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"You bet!" said Manners cheerfully.

Between the three of them, Baggy Trimble was swung into the air, yelling with apprehension.

Bump!

Baggy's tight trousers landed on the hard, unsympathetic ground with a terrific concussion.

"Ow! Oh! Yarooop!" howled the fat Fourth-Former. "Beasts! Bullies—"

Again the Terrible Three whirled him upwards.

Bump!

Again Baggy's howl rent the air.

"Yow! Oh! I'll confess!" gasped

Baggy. "I stuck that letter in my pocket a week ago, but I forgot it—I didn't keep it on purpose, you beast—"

Bump!

"Are you going to leave my letters alone in future?" demanded Tom.

"Yow! Yes! I wouldn't touch your beastly letters—"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yooooop! Oh! Yaroooooh!"

"There!" panted Tom. "Let that be a lesson to you, you fat worm!"

Baggy Trimble, released, collapsed to the ground and screwed up his face in an expression of awful agony. A heart-rending groan escaped him.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You've done it now! I'm dying. My back's broken, and both necks and my leg—I mean, both legs and my neck! I'm dying, but I forgive you."

"How does it feel to be dying?" asked Manners, with apparently deep concern.

"Awful!" groaned Baggy. "Everything is going misty now. My past life swims before me—"

"That must be pretty bad for you," said Monty Lowther sympathetically.

Baggy Trimble glanced up at him suspiciously, then gave another heart-rending groan. He hoped to convince the Terrible Three that he was really injured. But it was a vain hope.

"Oh, get up!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Buzz off before I count three, or you'll feel my boot. One! Two—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners and Lowther.

For the "dying" Baggy had suddenly become very much alive! On the word two, he jumped to his feet with really amazing alacrity for a fellow who was on the point of expiring, and fled away through the elms.

In the distance he turned to bestow a final yell on the chums of the Shell:

"Yah! Beasts!"

Tom unfolded Miss Fawcett's letter, and as he read its contents his brows became knitted.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" said Manners anxiously.

"No, there's nothing exactly wrong," said Tom. "Hang Trimble! I ought to have had this letter a week ago! Miss Fawcett is coming to St. Jim's this afternoon—"

"My hat!"

"She's due to arrive by the three-thirty train at Rylcombe. I can't meet her because of the match! And there's scarcely any time to arrange for someone else to meet her."

He read on, and suddenly whistled.

"By Jove! She's bringing a chap with her—a new chap who's coming to St. Jim's!"

"That's interesting!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Who is the merry merchant?"

"A chap named Bloom!" said Tom. "He's the son of an old friend of Miss Fawcett's. He's coming into the Shell, and—oh, my hat! She says she is writing to the Head to

ask if he can be put into Study No. 10, so that I can look after him!"

The chums of the Shell gazed at one another blankly.

They certainly had no wish to have the pleasant privacy of Study No. 10 invaded by a new boy, whoever he was.

"Into our study?" gasped Manners.

Tom nodded glumly. He was very fond indeed of his aunt, and would have done anything rather than have hurt her feelings or given her pain in any way. If it had been a matter of himself only, Tom would have welcomed the new chap into Study No. 10 for Miss Fawcett's sake. But Manners and Lowther shared the study—that was the rub.

"M-my hat!" stuttered Monty Lowther.

"I—I'm beastly sorry, you chaps!" mumbled Tom. "But if she's written to the Head—"

"But the Head hasn't said anything about it, has he?" exclaimed Manners.

"Not to me," answered Tom. "I expect, though, that he simply referred the matter to Railton, who thought we knew all about it. It's pretty certain that Railton has decided that Bloom shall go into No. 10, as it's Miss Fawcett's special request."

He looked at his chums pleadingly. Manners grinned. "Well, it can't be helped!" he said. "Don't look so sick about it, Tom!"

"I don't mind, personally," said Monty Lowther manfully. "If he's a decent chap, I dare say we shall get on all right."

"Oh, he's sure to be a decent sort of chap, I think," said Tom quickly. It was a great relief to him that his chums were taking the matter in such a sporting spirit. "But there's one thing I must do at once—I've got to find someone to meet her and the new chap at the station! There's not much time, either! The game starts in twenty minutes!"

"Gussy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, was not playing in the match against the New House that afternoon, he was standing down to give Digby of the Fourth a chance in the team. Tom Merry had consented to this, because the New House were not up to strength owing to the fact that Patty Wynn, the New House goalie, was laid up with a sprained knee. So even without the services of Arthur Augustus in the forward line, Tom Merry hoped to lead his team to a fairly easy victory, with the indomitable Falstaff of the New House missing from between the goal-posts.

"My hat, yes! Gussy's the man!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three turned and hurried across to the School House. In the hall, Baggy Trimble scuttled hastily out of sight into a recess at the sight of them, hoping they would pass by without seeing him. But in the hall the chums of Study No. 10 halted.

"Talk of angels!" grinned Manners.

An elegant junior was descending the stairs, a gleaming monocle in his eye, the fanciest of fancy waistcoats adorning his chest. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy grinned in a friendly way at sight of the Terrible Three.

"Hallo, deah boys!"

"You look a treat, Gussy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Off to dazzle the girl in the Rylcombe bun-shop with your charms?"

"You uttah ass, Lowthah!"

"Cheese it, Monty!" grinned Tom Merry. "Look here, Gussy, I wanted to see you badly. Miss Fawcett is arriving by the three-thirty at Rylcombe this afternoon, with a new chap who's coming into the Shell. Since you aren't in the match this afternoon, I wonder if you'd be a good chap and meet 'em for me?"

"Miss Fawcett—bwingin' a new fellow?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in surprise. "I have heard nothin' about it—"

"Only just heard myself. The letter was—well—delayed," said Tom, who had no time to explain all the facts just then. But his tone was grim as he spoke, and Baggy Trimble, in the nearby recess, quaked.

"Wight-ho, deah boy! I shall be delighted. It will be a vewy great pleasuah to meet Miss Fawcett at the station. I shall considah it an honah."

"Thanks ever so much, old man!" said Tom gratefully. "I know Miss Fawcett will be delighted to have you meet her. She thinks a lot of you, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus went a little pink. He had once overheard Miss Fawcett refer to him as "a very sweet little boy!" Tom Merry's guardian could never realise that her beloved Tommy and his friends were not still the same age as her ward had been when he was a pretty child in her tender care.

"I am pwood of Miss Fawcett's esteem," replied the swell of St. Jim's hastily. "Wely on me to be there to meet her!"

"It's jolly good of you! When you get back, bring her

and the new fellow, Bloom, to my study, will you? I'm standing a bit of a spread, of course. You can join us? Good! And I'll bring Blake and Herries and Dig along, too."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

"Well, cheerio, and thanks awfully!" exclaimed Tom, and the Terrible Three hurried off to change. Arthur Augustus, who had plenty of time to spare before setting off for the station, also left the hall, and Baggy Trimble appeared from the recess.

There was a very thoughtful look on the face of the Paul Pry of the Fourth.

He had overheard the conversation between Arthur Augustus and the Terrible Three, and it seemed to Trimble that he ought to be able to make something for himself out of the arrival of Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

CHAPTER 2.

A Ducking for Gussy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY strolled out of the gates of St. Jim's looking—as Cardew of the Fourth, who happened to see him go, remarked—a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

The swell of St. Jim's was wearing a topper the shine of which was rivalled only by the shoes that gleamed beneath his snow-white spats. Tucked under one arm was his gold-headed cane, while his monocle gleamed in his eye. His tie was a work of art. Beau Brummel himself could not have found a flaw in the dress of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he set out from St. Jim's on his way to meet Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

It was a sunny afternoon. Arthur Augustus breathed the sweet fresh air appreciatively as he strolled along.

He did not notice a fat form that rolled out of gates in his wake. Had he noticed, it is unlikely that he would have paid much attention.

It certainly would not have occurred to Arthur Augustus that Baggy Trimble was deliberately following him on his way to the station, for some reason of his own.

Arthur Augustus and Baggy Trimble were not the only St. Jim's fellows in Rylcombe Lane that afternoon, however.

Wally D'Arcy of the Third, the cheery inky-fingered fag who, as younger brother of the swell of St. Jim's, gave that aristocratic junior quite a good deal of worry, was sitting among the bushes at the top of a bank by the side of the road higher up the lane.

Wally was not alone. With him were Curly Gibson, Reggie Manners, and Levison minor. And they were all looking rather bored.

"What can we do now?" murmured Curly Gibson thoughtfully.

The four Third-Formers had been in Rylcombe Woods with their catapults, "potting" at rabbits. None of them had hit a rabbit, but they had had plenty of fun in trying to do so. They had tired of that amusement after a while, however, and had wandered back to the road.

The question was, what to do next?

D'Arcy minor fingered his catapult reflectively.

"I'd like a shot at something," he remarked.

"Those blessed rabbits are too jolly quick for us!" growled Reggie Manners.

"Can't blame 'em for not wanting to be potted!" grinned Levison minor.

"Can't any of you think of something?" grunted Wally. "We've got these giddy catapults here, and nothing to pot at! Think of something!"

"There's a greenhouse just this side of the village," said Reggie Manners.

"Rats! Too jolly risky! Besides, it's a rotten trick, potting people's greenhouses!" said Wally severely.

"I've seen you do it!"

"Shut up, young Manners," said Wally darkly.

"A pity some of those New House asses don't come along," put in Curly Gibson. "Or that beast Knox."

At the thought of having a "pot" at Knox, the unpopular prefect of the School House, the faces of all the Third-Formers brightened for a moment.

"But he won't be sporting enough to come along, the rotter," sniffed Wally, his face gloomy again.

"He's no sportsman," agreed Curly Gibson.

And then there was a sudden exclamation from Reggie Manners. He flung out a pointing hand.

"My hat! Look! It's your giddy major!"

The four fags peered through the bushes.

Coming round the distant bend was an elegant figure. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was strolling towards the ambush, his hat tilted at the very smartest angle.

"Old Gussy!" muttered Wally.

"That topper!" breathed Levison minor, fingering his catapult thoughtfully.

"Keep low!" commanded Wally. "Don't let him see us."

Arthur Augustus, observed but unobserving, came on in blissful ignorance of the presence of the four fags—and the four catapults—behind the roadside bushes.

"Look out!" grinned Curly Gibson softly. "I'm going to have a shot at that topper in a jiffy!"

"Cheese it!" snapped Wally.

"Eh? But—"

"You're not potting at that topper, young Gibson!"

Curly Gibson's face fell.

"But look here—" he began, in amazement.

"Hear what I say?" growled Wally.

"Well, why not?" Curly Gibson demanded defiantly.

"Because he's my major!"

"You seem jolly fond of your major all of a sudden!" snapped Curly, lowering his catapult.



And, without a sound to betray them, the four fags duly "scatted." Safe in the recesses of the wood, Curly Gibson, Reggie Manners, and Levison minor, doubled up with helpless joy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Curly. "Good shot, Wally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Reggie Manners. "Ripping, wasn't it?"

"Jolly good shot!" gasped Levison minor, collapsing against a tree trunk. "I couldn't have done it!" he added modestly.



In blissful ignorance of the presence of the four fags behind the hedge, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sauntered along the lane. And then, like a bolt from the blue, a pebble whizzed through the air. Zonk! "Oh, cwumbs!" Arthur Augustus gave a startled shout as his gleaming topper was swept from his head. (See Chapter 2.)

"You're not going to pot at that topper," repeated Wally firmly. "He's my major, not yours. That gives me the right to first pot!"

"Oh!"

Wally raised his catapult.

All unsuspecting, Arthur Augustus strolled on up the lane in the pleasant afternoon sunshine. And then, like a bolt from the blue, a tiny pebble whizzed through the air.

Zonk!

The pebble landed exactly half-way up the crown of the topper. It was a perfect shot.

"Oh cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus gave a startled shout as his gleaming topper was swept from his head.

The topper sailed through the air. Instinctively, the swell of St. Jim's made a desperate leap in pursuit.

At the back of his mind, Arthur Augustus probably had some vague idea of saving his precious topper from landing in the ditch by the roadside. In his excitement, however, he failed in his purpose. In fact, he made things ten times worse. For not only did the topper land in the ditch, but Arthur Augustus landed there also, with a hearty splash.

"Yoooooooh!"

His immaculate figure vanished for a moment beneath the water with which the ditch was filled. After the recent rains, the ditch was nearly full with brown, muddy liquid, and when Arthur Augustus rose like Aphrodite from the waves, so to speak, his face was almost completely obscured by mud and weeds.

"Oh! Bai Jove! Grooooo! Oh, m-m-m-m-my hat!" spluttered Arthur Augustus miserably. "Oh deah!"

With water dripping from him and a festoon of weeds clinging lovingly to his once immaculate jacket, the swell of St. Jim's clambered out on to the road again, looking very much like a drowned rat, as Curly Gibson heartlessly remarked.

"Scat!" said Wally tersely.

Wally surveyed the three with a thoughtful brow.

"I didn't think he'd take a header into the ditch like that," he said.

"No?" chortled Curly Gibson. "Neither did I! But he did!"

"I'll say he did!" agreed Reggie Manners, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Looked like a performing sea-lion diving for herrings!" shrieked Frank Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly funny, wasn't it, you chaps?" said Wally.

"Rather!" chuckled the "chaps" with one accord.

"Glad you think so!" roared Wally. "I don't!"

And before the three could defend themselves, Wally of the Third had landed his fist on Curly Gibson's eye, Reggie Manners' nose, and Levison's ear. Then he turned and stamped gloomily away, and vanished into the trees.

"Ow!" gasped Curly Gibson.

"Ooooh! Oh, by dose!" mumbled Reggie, clasping his nasal organ tenderly.

"Wow! My ear!" spluttered Levison minor. "He's potty! The rotter! He's waxy because his major got a ducking, and it was all his fault!"

"I didn't know he was waxy!" groaned Curly. "Oh crumbs!"

"You never can tell with Wally!" grunted Reggie.

That was evidently true enough, as the three thoroughly discomfited Third-Formers realised, too late!

But if Wally had not been pleased at his major's ducking, there was someone else who was!

Baggy Trimble had seen it all from a distance, and his delight had known no bounds. Baggy had set out to dog the swell of St. Jim's footsteps in the hope that some such accident might befall Arthur Augustus. It had seemed rather a faint hope, but one couldn't tell—with New House fellows about, and the Grammar School crowd as well.

Baggy had hoped, anyway. And his hopes had been wonderfully fulfilled.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Baggy Trimble, as he dived into the edge of the wood and scuttled along through the trees. "Now he can't meet Miss Fawcett! Oh, good egg!"

Some distance farther on, Baggy emerged into the lane again, out of sight of the spot where Arthur Augustus was picking water-weed from his hair and neck. At a good speed, considering his barrel-like figure, Baggy Trimble hurried on towards the village.

Whatever happened to Arthur Augustus, Miss Fawcett was not going to be left to make her way with the new boy to St. Jim's without an escort.

Baggy would be there!

CHAPTER 3.

Baggy Does the Honours!

MISS PRISCILLA FAWCETT stepped on to the platform at Rylcombe Station, and beamed round through her spectacles.

The three-thirty train had just arrived, and Miss Fawcett was hoping that Tom Merry would be there to meet her, although, to her surprise, he had not answered her letter telling him of her arrival.

At Miss Fawcett's side stood a rather big, thick-set youngster with bushy brows and a square jaw. Miss Fawcett turned to him.

"Georgie dear, I am afraid I do not see dear Tommy anywhere. Perhaps he is waiting outside. I feel sure, at any rate, that if he has not been able to come himself, he will have sent one of his little friends."

George Bloom nodded without speaking.

"Of course, being so good at games, Tommy is often wanted to play cricket on Saturdays," went on Miss Fawcett. "Very likely he is playing cricket this afternoon—"

Bloom smiled.

"Not cricket at this time of the year, Miss Fawcett!"

"Football, is it, just now? Of course! I— Oh, here is one of the little boys from the school!"

Miss Fawcett beamed through her spectacles at a fat figure, wearing a St. Jim's cap, that had come rolling on to the station platform.

The fat junior approached Miss Fawcett with an attempt at a charming smile upon his perspiring face. He had had to be quick in order to be there in time to meet the train, and Baggy could not stand much exercise without perspiring freely. He raised his cap, with a smirk. Baggy had his reasons for wishing to be very nice and polite to Miss Fawcett.

"Good-afternoon, ma'am!" said Baggy. "You remember me, what? Trimble is my name. Tom Merry's great pal, you know."

Miss Fawcett looked a trifle puzzled.

She remembered vaguely having seen Baggy before, though she certainly had not thought that he was one of her dear Tommy's particular friends. But she was a trusting old lady, who imagined that nearly everybody was as honest and kind as herself, so she beamed on Baggy Trimble, with her sweet-natured expression.

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"And Tommy has asked you to meet me?" she exclaimed. "How very kind of you to come! I want you to know Georgie, here, who is coming to your nice school."

"Ah, yes!" nodded Trimble, in a patronising way, as he shook hands with the new fellow. "Your name's Bloom, eh? Tom Merry told me all about you. I'm always glad to give a helping hand to a new boy, you know. I'll see that no one rags you, or anything like that. Not that anyone would try, when they know you are under my wing," he added grandly.

"How very kind that is of you!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett gratefully. "But Tommy is going to look after Georgie, you know. Now, tell me, why couldn't Tommy come to meet me? I know he would if he could have done so."

"Oh, he's playing footer!" said Trimble. "I—ahem—I was to have played myself, as a matter of fact, but I stood down. I wanted to give another chap a chance, you know. Er—a chap named Lowther is taking my place this afternoon."

"But I seem to remember Tommy telling me that Lowther always played!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett, in mild surprise.

"Ahem! Tom Merry must have meant me when he said Lowther," explained Baggy Trimble hastily. "Now, come along! Leave your luggage here, kid!" he added, turning to Bloom, "and I'll tell the porter to see that it's sent along to St. Jim's."

For Baggy to refer to the new boy as "kid" was rather comical, seeing how much bigger and stronger than the fat junior the newcomer appeared to be. But Baggy always patronised other people whenever he got a chance, and he was putting on airs with a vengeance now, before the new boy.

Bloom, who seemed to be a very quiet fellow, did not speak. He nodded, and left his luggage, and obediently moved towards the station exit with Miss Fawcett and the fat Fourth-Former.

As they emerged into the station yard Miss Fawcett glanced round for a cab. But Baggy Trimble shook his head.

"Not just yet, ma'am," he said knowingly. "You must be a bit peckish after your journey, eh? A bit hungry, I mean. Come along to the teashop and refresh yourself!"

He took the old lady's arm and led her firmly along the village High Street.

"But—but I don't think I want any tea!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "It is sweet of you to think of it, but it is a little early. I have no doubt Tommy will have some tea for me when we get to the school."

"But Tom Merry himself told me that I was to insist on you having tea as soon as you arrived here," said Baggy untruthfully. "I couldn't dream of letting you travel on to the school without some refreshment first."

And Baggy Trimble rolled off in the direction of the near-by teashop, taking Miss Fawcett with him despite her protests.

The sole purpose of Baggy's meeting Miss Fawcett had been to get a tea at her expense. With the prospect of being able to leave the unsuspecting old lady to settle the bill, Baggy intended to stuff himself. He was not going to allow her to go on to St. Jim's until he had had his feed—not if he could help it, anyway!

"They sell some ripping tarts at this place, ma'am!" grinned Baggy. "You'll like 'em."

"I never eat tarts, my dear boy!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "Really, I would much sooner go on to the school at once and have tea there. I—"

"But it would be bad for you," urged Trimble earnestly. "A late tea is bad for anyone. Look at me! I'm a fine, fit, healthy chap, regular athlete and so on, but I'm beginning to feel quite faint for want of my tea!"

"Oh, you poor boy!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett, in deep concern. "In that case, let us go to the teashop at once!"

And, followed by the silent new boy, Baggy Trimble steered the old lady triumphantly across the street towards the teashop door.

A smirk of satisfaction had spread over Baggy's hot and shining features. All was well, thought Baggy—the feed was going to be his!

And then, when they were within a yard of the teashop doorway, a distant shout caused Baggy, Miss Fawcett, and the new boy to turn their heads.

"Who on earth—" exclaimed Bloom, with a chuckle.

"Oh, lor'!" exclaimed Baggy.

A dishevelled figure was sprinting up the village street towards them.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was looking, however, anything but his usual elegant self. His topper was more like a concertina than an expensive article of headgear. His trousers had lost all trace of their original knife-edge creases; and there were now all sorts of other creases in them—quite incorrect and unfashionable

creases, however! His spats looked like grey rags clinging round his ankles.

Baggy Trimble gazed at Arthur Augustus as though he were an apparition.

It had never occurred for a moment to Baggy Trimble that the swell of St. Jim's would do anything but return to the school to change after his fall into the ditch in Rylcombe Lane. But Trimble had reckoned without the honour of the D'Arcys!

Though to appear in public in that condition was nothing short of torture to Arthur Augustus, he had given Tom Merry his promise to meet Miss Fawcett, and he would keep that promise at all costs. When Arthur Augustus had given his promise nothing would stop him from carrying it out!

"Why, goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "It is Arthur! Oh, how can he have got into that terrible state? Poor boy! He is usually so particular about his appearance, too!"

Bloom was grinning broadly. Miss Fawcett looked deeply worried and concerned as the swell of St. Jim's came hurrying up. The expression on Baggy Trimble's fat face, however, was one of greatest alarm.

The arrival of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had cheated Trimble of the feed of a lifetime!

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Walks It!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY'S noble face was crimson as he halted in front of Miss Fawcett and politely raised his battered headgear.

"I am tewwibly sorry to be so late in awwivin' to meet you, Miss Fawcett!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway accept my deepest apologies!"

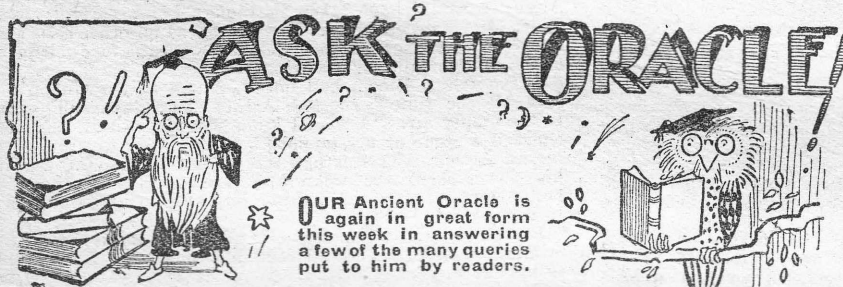
"But what a state you are in, my poor dear boy!" cried the old lady sympathetically. "Whatever has happened?"

"I—ah—unfortunately fell into a wotten ditch," said the swell of St. Jim's, going an even deeper shade of crimson. "Quite accidental, of course!"

There was a sudden chuckle from Bloom.

"I should hardly think you would have done it on purpose," he remarked cheerfully.

(Continued on next page.)



OUR Ancient Oracle is again in great form this week in answering a few of the many queries put to him by readers.

Q. Do you know the difference between a zephyr and a zither?

A. This is the question put to me by a Barnsley boy who signs himself "Smart Aleo"—and it happens I do. A zephyr is a balmy breeze; a zither is a simple-stringed instrument with a flat, sounding-board attachment.

Q. Why does a bishop wear an apron?

A. Because in the far-distant days when doublet and hose were worn, a special convocation of the Church passed a law that no member of the clergy should appear in public without a coat or cassock. The present-day "apron" is simply a form of the cassock worn in the Middle Ages by the bishops.

Q. Why is a horseshoe considered lucky?

A. For two reasons, Bessie Blythe. In the first place, it is shaped somewhat like a crescent, the symbol of the ancient Egyptian god, Isis. In the second place, it is made of iron which is supposed to have power to dispel evil. There is a disagreement among people as to which way a horseshoe should be nailed up, but the popular idea is that the two ends should be up-ward "so that the luck does not run out." The superstition of the horseshoe is one of the very oldest and most firmly fixed, and even the great little Nelson had a horseshoe nailed up on the mast of his ship, the Victory. There is no luck, though, Bessie, in throwing a horseshoe over the left shoulder, especially if you happen to slam a policeman in the face with it.



Why are horseshoes considered lucky? See what the Oracle has to say about it.

Q. Why is a pound note better than a golden sovereign?

A. Simply because when you fold it you double it, and when you open it you find it *in-creases*.

Q. What is a serape?

A. A light blanket, usually highly coloured, which the Mexican carries draped over his shoulders, and which he often uses to swathe his head when he sleeps at night.

Q. Are beards still permitted to be grown by officers and men in the Royal Navy?

A. I don't wonder you have asked this question, George Hoskin, of Liverpool, for seldom nowadays does one see a bearded naval man. For all that, the old tradition is persisted in, and any officer or rating may sport a beard, having obtained permission from his captain to do so. The exact use of a beard to a sailor has never been determined, however. The theory that a fine growth of face fungus may be useful to tie round the neck as a muffler in cold North Sea weather has not been established by practice. Certainly a beard may be useful to conceal sticks of tobacco, seagulls' eggs, or cigarette cards—but then, what's a sailor's hat for?

Q. Who was Shylock?

A. In a somewhat pathetic letter, Charlie Beal, of London, writes to inform me that when he tried to buy two white mice off a school chum for 1½d., the boy, in a contemptuous tone, called him a Shylock. Now Charlie wants to know what exactly the lad meant, so that he can cuff his ear if the remark were too uncomplimentary. Well really, Charlie, I don't know that it was too uncomplimentary in the circumstances. Shylock was the Jew in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice," a character who loved to drive a hard bargain. And well, to expect two white mice for 1½d. is a bit thick, don't you think?

Q. When did the great musician, Antoine Sax live?

A. To answer this question for "Musical Maurice," I have had to spend three days looking through records in the Guildhall School of Music, the College of Heralds, the "Lost, Stolen or Strayed" department of Scotland Yard, Battersea Dogs' Home, and the South Western Police Court. At last I met a harmonium player in the Cabmen's Rest in the Mile End Road, who, for the price of a sausage and mashed, gave me the information desired. He told me that Antoine Sax was the miscreant who had invented the saxophone! It appears that the date of this invention was 1843, and after all my research, it was the only thing that I could find out about the so-called Belgian musician. Truly, as the poet said, the evil that men do lives after them!

Q. Is the alligator really a dangerous and treacherous animal?

A. Undoubtedly, Florrie Ford. It is unwise to keep a full-grown one in the backyard as a pet. And most decidedly he is treacherous. He takes you in with an open countenance.

Q. What is the difference between a koodoo and a kopje?

A. Both these things are to be found in South Africa, but they are vastly different. A koodoo is a large white-striped, spiral-horned antelope, while a kopje is merely a small hill.

Q. What is a Manx cat?

A. A species of feline without a tail, native of the Isle of Man.

Q. What is the fastest type of swimming stroke?

A. Undoubtedly this is the "crawl," Tom Wiseman. The chief difference between this and the trudgeon is in the



The "crawl" stroke in swimming.

method of kicking the legs. Instead of swimming frog-like, you use the feet very much as in running, and this is the method which is naturally adopted by the Kanakas, Japanese, and others who are noted for their swimming prowess.

Arthur Augustus surveyed George Bloom rather coldly through his eyeglass. Then he turned it curiously upon Baggy Trimble.

"Tom Mewwy was fwightfully sowwy not to be able to meet you himself, Miss Fawcett," he explained. "He asked me to come instead. It was a gweat pleasuah for me, too, I can assuah you."

"But—but Trimble told me that Tommy had asked him to meet me!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus turned a frigid look upon the fat junior, who hastily looked the other way. "Did Twimble weally say that?"

"It is very kind of Tommy to ask two of his little friends to meet me!" beamed Miss Fawcett.

"Oh! Bai Jove! Y-yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus weakly. "I—I mean, not at all!"

He glared at Trimble, who was shifting his feet nervously.

"I—er—I've just remembered an important appointment, Miss Fawcett!" stammered Trimble. "I r-really m-must be going! G-got to go to the dentist!" he finished wildly, saying the first thing that came into his head. "Quite forgot till a s-second ago. G'bye!"

And Trimble scurried away and vanished round the corner, leaving Miss Fawcett looking considerably surprised at his abrupt departure. Arthur Augustus, who felt that the fewer questions asked the better, cut in hastily:

"What about a cab?" he exclaimed, and signalled to a cab in the station yard behind them.

The cabby flicked up his horse, and the ancient vehicle came creaking towards them.

Several village children had come up, and were standing by in a grinning group. Arthur Augustus' extraordinary appearance was evidently the cause of their merriment. The swell of St. Jim's, looking thoroughly uncomfortable, eyed the approaching cab as a shipwrecked mariner might have eyed a lifeboat.

Miss Fawcett, having introduced him to the new boy, turned her attention once more to Gussie's clothing.

"Why, you seem to be utterly soaked!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett, in alarm.

"It's nothin', I assuah you!"

"Oh, but it is very serious! You might catch your death of cold! Under the circumstances, I think it would be wrong of me to allow you to share my cab. You would get so chilly during the journey. It will be best for you to run all the way back in order to keep warm. Then you must change at once, and be sure to put flannel next your skin."

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, then recovered himself hastily. "I weally considah I shall be perfectly all wight in the cab, Miss Fawcett. I am suah—"

"No, you would be sure to catch cold, my poor boy!"

"I nevah catch colds! I assuah you I nevah c-catch—Atisssshooooo!"

Arthur Augustus almost doubled up with the violence of his sneeze.

"I—I beg your pardon."

"Oh dear! I'm afraid you have a cold already!" cried Miss Fawcett anxiously. "I really must insist that you run all the way back to the school. You must keep warm!"

"Oh deah! I—I feel suah it would be wisah to dwive. One sneeze means nothin'—"

"No, I insist!" exclaimed the old lady tenderly. "My dear Arthur, you must run along at once. And warm yourself thoroughly in front of a fire. And mind you change everything."

"But I assuah you—tisssshoooo! Atisssshoooo! Oh cwumbs! I—atisssshoooo!"

"Run along, please! My poor boy, please do as I say. I should never forgive myself if you were seriously ill! You might catch a dangerous chill."

"Yaas; but—"

"Now run along at once, like a good little boy!"

"Oh deah!"

There was no help for it. With a last longing look at the cab, Arthur Augustus raised his disreputable hat and turned to go. Miss Fawcett and the new fellow—who was grinning hugely—climbed into the cab. The cabby cracked his whip, and the old horse broke into a trot.

Creaking and groaning, the ancient vehicle rolled off up the road. Arthur Augustus, followed by a swarm of cheering village children, toiled after it. At the corner, Miss Fawcett leaned out of the window and waved to him in kindly sympathy. Arthur Augustus, polite to the last, raised his battered topper to her once again, and the cab vanished round the bend in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Oh cwumbs!" groaned Arthur Augustus aloud. "This is wotten! The old lady means to be most fwightfully kind, but— Oh, blow it!"

And the swell of St. Jim's, now that Miss Fawcett was out of sight, slowed to a walk. As he passed a shop window he caught his reflection in the glass, and gave an exclamation of horror.

"Bai Jove! Oh cwumbs! I look a feahful w'eck! Oh, this is howwible!"

Had there been another cab in the station yard Arthur Augustus would have taken it, though being careful never to let Miss Fawcett know. But there was no other cab, and so he strode on, soaked and wretched, with the farewell jeers of the village children following him.

"That fellow Bloom had nothin' but a silly gwim on his face all the time," snorted Arthur Augustus indignantly to the empty air. "I wish I knew who the wottah was that chucked a stone at my toppah!"

Had Arthur Augustus had the unknown stone-thrower in his power then, the unknown's fate would have been a horrible one indeed—something lingering, with boiling oil in it!

But Gussy had no means of finding out who the guilty criminal was. That would remain a mystery. But of one thing, at any rate, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was feeling very certain just then—that it was a hard, hard world.

CHAPTER 5.

Under False Colours!

WHEN, some time later, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, changed and in his right mind, so to speak, duly presented himself for tea at Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, he found a very cheery little party in progress.

In addition to the Terrible Three, Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth were there, and so was Talbot of the Shell. Miss Fawcett was well known to all of them, and all were very fond of that sweet old lady. All the juniors were being very charming to Miss Fawcett, and her beaming smile showed that she was very happy indeed. But then she was always happy when she was with Tom Merry.

George Bloom was still showing himself to be a very quiet fellow, and joined little in the conversation. Though no one had as yet got much out of him in the way of talk, his hefty physique had impressed the School House juniors favourably. Bloom looked as though he might well prove to be a useful addition to the House athletics.

When Miss Fawcett had assured herself that Arthur Augustus had obeyed her instructions to change everything, she turned again to Tom Merry.

"And now tell me all about the football match this afternoon, darling," she exclaimed tenderly. "Did you make a nice lot of runs?"

"Oh! Ah, not exactly!" said Tom Merry hastily. "I managed to kick a goal, though."

"Which is a bit more useful than runs in a footer match," whispered Lowther to Manners.

But he was very careful that the old lady should not overhear him. Lowther would not have hurt Miss Fawcett's feelings for worlds.

"And did you beat the other boys?" inquired Miss Fawcett brightly.

"Rather!" nodded Talbot. "We beat the New House chaps by a couple of goals. But their goalkeeper was away," he added. "That gave us a big advantage."

"I suppose it did," agreed Miss Fawcett. "Without a goalkeeper, I suppose there is no one to save the stumps from being knocked down."

Herries, who was drinking tea at the moment, suddenly choked and went very red in the face. Blake surreptitiously thumped him on the back.

"Not exactly that, dear," smiled Tom Merry. "You don't have stumps in footer; you're thinking of cricket."

"Am I?" beamed Miss Fawcett. "How foolish of me! But I'm afraid I know very little of these things. All I know is that I once heard a man say somebody playing at cricket had been caught, so I suppose you catch each other,

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In a deathly silence, Tom Merry began to slip on his jacket. He glanced at Bloom calmly. "Sorry to have brought you here for nothing," he said. "The fight's off!" And in the breathless hush that followed the captain of the Shell turned and pushed his way through the crowd, and strode from the gym. (See Chapter 7.)

as in hide-and-seek. But it all looks very mysterious when you watch it."

"I suppose it does," laughed Tom. "But both footer and cricket are jolly fine games!"

"I am sure they are." Miss Priscilla turned to Bloom. "And I hope, Tommy dear, that you will give Georgie a place in the team. He tells me he is very fond of sports."

"Glad to hear that!" said Tom heartily. "You're the sort of chap we want in the Shell, Bloom; I can see."

"Thanks!" smiled Bloom quietly. "Yes, I hope to do some good at footer. But, of course I shan't expect a place in the team at first."

"Have to prove your mettle first, of course," nodded Tom cheerily. "Where do you play?"

"Surely you used to play on the football field at your last school, Georgie?" exclaimed Miss Fawcett.

Bloom smiled.

"He means, what position in the team do I usually play," he explained. "Right-half was my place at Fairleigh."

"Well, we'll soon see how you shape," said Tom.

At last the time came for Miss Fawcett to return to the station.

Since the finish of the New House match, Tom had confirmed the fact that Bloom was to come into Study No. 10. The new boy had to go off after tea to interview Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther went alone in the cab with Miss Fawcett to the station.

On the platform at Rylcombe, as the train steamed in, the old lady kissed Tom Merry tenderly.

"Good-bye, darling!" she said. "And you'll promise to look after Georgie for me?"

"Rather!" smiled Tom, though the idea of the heftily-built new fellow needing anyone to look after him struck him secretly as being rather funny. However, even if it was so obviously unnecessary, there was no harm in promising. Tom thought.

"You will see that he is not treated roughly by any unkind boys? There are one or two rough boys at the school, I am afraid, are there not?"

"One or two," grinned Tom, who could not imagine Bloom being bullied by anyone.

"You will see he is not bullied, though?"

"I will, dear!"

"Thank you, Tommy! It will be such a relief to me to know that my old friend's little boy is being looked after by you, dear! I can tell his mother that you have promised to take care of him, can't I?"

"Of course!"

A minute later the train rattled out of the station, and the three Shell fellows set off on their walk back to St. Jim's.

"Bloom seems a decent enough fellow, thank goodness!" said Manners cheerfully. "Very quiet, but that's not a fault. And he seems keen on footer, too."

"He doesn't seem the sort of chap to let the study down!" agreed Monty Lowther.

Dusk was falling as they crossed the quad on their return to St. Jim's. The three chums went straight up to the Shell

passage. Tom pushed open the door of Study No. 10 and entered, with Manners and Lowther at his heels.

"My hat!"

A sharp ejaculation broke from Tom Merry. He stared into the study in dismay.

George Bloom, the new fellow, was lolling in the best easy-chair, with a cigarette smouldering between his fingers. The atmosphere was hazy with smoke.

Bloom glanced round at the Terrible Three and nodded.

"Back from the station?" he remarked. "I'm just having a whiff."

Tom found his voice with difficulty.

"I—I see you are," he said blankly.

The discovery had left him so taken aback that as yet he had not even been able to protest.

"I dare say you chaps thought I was an awful greenhorn," went on Bloom blandly. "But, of course, that was all part of the game. I had to play up in front of the old lady!"

"My hat!" breathed Manners.

"Did you swallow all that stuff I pushed out about footer?" added Bloom, grinning. "It was all bosh, of course. I loathe the footer! A sickening waste of time, in my opinion!"

In dumb astonishment the chums of Study No. 10 gazed at the new fellow who had come to share their study at St. Jim's. Bloom gazed back at them with calm unconcern, and blew a smoke-ring at the ceiling.

So it was all a bluff! The new boy was anything but the quiet, decent fellow they had taken him to be. He had revealed himself abruptly as a shady outsider! His whole behaviour before Miss Fawcett had been sheer hypocrisy.

George Bloom had come to St. Jim's under very false colours. He was now revealed, to the dismay of the Terrible Three, as a wolf in sheep's clothing.

CHAPTER 6.

Discord in Study No. 10!

"**W**HEW!" breathed Tom Merry.

"My only Aunt Sempronia!" gasped Monty Lowther.

Manners did not speak. He merely glared.

Bloom grinned at them. Evidently he put down their evident astonishment to a feeling of pleased surprise that he was not the duffer he imagined they had thought him to be, but a regular "blade."

He put a hand into his pocket and took out a packet of cheap cigarettes.

"Have a fag?" he inquired.

And then Tom Merry pulled himself together. His brow went dark. He stepped forward, but instead of selecting a cigarette, he snatched the whole packet from the new fellow's hand.

"Here, steady on!" said Bloom angrily. "I didn't ask you to collar the lot!"

"Didn't you?" replied Tom icily. "Well, I've taken 'em, all the same."

He tossed the weeds contemptuously into the fire. Bloom stared at him in dumb astonishment. It was his turn to be taken aback now!

Tom Merry reached out again, and this time snatched the smouldering cigarette from the new boy's fingers. It followed the rest of the packet into the fire.

"You—you—you—" began Bloom, choking.

"Smoking's not allowed in this study!" said Tom curtly. "Understand?"

Bloom glared at him.

"Of all the thundering nerve!" he panted. "How dare you chuck my fags in the fire?"

"So you're a smoky rotter, are you?" growled Manners disgustedly, moving forward. "And you don't like footer?"

"Think it's a waste of time—eh?" roared Monty Lowther. "Oh, help! To think we've got a worm like you in this study! Oh, my hat!"

Bloom sprang to his feet. His fists were clenched and his eyes blazed from beneath heavy brows. He was a hefty-looking individual at any time, but now he was in a temper he looked twice as formidable.

"Do you mean to say you three idiots really are the good little boys Miss Fawcett thinks you?" he sneered. "I thought it was just bluff—as it was with me!"

"You thought wrong," answered Tom Merry quietly. "I don't know about being 'good little boys,' but we aren't dingy blackguards, anyway—as you seem to be!"

"Keep your polite remarks to yourself!" hissed Bloom, and took a step forward, thrusting his face aggressively into that of the captain of the Shell.

"I am used to saying what I think, and to people's faces!" retorted Tom contemptuously. "You're in this study, and that's that! But while you are here you'll remember that

smoking is barred, and that you are expected to try to behave like a decent chap."

Bloom breathed hard.

"You talk too much!" he growled savagely. "At my last school—Fairleigh—I was cock of the walk—"

"You aren't here!" snapped Tom.

"Aren't I?" grinned Bloom. He looked Tom up and down in an offensive way. "I fancy I could lick you, Tommy darling!"

Tom flushed. The indirect taunt to Miss Fawcett implied in the use of her affectionate term for him, angered Tom almost past control. But he kept his temper with an effort.

"You can cut that sort of talk right out, Bloom!"

"Thanks for telling me!" sneered the new boy. "If you think you can order me about in this study you are precious mistaken!"

"Don't talk too big for your boots!" said Manners coolly. "Tom Merry's captain of the Shell and captain of this study, too, if it comes to that. We're not going to have our study made a bear-garden by any new fellow—even if he was cock of the walk at his last school!"

"No blessed fear!" snorted Monty Lowther.

Bloom glared at them. Then he turned his attention again to Tom Merry.

"Watch this!" he said.

He took from his pocket a second packet of cigarettes, selected one, put it in his mouth, and lit it. Then he deliberately puffed a cloud of smoke into Tom Merry's face.

"That's my answer to you!" he said truculently. "I do as I like in this study, I tell you! And it would take a better man than you are to stop me!"

Tom Merry's reply was very prompt. Before Bloom had a chance to prevent him Tom had snatched the cigarette from the new boy's mouth and tossed it after the others into the fire.

"Collar him, you chaps!" he said quietly. "We'll get that other packet, too, and confiscate it!"

Before Bloom could raise a hand to keep them off, the Terrible Three had grasped him and whirled him off his feet. He landed on the floor with a crash, with Manners seated grimly astride him. Tom pinned his legs, and Lowther cheerfully extracted the packet of cigarettes.

"Put those back!" yelled Bloom.

Crimson with fury, he struggled to free himself. But, powerful fellow though he was, he was helpless in the grip of Tom and Manners.

"I don't think!" retorted Monty Lowther cheerily, and dropped the packet into the fire. "Quite a little bonfire we're having! And all thanks to you, Bloom! Not got it into your head that it's the Fifth of November, have you? 'Cause it's not!"

"Let me go, you cads!" hissed Bloom furiously.

"Certainly," said Tom, having made sure that the new boy had no more smokes concealed about him. "And if we ever catch you bringing your filthy cigarettes into this study again, there'll be trouble! Get that into your napper."

Bloom struggled to his feet as the Terrible Three released him. His face was white with rage.

"You'll pay for that!" he shouted, and hit out at Tom Merry with a wildly swinging fist.

Tom side-stepped and avoided the blow.

"Enough of that!" he snapped.

"You're afraid to fight, eh?" cried Bloom sneeringly.

"Not in the least."

"Then come on!"

Bloom began peeling off his coat. Manners laid a restraining hand on his chum's arm.

"Can't fight in here, old man," he muttered.

"I'd almost forgotten that," said Tom easily, but his face was set in very grim lines. "If you're really keen on this scrap, Bloom, you'd better come along to the gym."

"Right!" answered Bloom, in savage tones. "I'm going to give you the hiding of your life! I'll show you how I ruled the roost at Fairleigh!"

"Modest little chap, isn't he?" drawled Monty Lowther, but Bloom was too angry to heed or even hear Monty's sarcasm.

"Where do we go?" demanded Bloom. "Lead me to this gym, and I'll show you how to use your fists!"

"That's kind of you!" said Tom. "This way!"

With black brows, the captain of the Shell strode from the study, followed by his chums and the new School House junior.

It was not often that Tom Merry could be roused as he was roused now. Though the best boxer in the junior school, Tom was a peaceable chap, who actually used his fists very seldom. But Bloom had passed the limit. Tom was feeling grimly pleased at the prospect of facing the blustering new fellow in the school gymnasium.

For the moment, at any rate, Tom Merry had quite forgotten his promise to Miss Fawcett to look after George Bloom and take him under his sheltering wing at St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 7. No Fight!

"HEARD the news?" Baggy Trimble, scuttling along the Fourth Form passage, was going excitedly from study to study and putting in his fat head.

Baggy was fairly bursting with excitement. If there was one thing Baggy loved—barring grub and sleep—it was to have some item of news to spread abroad.

Most of the fellows grasped a ruler or a cricket-stump when Baggy's head appeared round their doors. But they all asked what the news was before throwing anything, and when they heard Baggy's item of information they one and all dropped their weapons and left their studies hastily.

"Heard the news?"

Baggy put his head in at the door of Study No. 6. Blake was at prep, together with Herries and Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Blake grasped a Latin dictionary, Herries' hand closed on a cricket-stump, Digby reached for the inkpot, and Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle.

"Cleah off, Twimble!"

"What is the giddy news, anyway?" growled Blake.

"Tom Merry's off to the gym to fight that new fellow, Bloom!" squeaked Baggy, fairly quivering with excitement.

"W-w-what?" gasped Blake.

"Fibber!" exclaimed Herries incredulously.

"Tell that to the marines!" suggested Digby. But he looked startled, all the same.

"You weally mean to say, Twimble—"

"Yes, I do!" hooted the fat Fourth-Former eagerly.

"Honest Injun!" He vanished, leaving the door wide open, to spread the news further. Mellish, of the Fourth, hurrying by, halted and glanced in.

"Heard the news?" he inquired, grinning. "Tom Merry and the new chap—"

"It can't be true!" exclaimed Blake.

"It is true!" chortled Mellish. "The righteous Thomas, licking a new kid! Sheer bullying, I call it!"

He hurried on. The four chums of Study No. 6 jumped up. "But Bloom is such a quiet, peaceable chap!" said Blake dazedly.

"Tom Mewwy must be off his wockah!" declared Arthur Augustus in troubled bewilderment.

"Let's go and see, anyway!" suggested Digby, and the four chums dived for the door in a body, and joined the hurrying swarm of fellows who were pouring down the stairs.

That it was true right enough was obvious as soon as Blake & Co. entered the gym. They found a crowd of juniors surrounding Tom Merry and the new boy. One look at Tom's face was sufficient to prove to the chums of the Fourth that Tom Merry was in a fighting mood for once!

"My aunt!" muttered Blake. "Tom looks waxy!"

"What on earth can Bloom have done?" ejaculated Digby in amazement.

"Stand back, you chaps!" called out Manners. "Hang it, give 'em a chance! Get back, Trimble!"

The fellows moved back and formed a rough circle, leaving Tom Merry and Bloom in the centre, together with Manners and Lowther.

Bloom looked round with a sneer on his bulldog face.

"Anyone going to second me?" he demanded.

There was no answer. None of the fellows present knew Bloom, other than a brief glimpse of him on his arrival at St. Jim's. And from the ugly look on his face, most of the fellows agreed that he did not look a particularly attractive customer.

But one and all admired his hefty build.

"Looks a tough nut to crack!" muttered Clive of the Fourth.

"Tom Merry hasn't got an easy job on hand," murmured Levison.

Still there was no answer to the new boy's demand for a second. Then Baggy Trimble stepped forward.

"I'll second you, kid," he said majestically. "I'm not the chap to see a new kid bullied. Rely on me to see fair play, old chap."

Bloom eyed him contemptuously.

"You?" he grinned. "I'd sooner be seconded by a captive-balloon! And don't call me 'kid'! I don't like it!"

He stepped forward and gave Trimble a sharp box on the ear, that made the fat junior leap back in startled surprise.

"Yow!" howled Trimble. "Oh! Beast! I hope Tom Merry licks you! I hope he knocks you into the middle of next week!"

Then Baggy skipped back nimbly into the crowd. Aubrey Racke of the Shell stepped forward.

"I'll second you, Bloom," he said coolly. "I don't know what the row is about, but I'll second you."

Bloom eyed Racke with considerably more favour than he had eyed Trimble. Racke's cast of countenance appealed to him.

"Good man!" he exclaimed. "You look a decent chap—not the milksop kind I seem to have got in with in Study No. 10!"

Racke chuckled, well pleased.

"You're dead right there," he exclaimed, with a laugh, and he and Bloom shook hands.

The crowd watched in silence, eager for the fun to begin. Bloom began to strip off his coat.

"Ready, Tom?" asked Manners, taking out his watch.

Tom nodded, with set face. His temper had subsided, but he was still determined to give the blackguardly new fellow a lesson.

"I'm ready," he said.

Slowly he began to peel off his coat and waistcoat. Bloom was already rolling up his sleeves in a determined way, and talking to Racke in a low tone. From Racke's delighted grin, Monty Lowther guessed that Bloom was explaining to the cad of the Shell the reason of his quarrel with Tom Merry.

Bloom stepped forward.

"I'm ready," he declared aggressively.

Manners glanced at him, then glanced at Tom Merry. A sudden exclamation broke from Manners' lips.

"Tom, what on earth's the matter?" he muttered.

A queer look had come into Tom Merry's face. His face was rather pale, but a bright spot of colour was burning in either cheek.

"What's up with him?" muttered Talbot to Blake.

"What's the matter, old man?" repeated Manners.

(Continued on next page.)



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Tom did not answer. Instead, he turned and slowly picked up his jacket and waistcoat. There was a breathless hush of sheer amazement.

In a deathly silence the captain of the Shell began to slip on his jacket. The colour died from his cheeks now. He glanced at Bloom calmly.

"Sorry to have brought you here for nothing," he said coolly. "The fight's off!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Bloom.

"What I say. I'm not fighting!"

And in the breathless hush, the captain of the Shell turned and pushed his way through the crowd, and strode from the gymnasium.

The silence was broken by the voice of Aubrey Racke.

"Great pip!" yelled Racke. "Tom Merry's funk'd!"

CHAPTER 8.

"Cold Feet!"

TOM MERRY stood on the hearthrug in Study No. 10 and stared gloomily at the floor.

He was alone in the study.

"Oh, well!" he said suddenly, in a troubled voice, and shrugged his shoulders. But the look of deep gloom was still on Tom's usually cheery face as he crossed to the bookshelf and took down his books for prep. He threw them on to the table, pulled up a chair, and immersed himself in the intricacies of Virgil.

The door opened and Manners and Lowther entered.

Tom glanced up, nodded, and went on with his Latin. Manners and Lowther glanced at one another. Both looked worried.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther, a trifle awkwardly. "Er—ahem! Started prep, eh?"

Tom nodded without looking up.

After a lengthy silence in the study, broken only by the scratching of Tom's pen, Manners and Lowther, too, sat down at the table and opened their books.

For ten minutes or more three pens scratched busily. Then Monty Lowther could stand the strain no longer. Though he, like Manners, had felt that it was up to Tom to be the first to refer to the extraordinary affair in the gym, Monty could not wait any longer now that it was obvious that Tom did not intend to refer to the matter at all.

"Look here, Tom, old chap—"

"I say, what does 'cæstus' mean?" inquired Tom.

"Blow 'cæstus'!"

"Oh, I know," murmured Tom thoughtfully. "It means those iron boxing-gloves the Romans used to wear—"

"Yes, but—"

"Like knuckle-dusters, weren't they?" added Tom, and bent over his books again.

"Look here," began Lowther, "I—"

There was a tap at the door, and the grinning face of Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, appeared.

"Parcel for you, Merry!" He tossed a small brown paper parcel on to the table. "Must have been sent up from the village."

Tom picked up the parcel, with a puzzled frown. He was not expecting a parcel from the village, but his name and address were on the label attached to it. He cut the string.

"Wonder what it is?" said Mellish, with a snigger.

"Mind your own business, and clear out!" growled Manners. Something in Mellish's manner struck him as suspicious.

Tom unwrapped the brown paper, and drew out a pair of old woollen socks.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he began in bewilderment. A sheet of paper fluttered to the floor, and he picked it up.

Both Manners and Lowther saw what was written on the sheet—they could not help doing so. The colour flooded into Tom's face as he stared down at the big, scrawled capital letters:

"FOR COLD FEET!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Mellish.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the passage, and the Terrible Three realised suddenly that behind Mellish was a crowd of other fellows, all peering eagerly into the study. Racke was there, and Croke, and Scrope, and Gore, and several others.

"Oh, my hat! 'For cold feet!'" yelled Racke. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh, that's rich!"

The flush died from Tom's face. Quietly he rose to his feet and took a couple of quick strides to the door. Mellish tried to dodge, but the captain of the Shell grasped him by the collar and swung him round. There was a wild howl from Percy Mellish the next moment as Tom Merry's boot took him in the rear.

"Yooooop!"

The sneak of the Fourth shot out into the passage, and

as he collapsed his waving arms clasped Scrope lovingly round the neck and dragged that hapless youth to the floor with him. Tom threw the socks out after Mellish, and slammed the door. Without a word he tossed the insulting sheet on to the fire, and sat down to resume his prep.

Manners and Lowther looked at one another.

"Look here," said Manners quietly, "this won't do, Tom!"

"What won't do?"

"You know jolly well!" burst out Monty Lowther indignantly. "All the chaps are saying you funk'd fighting Bloom—"

"Are they?" Tom bent over his books once more.

"Yes, they are, and it's not good enough!" said Manners grimly.

Tom Merry's pen scratched on.

"And then you get worms like Mellish doing this sort of thing—saying you've got cold feet!" growled Monty Lowther.

"You aren't going to stick this sort of thing, are you?" said Manners. "We don't understand why you refused to fight Bloom at the last minute, but—"

Tom laid down his pen.

"Do you chaps think I funk'd?" he asked calmly.

"Of course not!"

"Then why worry?" Tom picked up his pen again, and resumed his prep.

There was a tap at the door. It opened to reveal the round, pasty face of Baggy Trimble.

"Yah!" yelled Trimble. "Who funk'd fighting the new kid? Blessed if I didn't expect it, though. Rotten funk!"

Trimble, who had not forgotten his bumping at the hands of the Terrible Three for having meddled with Tom Merry's letter from Miss Fawcett, sniffed scornfully as he surveyed the captain of the Shell. Manners picked up a cricket-stump, and Baggy vanished hastily, slamming the door.

"There you are!" snorted Monty Lowther. "Even Trimble's got the confounded nerve to—"

There was another knock on the door. Manners picked up the cricket-stump again, and as the door opened he flung it like a javelin. There was a howl from the doorway as the sharp end of the stump caught the newcomer in the middle of the waistcoat.

"Gwooooooh!" gurgled the new arrival, doubling up over his injured middle. "Ow! Ow! Bai Jove!"

It was not Baggy back again, nor Mellish, nor Aubrey Racke, nor any of the others of their kidney. This time it was the swell of St. Jim's who had arrived, and who had caught Manners' rather too hastily thrown weapon on the third button of his dazzling waistcoat. Monty Lowther gave a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! Sorry, Gussy!" gasped Manners. "Thought you were someone else!"

"Oh dear! Gwoooooh! Weally, Mannahs, if you had not apologised I should have had to administrah a feahful thwashin'!" panted the swell of St. Jim's. "Ow!"

There were footsteps in the passage. Blake appeared behind Gussy, and he was followed by Herries and Digby. Talbot of the Shell was with them.

Blake stared in astonishment at the doubled-up form of Arthur Augustus.

"My hat! Gussy's kow-towing!" he exclaimed. "Why the sudden humility, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus straightened himself and surveyed Blake frigidly through his eyeglass.

"I was not kow-towin', you ass! Weally, Blake—"

"But I saw you."

"You uttah idiot, Blake! I was meahly—"

"You looked as if you were kissing the carpet," went on Jack Blake severely. "I won't have any Fourth-Former abasing himself to these Shell-fish, so don't you do it again!"

"I was not abasin' myself!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I had been stwuck with a cwicket-stump—"

"No excuse. Even if they try to force you to it by bullying, you shouldn't kow-tow to any fellow!" Blake persisted.

"I suppose you are meahly twyin' to be funnay!" snorted Arthur Augustus. "I considah your levity in vevy bad taste, Blake. We have come to this studay on a sewigous mattah—"

"Hear, hear!" put in Digby.

The chums of Study No. 6 crowded into the room, and Talbot followed them in and shut the door. Tom Merry glanced from face to face, with a slight frown.

"We were trying to do a bit of prep, you know," he said politely.

"Blow pwepl! I considah it is necessawy—"

"Shut up Gussy! It's like this—"

"Weally, Blake! Pway leave the talkin' to me! You see, Tom Mewwy—"

"You've talked enough for a dozen already, Gussy. Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Shut up, Blake, and allow me to pwoceed! As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "Look here, Tom Merry, it's this way! All the chaps are saying you funk'd fighting Bloom, and it's not good enough. We know you didn't chuck the fight from funk, of course, but we're hanged if we do know why you refused! And we feel that, as pals of yours, we want a giddy explanation. It's for your own sake, Tommy. You must have had some good reason, and it's only fair to tell the chaps."

"Hear, hear!" nodded Talbot quietly.

"That's it," agreed Herries and Digby together.

"Wathah! We insist on a giddy explanation, deah boy!"

Tom laid down his pen and leaned back in his chair. A faint smile had appeared on his face.

"Let's have it!" snorted Monty Lowther.

"It's simple enough," said Tom quietly. "I don't see why there should be such a fuss, anyway. Only silly asses would think I funk'd fighting a blustering, shady rotter like Bloom. Why should I worry?"

"Well, we worry!" snorted Monty. "It's rotten, having chaps going about saying you've got cold feet!"

"Is it?" answered Tom, with a smile. "Surely that's really my affair, isn't it?"

"It's the affair of all your pals, Tom," put in Talbot.

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, if you want to know, it's simple enough, as I say. When Miss Fawcett left to-day, she got me to promise to look after Bloom, and stand by him all along the line. I'd forgotten that, I'm sorry to say, when I went off to fight Bloom in the gym. But I remembered just in time. After my promise, I couldn't start off by fighting the fellow, could I? That would have been a bit too thick! So I had to call it off."

"I—I see!" murmured Blake.

"But—" began Monty Lowther.

"There are no buts!" said Tom sharply. "I'm keeping my promise to stand by Bloom, as far as he'll let me. I don't like the fellow, but because of that promise to Miss Fawcett I'm bound to try to be decent to him. And I mean to try."

"You're an ass!" said Blake. "But I s'pose you're right."

"I admire youah spiwit," said Arthur Augustus approvingly. "It does you great cwidit, deah boy."

"Not in the least," grunted Tom. "And now clear out, you asses, and let me get on with my prep."

"Anybody know where Bloom is, anyway?" put in Manners.

"Yes!" boomed a sudden voice from the doorway. "He's here!"

And with an aggressive grin on his bulldog face, George Bloom strode with a swagger into Study No. 10.

CHAPTER 9. Talbot Gets Annoyed!

THERE was an abrupt silence in the study as Bloom pushed his way through to the fireplace and planted himself there, legs apart, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

The new fellow looked round truculently, then his gaze rested on Tom Merry. His lips parted in a sneer.

"Hallo, windy!" he exclaimed.

Tom did not reply. He looked at the others.

"If you chaps don't mind buzzing off, I'd like to be getting on with my prep," he said quietly, and bent over his books.

"Oh, there's a good little Tommy darling!" grinned Bloom. He crossed to the table and snatched up the open Virgil from under Tom's nose. "Latin, eh? I hope you're good at Latin, because I expect that later on I shall be making you do some of my prep for me."

He tossed the book down again.

"My hat!" breathed Talbot.

"What feahful cheek!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Tom's face had set in hard lines. He rose to his feet, his fists clenched. Then he relaxed them.

"A pity you didn't learn manners at Fairleigh, Bloom," he said curtly.

"Manners?" sneered Bloom. "I don't bother about good manners when I'm dealing with funks!"

"Meaning me?" said Tom coolly, with an odd, slow smile. That smile puzzled Bloom. He did not quite like it. But he nodded insolently.

"Meaning just that!"

And then Talbot stepped forward, his face blazing.

"You blustering fool!" snapped Talbot. "Listen, while I tell you a thing or two! Tom Merry here is the finest boxer of the junior school at St. Jim's, and we know how to use our fists here! Why, there are half a dozen chaps in the Shell and Fourth who could knock you silly!"

Reginald Talbot paused, and smiled. It was a very grim smile, however.

"You think that Tom Merry funks fighting you?" he went on, with a laugh. "You're mad! The only reason he wouldn't meet you in the gym just now was because of his promise to Miss Fawcett. He promised to stand by you and be decent to you, and Tom's one of those chaps who stick by their promises. Understand? But if he cared to, Tom Merry could make mincemeat of you!"

Bloom stared at Talbot dumbly.

"Now," snapped Talbot, "I've told you the truth, if Tom wouldn't bother to!"

"Heah, hear!" shouted Arthur Augustus delightedly. "That's the way to talk to the wotten boundah!"

Bloom licked his lips. They had gone rather dry.

"I don't know who you are," he said to Talbot thickly, "but if you think you can bluff me with that sort of talk you're making a big mistake! You say there are half a dozen chaps in the Shell and the Fourth who could lick me? You're talking jolly big! I dare say you think you're one?"

Talbot nodded.

"I fancy I am!"

The two faced one another with clenched fists. They were both well-built fellows, without an inch between them. But Bloom, in his conceit, gave a sneering laugh.

"This is what I think of you, my lad!" said George Bloom, and he picked up the inkpot from the table and dashed the contents into Talbot's face.

"Oh!" gasped Talbot sharply, and took an involuntary step backwards.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bloom.

Talbot took out a handkerchief and wiped the ink from his face. Then, slowly and deliberately, he peeled off his coat. Bloom promptly followed suit.

"It's nearly bed-time," said Talbot, his face set. "The gym will be locked up. So we'll fight here, if you chaps don't mind."

"Rather not!" exclaimed Monty Lowther promptly.

"Carry on!" nodded Manners, a look of grim pleasure on his face.

"Half a minute!" out in Tom Merry, frowning in a troubled way. "This won't do! I—"

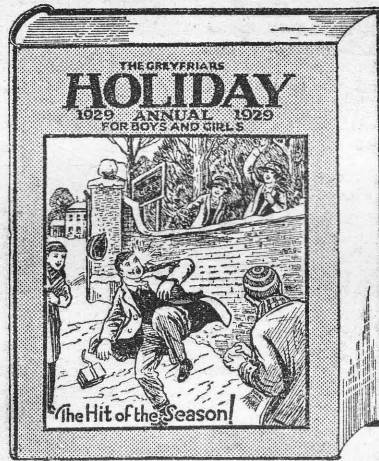
"You can't expect me to stand that from Bloom, Tom," said Talbot quietly. "If you mean to stand by him," he added, with a sudden cheery grin—"why, hang it, I'll have to fight you, too, that's all!"

Tom smiled faintly.

"Well, I suppose I can't interfere," he said, with the same worried frown. "But I think I'll go and leave you to it."

Tom realised that, despite his promise always to stand by Bloom, this was an occasion when it was impossible for him to interfere. But he did not feel inclined to stand by

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and see the fellow who had been forced into his unwilling care engaged in a fight on his first night at St. Jim's.

He strode to the door and left the study. Manners turned the key in the lock against possible interruption.

"Do you want rounds?" he inquired.

"Rounds be blowed!" snapped Bloom. "I'm going to give this fellow the licking of his life! I'll show you how we fought at Fairleigh!"

And he rushed at Talbot.

Crash!

Talbot went over on his back, sent spinning by a terrific right-hander that had smashed through his hastily raised guard.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jack Blake blankly.

But Talbot was on his feet again in a twinkling.

"He got me off my guard," he muttered coolly.

"Rats!" grinned Bloom, who was anticipating a speedy victory. "Come on, you flabby ass!"

Again the new fellow made a rush, but this time Talbot was ready for him. For a minute or more the two faced each other squarely, giving blow for blow. Tramping and panting, the two combatants hit out at one another fiercely.

"Go it, Talbot!" muttered Monty Lowther.

"Thwash the boundah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus eagerly, surveying the fight through his gleaming monocle.

Crash!

This time it was George Bloom who went down. Talbot stepped back, breathing hard.

Bloom staggered up, his nose streaming red, and with an expression of surprise on his bulldog face.

"That was a rotten fluke!" he panted, and hurled himself again at Talbot.

The fight was renewed at the same fast pace. Hammer and tongs, the two trampled to and fro in the small space of Study No. 10, watched with eager excitement by the others.

That Bloom had tremendous force behind his blows was obvious. Whenever he landed a punch Talbot, powerful fellow though he was, would stagger. But Talbot's blows were equally terrific, and he had far more science behind them than had Bloom.

Talbot went down again, to a swinging left-hander to the jaw. But then Bloom went down twice in rapid succession, and after the second time he rose to his feet with far less readiness than he had previously shown.

"Come on!" said Talbot between his teeth.

Bloom, panting and dishevelled, with a rapidly closing eye and a nose that now looked like a well-ripened tomato, came on.

But he was beaten now. He did not land any more blows; all his punches were wild. Talbot, beating through the other's guard with deadly persistence, landed blow after blow. And then, with a final beautiful straight left, he sent Bloom spinning into the corner by the door.

And this time the new occupant of Study No. 10 did not rise; he lay where he was, gasping and groaning.

"Had enough?" demanded Talbot.

A savage glare was his only answer.

"Licked to the wide!" remarked Monty Lowther laconically.

Talbot slipped on his coat again, unlocked the door, and opened it.

"Cheerio, you chaps!" he remarked. "There you are, Bloom," he added, glancing at his beaten foe, "that's a little demonstration of what I meant. Tom Merry can lick me. I can lick you. That's proof that Tom Merry doesn't funk your kind."

"Q.E.D., as Mr. Euclid says!" grinned Digby.

There was a step in the passage. It was Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Bed-time, kids!" he exclaimed. "Get along!" Then he looked hard at Talbot. "What have you been doing to your face?"

Talbot bore several traces of his "little demonstration." He grinned.

"Nothing, Kildare!" he said hastily. "I—er—banged it against something."

Kildare stepped, frowning, into the study, and started when he saw Bloom lying in the corner, mopping his nose with a handkerchief.

"By Jove! Fighting, eh? You mean to say, Talbot, that you have been fighting a new fellow on his first night? That's pretty rotten, isn't it?"

"He asked for it," put in Manners quietly.

Kildare stared at the juniors hard. But he knew Talbot well enough to realise that he was not the kind of fellow to fight a new boy—or anyone else, for that matter—without a good deal of provocation.

"Take a couple of hundred lines, Talbot, for fighting in the study!" he said sharply. "I'd give the same to you if you weren't a new kid, Bloom!" he added. "You are Bloom, I suppose?"

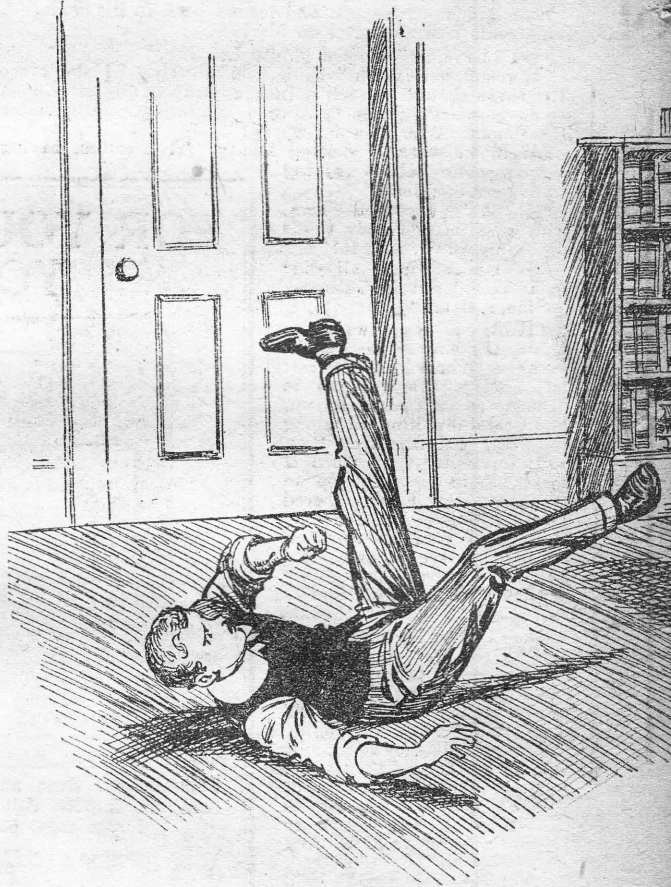
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"Yes," said Bloom sullenly.

"If you've got a quarrelsome nature, Bloom, you had better curb it at St. Jim's," said the captain quietly, guessing the truth of the situation very shrewdly. "Now get upstairs to bed!"

Tom Merry joined his chums on the way up to the dormitory, and Monty Lowther told him the result of the fight with great satisfaction. The captain of the Shell said nothing.

As he entered the Shell dormitory Tom Merry noticed at once that there was an odd atmosphere of suppressed



"I'm going to give this fellow the licking of his life!" snapped Bloom back, sent spinning by a terrific right-hander that had smashed th
Blake blankly

eagerness in the long room. The dormitory was already crowded, and he fancied he heard some quickly silenced chuckles as he came in.

He crossed towards his bed, and instantly realised the cause of the chuckles.

Hanging at the head of the bed were a pair of big red woolly bed-socks. And propped against the pillow was a cardboard notice:

"FOR COLD FEET!"

The captain of the Shell crimsoned. He picked up the bed-socks and the offending notice, and tossed them, without a word, under the next bed. There was a breathless silence.

"Not going to wear 'em?" Racke's voice broke the hush. "They'll keep your cold feet warm to-night, perhaps."

Tom wheeled on him.

"What's this talk of cold feet, Racke?" he asked, with dangerous calm.

"Oh, I just had an idea you might suffer from 'em!" retorted Racke airily.

With a few quick strides Tom Merry was beside Racke. He grasped the cad of the Shell by the collar and jerked him to his feet.

"Leggo!" roared Racke angrily. "Leggo, you cad——"

"There's one thing," said Tom, "I'm not funky of you, Racke, anyway!"

And, picking up one of Racke's discarded shoes from the bedside, he swung the cad of the Shell across the bed, and the shoe rose and fell.

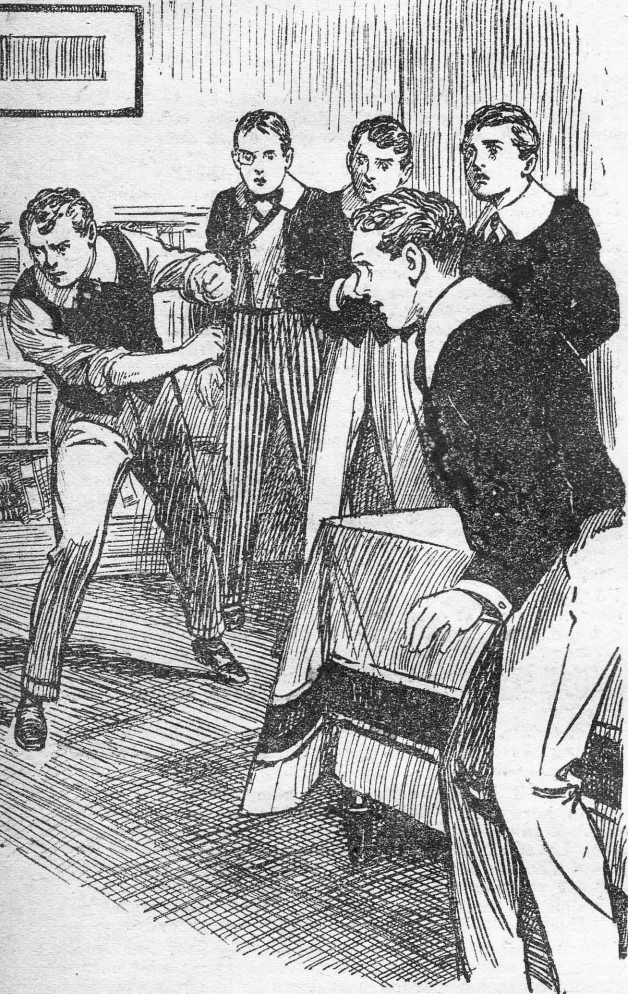
Racke yelled and struggled, but he was powerless in Tom Merry's iron grip.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow! Oh! Yarooooo! Rescue!" howled Racke.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kangaroo. "Go it, Tom!"

"There!" gasped Tom Merry, tossing the shoe aside at



He rushed at Reginald Talbot. Crash! Talbot went over on his back as he hastily raised guard. "Oh, my hat!" murmured Jack (Chapter 9.)

last and releasing Racke. "Not so much gas about cold feet in future!"

Racke, furious, staggered up and looked for a moment as though he would rush at Tom. But he did not like the look in the eyes of the captain of the Shell, and he turned away, muttering.

It was at that moment that Bloom entered the dormitory, still dabbing savagely at his battered features. There was an instant silence.

"Crumbs!" gasped Kerruish. "Where did you get that face, Bloom?"

"Did Tom Merry fight, after all?" chuckled Wilkins.

"No," said Manners, grinning. "Talbot thrashed Bloom. Tom didn't quite cotton on to the idea of licking a friend of Miss Fawcett's on his very first night at St. Jim's."

"My hat!" gasped Clifton Dane. "So that's the reason you wouldn't fight, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Tom, and climbed into bed.

Racke & Co. stared in dismay at George Bloom. Apparently he was not the invincible fighting-man they had imagined him to be. And they realised suddenly why Tom Merry had refused at the last moment to fight the new fellow.

For the sake of Miss Fawcett!

Bloom went to bed without saying a word to anyone. But it is doubtful if he went to sleep very quickly—he was too sore for that!

There was another fellow who took a long time to go to sleep, and that was Tom Merry.

He lay awake in the darkness with a frowning brow. It had been an eventful day! And seeing how Bloom had turned out, the captain of the Shell was not looking forward at all to the future with a fellow of Bloom's kidney in the study.

But of one thing Tom Merry was determined. He still meant to stand by his promise to Miss Fawcett, whatever happened!

CHAPTER 10.

Looking After Bloom!

"TEA-TIME!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

The Terrible Three had been punting a footer about in the close with Blake & Co., and Talbot and Kangaroo, and Levison and Clive of the Fourth.

But at Monty's remark about tea, most of the fellows found that they were feeling decidedly peckish after their spell of exercise following afternoon school. The party broke up, and with the football under his arm Tom Merry entered the School House with Manners and Lowther and went up to the Shell passage.

Manners swung open the door of Study No. 10 and the three chums entered. Then they halted in surprise.

The study was quite crowded!

Bloom was there, standing by the fireplace, waiting for the kettle to boil for tea. And lounging about the study, making themselves thoroughly at home, were Racke and Crooke of the Shell, Mellish of the Fourth, Gore of the Shell, and Cyril Chowle of the New House.

"My hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Racke glanced at the Terrible Three carelessly.

"Come in," he remarked. "Plenty of room!"

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Manners. "I should say there is plenty of room, seeing this is our study!"

Bloom looked round and glowered at the Terrible Three.

"You've turned up, have you?" he growled.

"We have," nodded Tom Merry. "But what's the idea, Bloom?"

"Can't I have some friends in to tea, if I want to?" snarled the new boy. "This is my study!"

"Ours, too," said Manners coolly.

Tom frowned. In accordance with his resolve to try to act in as friendly a way as possible to George Bloom, he did not want any trouble now. But to see all the dingy blackguards of the Fourth and Shell lounging around in Study No. 10 went against the grain—very much so!

Manners and Monty Lowther looked at their leader questioningly. They knew that he felt he was in a difficult position, and so they did not intend to do anything without a lead from their chum.

"Nice little tea-party we shall all make!" grinned Racke, who had read Tom Merry's thoughts almost at once.

"Make yourselves at home, you chaps," sniggered Mellish.

"He, he, he!" came from Chowle.

Tom Merry looked at Bloom.

"I'm sorry, Bloom. But this party can't go on. I know this is your study, but it's ours, too, and visitors to a study are by general agreement of the owners. It's three to one against having Racke & Co. to tea. I fancy——"

"Rather!" grinned Monty Lowther, and Manners nodded. "So your party is off, Bloom. Better ask your pals to clear out," went on Tom quietly.

Bloom's face took on a black look and his eyes glittered.

"Look here, Tom Merry," he roared, "I won't stand it! I've a perfect right——"

"Not against a majority of three to one," repeated Tom. "Take your pals to tea at the tuckshop, if you're so keen to tea them."

The captain of the Shell had a pretty shrewd idea that Bloom had deliberately asked Racke and his cronies to tea in the study to annoy him, rather than for the pleasure of their company.

Bloom breathed hard. Then an ugly sneer came on to his bulldog face.

"Call this keeping your promise to Miss Fawcett?" he said tauntingly. "You promised to be decent to me, didn't you? And then you even object to my having friends to tea!"

Tom Merry flushed.

"If you want the truth, you shall have it," he said. "I had thought of that, and for half a minute I decided to let these fellows stay. Then it occurred to me that my promise was to do my best for you at St. Jim's—and the best thing

I can do for you, Bloom, is to try and stop you getting friendly with fellows like these! So out they go!"

He glanced contemptuously at the visitors. Racke flushed angrily.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Outside!"

"I won't! I've been invited here to tea, and—"

"Choose your way out, Racke—door or window?"

Racke jumped up. So did all the others. Bloom breathed hard and clenched his fists.

"Back up, you chaps!" he said between his teeth. "It's six of us against three! We'll chuck them out! They'll get out, not us!"

But Racke did not quite like the look of things. The Terrible Three might be outnumbered, but against such fellows as Mellish and Chowle they were not likely to go under. The prospect of a scrap with three of the heaviest fighting-men in the Shell did not appeal to Aubrey Racke in the slightest.

"It's not worth a row," he said briefly, and with his hands in his pockets he lounged out of the door and vanished.

Mellish and Chowle, looking distinctly nervous, followed him hastily. Then Crooke went out, keeping a wary eye on the Terrible Three. The burly Gore had looked at first as though he would resist and stand by Bloom. But seeing himself deserted, he shrugged his shoulders and left the study, closing the door behind him. Bloom was left alone with his study-mates, furious and fuming.

"Your pals seem to have left you in the lurch," remarked Monty Lowther, with a chuckle.

"Cheese it, Monty," cut in Tom Merry. "Look here, Bloom, take my tip and don't mix with that lot. They're no good. Forget our little arguments, like a sensible chap, and have tea here with us—"

"Don't preach to me, hang you!" snarled Bloom. "So I mayn't even have my friends to tea, eh? That's how you keep your promise, is it?"

Tom coloured slightly, but said nothing. He knew that he was in the right.

With a final glare round at the three, Bloom flung open the door and stamped out of the study. The air felt the clearer for his going!

"Doesn't seem to be much good, your trying to be decent to a chap like that," said Manners sympathetically.

Tom shrugged his shoulders and began getting out the tea-things, and Study No. 10 had, at any rate, a meal free from strife, which would certainly not have been the case had Bloom chosen to remain.

After tea, the chums settled down to their prep. Time wore on, but there was no sign of Bloom's return. Tom began to glance at the clock. Finally, he laid down his pen.

"If that ass doesn't come back and start his prep soon, he won't get it done!" he exclaimed.

"That's his look out," grunted Monty Lowther.

"Thinking of your blessed promise to look after him?" inquired Manners, grinning slightly. "I shouldn't worry! You've done your best, and he won't have it."

But a quarter of an hour later Tom rose to his feet frowning.

"I'm going to look for him," he said. "I'll bet anything he's with Racke & Co. still up to some shady business, probably. Cigarettes and the rest of it, I suppose! I'm going to stop that, for Bloom's sake, whether he likes it or not! You chaps coming? I dare say I shall need a helping hand."

"Right-ho!" nodded Manners. "If you're set on it."

And the Terrible Three set out along the passage for Study No. 7. On the way, they ran into Levison and Clive of the Fourth.

"Seen Cardew?" inquired Levison, rather grimly. "We heard he was seen in the Shell passage. He may be with Racke & Co., the silly ass!"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Cardew backsliding again? Funny, we're looking for a chap whom we fancy is in Racke's study!"

In a body the five juniors approached Study No. 7, and Tom Merry knocked on the door. There was a scuffling sound within, and then Racke's voice called out:

"Who's there?"

"We are," said Clive. "We want Cardew?"

The door opened, after the click of a key in the lock, and Ralph Reckness Cardew faced them with a smile.

"Hallo, dear men!" he said. "Why, Thomas here, too—eh? Quite a deputation, in fact! Anythin' wrong?"

At sight of Tom Merry & Co. in addition to Clive and Levison, standing in the passage, there was an exclamation from within the study. Looking over Cardew's shoulder, Tom saw that Bloom was seated at the table with Racke and his cronies. Crooke was turning away from the window, which he had evidently opened hastily on hearing the knock on the door, in order to let out the cigarette smoke with which the study was laden. But the air was still pretty thick.

"We want you, Cardew," said Levison.

"Kind of you, dear man," murmured Cardew. "Can't get along without my fascinatin' company for one evenin'?"

"Excuse me, Cardew," said Tom Merry, and stepped past the dandy of the Fourth into the study. His lips curled contemptuously.

"Who invited you to this study?" snapped Racke.

"I say, Bloom," said Tom, ignoring Racke, "I thought I'd just come along to give you a friendly tip. If you don't start your prep at once, you'll fall foul of Mr. Linton! He's a bit of a tartar at times, and I shouldn't risk that. Coming?"

"No," said Bloom shortly. "Mind your own business!"

"Hear that?" growled Crooke. "Mind you own business!"

Meanwhile, in the doorway, Clive and Levison were arguing heatedly with Cardew. Cardew finally yawned and turned into the study.

"Sorry if it annoys you, dear men," he said, "but I'm stayin' here a bit. We're just goin' to start a little game of nap. Won't you join us, Clive? No? Well, what about you, Levison? Dear me! You won't, either? Well, what about Thomas & Co.? The more the merrier, you know."

"Are you coming with us?" exclaimed Levison grimly.

Ralph Reckness Cardew shook his head and smiled.

"Then we'll jolly well make you!" snorted Levison.

Clive and Levison strode into the study. They had trouble every now and again with their wilful, changeable-natured chum. Whenever Cardew backslided he had to reckon with his study-mates.

Lowther chuckled.

"Looks as if there's a general desire to break up this little shady party of yours, Racke!" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry was frowning angrily. He was determined to see that Bloom did not get led into blackguardly habits by Racke & Co.—not that Bloom seemed to need much leading. At Lowther's words, Tom nodded.

"That's it," he said cheerfully. "If Cardew doesn't go with Levison and Clive, they'll bust up the giddy party, it seems. Well, if Bloom doesn't come with us, we'll bust it up!"

"I'm not goin'—honest," yawned Cardew. "Prep is such a bore. I'm not doin' any to-night. Old Lathom can do what he likes about it to-morrow, but to-night—well, the night is mine!"

"Coming, Bloom?" asked Tom.

"No!" shouted Bloom. "Clear out, you interfering rotter!"

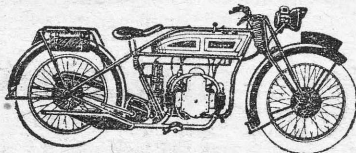
Tom turned to Clive and Levison.

"Then we're agreed?" he said. "We bust up the party?"

"We do!" growled Levison; and there was a rush.

The table went flying, and a pack of cards that had been hidden under the cloth when Tom Merry had knocked on the door went flying, too. Chairs were overturned, and there was a crash as Mellish landed backwards in the coal-scuttle. Manners went flying before a wild blow from Bloom, but then Lowther and Tom Merry got the new boy in a vicelike grip, and marched him from the study, despite all attempts at rescue. Levison and Clive had collared the

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exasperated Cardew, and he, too, was marched from the study.

"Let me go!" panted Bloom.

"Rats!" said Tom cheerfully. "Don't be an ass!"

Cardew was more philosophical than the new fellow. He smiled wryly.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "I'll go quiet, you asses! It's a fair cop, as Bill Sykes would say. You know, you well-meanin' chaps ought to be all locked up; you're a thunderin' nuisance at times!"

"We mean to be," Clive told him grimly; and the three Fourth-Formers went off in one direction, and the Terrible Three and their captive went off in the other.

In Study No. 10 the three chums dumped Bloom into a chair.

"You cads!"

"Oh, chuck that sort of talk!" exclaimed Tom impatiently.

"Get on with your prep."

"Blow prep!"

"Linton will blow you if you do!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Bloom, a very ugly look on his face, glanced from one to another of the three. But Manners had his back to the door, and he knew that it was useless to argue. Besides, in his heart he realised that the Terrible Three were right—he had to do his prep or suffer unpleasant consequences from Linton. It was a bitter pill, but he had to swallow it.

With many a growl, the new fellow flung his books on to the table and got to work. The Terrible Three sat down to finish theirs.

"Want all the ink, Tom Merry?" snapped Bloom, after a while.

The captain of the Shell silently pushed the ink a little nearer to Bloom. Considering it had been in the centre of the table, the new boy's remark were quite uncalled for.

"Lend me your dictionary, Tom Merry!" growled Bloom in an offensive tone.

Tom handed it to him without a word. He knew that Bloom wanted to rouse him, and he was determined to keep his temper.

Bloom worked on in silence for some time after that. But his mind was not wholly devoted to his prep. He was thinking hard, and he soon came to certain conclusions that caused his eyes to gleam with odd satisfaction.

He knew now—thanks to Talbot's proof—that Tom Merry was not afraid of him, and could lick him in a fight if he chose. Bloom, on first realising this fact, had been amazed that Tom had borne his offensive behaviour so quietly. It had been hard for Bloom to realise that this was not through cowardice; but now that he did realise it he had been racking his brains for the true reason.

Though it was obvious to such fellows as Manners and Lowther, it was not so easy for a fellow of Bloom's stamp to credit that Tom was behaving so meekly because of his promise to Miss Fawcett. But at last the truth had penetrated Bloom's understanding, and, though he did not in the least admire Tom for it, he realised that he had a very strong weapon to use against the captain of the Shell.

Bloom felt sure now that Tom Merry would not lay a finger on him whatever he did, and he resolved to make the very most of that fact.

Through the rest of prep he began again to be as offensive as possible. And once when Tom, stung almost past endurance, coloured angrily, Bloom simply grinned.

"If you touch me, Tom Merry, Miss Fawcett shall know all about it!" he sneered.

And Tom Merry, who knew that Bloom would not hesitate to carry out his threat, and would not himself have caused pain to Miss Fawcett, directly or indirectly, for worlds, carried on with his work without a word.

Bloom grinned to himself. He had found out just how he held the whiphand.

CHAPTER 11.

Queer!

"TOM MEWWY, deah boy!"

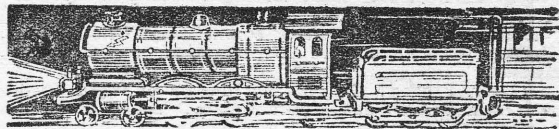
Tom Merry halted and glanced round as the voice of Arthur Augustus hailed him. Tom had been strolling in the quad after dinner on the following day, together with Figgins of the New House. The School House junior captain and the New House leader had been discussing the school football when the swell of St. Jim's hailed Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus approached. He held a letter in his hand.

"This lettah has just awvived for you, deah boy," he explained. "I spotted you out here, so I bwrought it for you."

"Thanks, Gussy." Tom took the letter and glanced at the writing. "My hat! It's from Miss Fawcett!" he exclaimed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded.

(Continued on next page.)



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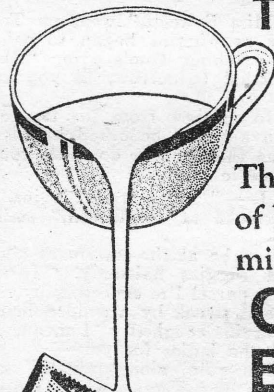
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"I am not surprisid," he admitted.

"Why not?" asked Tom, looking rather puzzled.

George Figgins chuckled.

"Doing the Sherlock Holmes' stunt, Gussy?" he inquired.

"Guessing whom letters are from by the shape of the stamp, or what?"

"Weally, Figgay! I would not dweam of twyin' to discover ffrom a chap's lettahs came!" responded Arthur Augustus tartly. "But I have myself just had a lettah ffrom my cousin, Ethel Cleveland, and she tells me she is comin' down to St. Jim's to-morrow to stay for a short while with Mrs. Holmes. She says in her lettah that Miss Fawcett is comin' down with her for the aftahnoon. So no doubt Miss Fawcett would w'rite to inform Tom Mewwy of her comin'."

Figgins did not answer.

A curious look seemed to have come over the face of the leader of the New House. For one thing, it was exceedingly red. In fact, it was quite crimson. His eyes seemed to avoid everything but the ground. Arthur Augustus surveyed him in some astonishment.

"Bai Jove! You are not unwell, I twust, Figgay?"

"Oh! Nunno!" mumbled Figgins.

"Not got a touch of fevah?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"You look quite flushed. You are suah you have not got a high tempewatuah?"

"Eh? No; of course not!"

George Figgins seemed quite unable to meet the eye of the swell of St. Jim's. He kicked a pebble with his foot, and coughed, and went, if possible, a still deeper crimson.

Tom Merry chuckled.

Arthur Augustus was about the only person within the walls of St. Jim's who did not seem to realise that which everyone else had known long ago—namely, that George Figgins was consumed by an overwhelming admiration for Arthur Augustus' pretty cousin Ethel.

It is true that once or twice it had entered Gussy's mind in a vague sort of way that Figgins, with characteristic New House "neck," usually managed to see a good deal of Cousin Ethel whenever she visited St. Jim's; also, that Ethel did not seem particularly to dislike Figgins' company. But that was as far as his realisations had gone.

Arthur Augustus continued to stare at Figgay with faint alarm.

"Suah you do not feel queeah, deah boy?"

"Eh? Oh, no!"

"You look queeah, anyway," continued Arthur Augustus.

"Not been ovahdoin' the footah lately?"

"The footer?" said Figgins vaguely.

"You seem almost like a fellow in a twance, you know," persisted Arthur Augustus. "You must have been ovahdoin' it a bit, Figgay, old chap. I should go and lie down a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Gussy, you're priceless!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Yes, this letter is from Miss Fawcett," went on Tom, changing the subject hastily as Figgins began to colour more violently than ever at catching Tom's grin. "She's coming down with Cousin Ethel to-morrow, as you say. Good!"

Figgins seemed suddenly to awaken from his trance.

"What time does the train arrive?" he asked, briskly.

"Weally, Figgay, what has that got to do with you?" inquired Arthur Augustus a little coldly.

"I—I— Well, you see, I—"

"They're arriving at Rylcombe at two-fifteen," smiled Tom Merry.

"I—er—I rather think I shall be at the station at about that time, you know," said Figgins haltingly. "I—er—rather want to inquire about a parcel I'm expecting by rail. So if you like," he added, as if struck by a sudden bright idea, "I'll meet Eth—" Figgins coughed. "I mean, I'll be only too pleased to meet the ladies for you—"

"Thanks vewy much! I'm goin' along myself," said Arthur Augustus. "But, if you like, Figgay, I will inquire about your parcel for you, to save you the bothah of goin' to the station," he added kindly.

"No bother at all!"

"I'll tell you what," chuckled Tom Merry, "let's get up a party to meet 'em! We'll all three go, and Manners and Lowther, and Blake and Herries and Dig—"

"Wight you are! But Figgins won't want to butt in on a School House party, will you, Figgay? You'd feel out of it, bein' a New House ass, with a lot of School House chaps."

"Ass yourself!" snorted Figgins. "I'm going!" He glanced at Tom a little sheepishly. "I'll meet you School House bounders at a quarter to two at the gates, shall I?"

Tom nodded, and Figgins moved off. Arthur Augustus stared after him in perplexity.

"Weally, what an extwaordinawy fellow Figgins is!" he

exclaimed. "These New House fellows are all a little mad, I fancy!"

"That's it!" said Tom Merry.

"What about that chap Bloom?" went on the swell of St. Jim's. "I suppose he will have to be one of the party, since he is a fiend of Miss Fawcett's?"

"Yes, I suppose he'll have to go—if he wants to," said Tom, rather gloomily. He had forgotten Bloom for the moment.

"Then we'll all meet at the gates at a quariah to two," said Arthur Augustus, and moved off elegantly in the direction of the School House.

Tom Merry stood, with a slight frown, under the old elms. He was thinking of Bloom. There was no doubt that Bloom's presence would spoil what would otherwise have been a very cheery little party. But Tom knew that Miss Fawcett would expect to see him there, and so, for her sake, he would have to ask the new fellow to come to the station with the rest.

"There's one thing," muttered Tom, "Bloom seems to behave himself in front of Miss Fawcett. Wants to keep in her good books for some reason, I suppose."

There was a slight frown on the face of the captain of the Shell as he went off to look for George Bloom.

CHAPTER 12.

Kidnapped!

"WELL, I'm blessed!"

Tom Merry made that remark on the following day, after dinner.

The captain of the Shell had gone to the cycle-shed to get his bike, since he intended to cycle over to Wayland for some new footer boots he had ordered. There would be plenty of time to get back by a quarter to two, at which time the select little party to meet Miss Fawcett and Cousin Ethel was due to start.

"Well, I'm blessed!" repeated Tom.

The cause of his ejaculation was that his bike was missing from its place. Someone had taken it.

"Someone's got a precious cheek!" Tom told himself angrily, and left the shed, and headed for the porter's lodge by the gates.

To find his bike missing at a time when he particularly wanted it, and had no time to waste, would have annoyed anyone! Even the good-tempered captain of the Shell looked angry as he approached Taggles, the school porter, who was brushing some dead leaves from the doorstep with a broom.

"Seen anyone go out on a bike since dinner, Taggles?"

Ephraim Taggles scratched his head, and rested on his broom. Taggles did not like work, and even Tom's question proved to be a good excuse for resting awhile from his labours.

"Anyone on a bike, Master Merry?" ruminated Taggles.

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Cut the cackle and get to the hosses!" suggested Tom impatiently. "You must have seen anyone who went out—"

"I did see a young gent or two on a bike," continued Taggles in a leisurely manner. "Master Lefevre went out with Master Lee."

"Anyone else?" inquired Tom. He knew that Philip Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, would not have borrowed his cycle, nor would Lefevre's chum, Lee.

"And then there was Master Bloom, the new young gentleman," added Taggles thoughtfully. "Them's all."

"Bloom?"

"Master Bloom," repeated Taggles, with a nod. "Told me he was just goin' out to catch up Master Racke, who'd gone out walkin' a few minutes afore him. He'll be back soon, I expect, Master Merry, if you was wantin' to see 'im."

"I do want to see him!" growled Tom. "He's bagged my bike!"

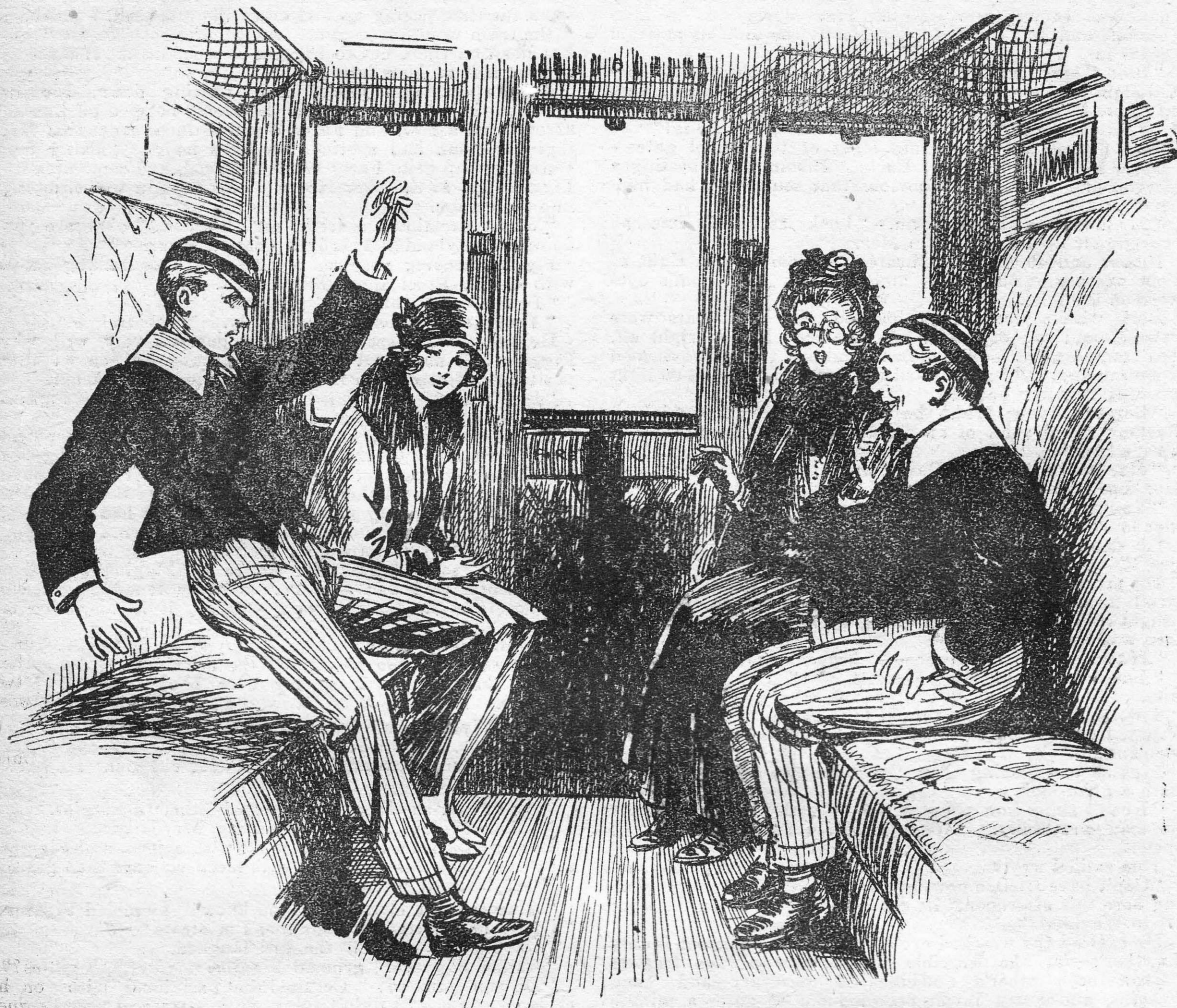
Tom strolled over to the gates. As yet there was no sign of Bloom returning. But the new fellow could not be long, if he had only gone out to catch up Racke, who was walking. With one of the pair on foot and the other on a bike, they could not go out together without first returning for another bike or to leave the one that Bloom was riding, for there was no step on Tom's cycle.

Besides, Bloom had declared his intention of joining the party to meet Miss Fawcett and Cousin Ethel, so he could only have gone after Racke with the intention of having a word about something with the cad of the Shell.

So Tom stuck his hands in his pockets and waited.

"Hallo, Tom Merry!"

Tom turned. Figgins was approaching, together with Fatty Wynn, his chum, and study-mate. Tom grinned and nodded.



"Why, this is a pleasant surprise!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, as George Figgins climbed into the carriage. Fatty Wynn followed his leader in, and sat down next to Miss Priscilla Fawcett. "Won't you sit down?" suggested Ethel to Figgins. But just then the train started off with a jerk, and Figgins sat down beside his girl chum with more violence than grace. (See Chapter 13.)

"Look here," said Figgins haltingly, "I just wanted to see you to say I shan't be in the party going to meet—the train at Rylcombe."

Tom stared at Figgy in astonishment.

"What?" he exclaimed. The age of miracles had certainly not passed, it seemed to Tom, if Figgins was not going to meet Cousin Ethel that afternoon.

Figgins coloured violently.

"Fact is," he confessed, "I—I've got a scheme. I—I rather want to buzz over to Wayland about something. I thought I'd go to the station and leave my bike there, you see, and take the train to Rylcombe, and join the party there, you know. I might even spot Miss Ethel and Miss Fawcett on the train, and travel with them to Rylcombe."

Fatty Wynn winked solemnly at Tom. Tom laughed. Now he understood!

"Good scheme, Figgy," he said. "I'm going over to Wayland myself to collect some footer boots, as it happens, so we can buzz along together if you like."

Figgins' face fell a trifle.

"It's all right," said Tom hastily. "I shall bike back to the school afterwards and go up to Rylcombe with the other chaps."

"Oh, I see!" Figgins brightened again. He was a modest chap, and he was always rather afraid that a handsome-looking fellow like Tom Merry might prove a superior attraction to Cousin Ethel. As a matter of fact, however, Gussy's pretty cousin secretly liked Figgins the best of her cousin's schoolfellows, though she could never have explained why; unless it was that just that very modesty, and Figgy's frank, unassuming nature had a good deal to do with it.

"Fatty's coming with me," went on Figgins.

Tom grinned again. He had a shrewd idea that Figgins' reason for wanting the company of David Llewellyn Wynn was that the plump junior could engage Miss Fawcett in

conversation in the railway carriage, and so leave Figgins himself quite free to devote his attentions to Cousin Ethel.

"Well, we may as well be getting along, eh?" suggested Figgins brightly.

"Half a minute," said Tom. "I'm just waiting for my bike. That new chap, Bloom, has borrowed it, without asking, and so I've got to wait till he gets back. But I expect him back any minute."

"Bloom, eh?" remarked Figgins. "That's the fellow you've got under your wing, isn't it? I've not seen him about much, but I hear he's not—well, not exactly a success in your study, is he?"

"No," admitted Tom bluntly. "He's not."

"Hard luck!"

Tom Merry frowned. The thought of George Bloom often brought a frown to the face of the captain of the Shell.

Tom did not discuss Bloom's failings very much with Monty Lowther and Manners. They had to suffer Bloom in person, so Tom thought the unpleasant new fellow was best forgotten when out of sight. But to Figgins there was no harm in talking, and it was rather a relief to unburden his troubles to someone.

"The chap's an outsider," he growled. "He makes himself as offensive as he jolly well knows how, at every turn. He cribs off me in Form, bags my books, even borrows my clobber if he feels like it! He upset a jug of water over my bed last night—pretended it was an accident—"

"My hat!" broke out Fatty Wynn in amazement. "Do you mean to say you haven't licked him within an inch of his life?"

"That's just it! I can't touch him, and he knows it! If I did, he would let Miss Fawcett know that we're enemies, and not the good pals she thinks we are. It would make her jolly miserable. I'd sooner put up with Bloom than that."

Figgins and Fatty Wynn nodded sympathetically. They knew well enough how devoted Tom Merry was to Miss Fawcett, and they understood perfectly the difficult position he was in.

"Bloom hates me," went on Tom, with a shrug. "Takes a delight in being as beastly as possible. And, as I say, he knows I won't touch him, for Miss Fawcett's sake."

"Talk of angels," interrupted Figgins. "Here he is!"

Two figures had come into sight of the school gates—George Bloom and Aubrey Racke. Bloom was wheeling a bicycle, and it was quite obvious that something had happened to that bike!

"My aunt!" grunted Wynn. "Looks as if he's smashed your jigger up for you, Tom Merry!"

Bloom and Racke came nearer. Bloom caught sight of Tom waiting at the gates, and grinned. But Tom's eyes were on the bike.

Both wheels were badly buckled, the handlebars were twisted, and one of the pedals had been broken right off. The frame was battered and bent, and half the spokes seemed to be missing. Bloom wheeled the wrecked machine straight towards Tom and halted.

"Borrowed your grid," he said blandly, with a wink at Racke. "Had a bit of an accident. Skidded! Luckily, I wasn't hurt."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Racke, enjoying the look on Tom's face thoroughly.

"You'd better take this bike into Wayland and get it mended," said Tom grimly.

"I don't think!" chuckled Bloom. "Here, take your grid!"

He propped the bike up against the gates and turned to stroll away with Racke. But the captain of the Shell caught him by the shoulder and dragged him round. Tom's face was blazing.

"If you lay a hand on me——" began Bloom.

"You'll sneak to Miss Fawcett, eh?" Tom finished for him. His lips curled. "Oh, get out of my sight! You're not worth licking!" He turned to Figgins. "It's all right, Figgy, I can borrow Lowther's bike to go into Wayland. He won't mind."

Figgins was glaring after the retreating figure of Bloom with a grim look.

"I can't think how you can put up with him a moment!" he said wrathfully. "Why, I nearly kicked him myself then!"

Tom smiled wryly.

"Can't have trouble now, anyway, with Miss Fawcett coming here this afternoon," he exclaimed. "Come on, let's get off to Wayland."

He carried the wrecked cycle to the shed, took out Monty Lowther's—for the Terrible Three were always free to borrow each other's machines if necessary—and Tom, Figgins, and Fatty Wynn pedalled out of gates a minute later on their way to Wayland.

Tom Merry left Figgins and Fatty Wynn in the old High Street of the town, collected his footer boots, and mounted his machine again to return to the school.

He was cycling swiftly, as he had not much time. Consequently, he had no chance to pull up when he sped round a bend in the lane near St. Jim's and found himself faced with a rope stretched tight across the road before him.

Crash!

Tom Merry and the bike went spinning into the road. Dazed, the junior lay panting for some moments, trying to collect his whirling thoughts. The accident had come so suddenly that as yet he could scarcely realise what had happened. All he knew was that the rope must have been stretched across his path deliberately.

Then four figures came darting out of the hedge. As Tom struggled to his feet, he was collared.

"Hands off!" he panted.

But his attackers bore him to the ground, and in another minute, after a desperate, vain struggle, Tom found himself pinned to the dust, face downwards, while his hands were being tied behind him. Then a gag was fastened roughly across his mouth.

"Get him out of sight of the road," said Crooke uneasily. Tom was lifted, a helpless, bound figure, and carried through a gap in the hedge. Mellish came last with the bike. Swiftly Tom's captors carried him along behind the hedge towards the dark trees of Rylcombe Wood.

CHAPTER 13.

Cousin Ethel's Escort!

"HERE'S the giddy train!"

David Llewellyn Wynn made that remark on the platform at Wayland. He had just come rolling out of the station buffet, after having what he had described as a "snack"—though most fellows would have called it a meal in itself.

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Figgins, however, had not entered the buffet. He had spent his time pacing up and down the platform, wondering if the train would ever come. As a matter of fact, the train was dead on time, but to Figgins it seemed that it must be at least half an hour late.

As the carriages passed him, slowing down, Figgins searched the windows eagerly. Suddenly he sped off like an arrow from a bow, and Fatty Wynn deduced from that fact that his chum had spotted the faces he was looking for. With a plump grin, Fatty Wynn followed, and came up with Figgins just as the New House junior captain was climbing into a carriage.

"Why," exclaimed a fresh, girlish voice, "what are you doing at Wayland? This is a pleasant surprise!"

Figgins, looking very red and bashful, was shaking hands with Cousin Ethel and Miss Fawcett.

"I—I—I——" stammered Figgins.

"Yes?" said Ethel encouragingly.

Her eyes were sparkling. She guessed very well why Figgins had happened to be at Wayland Station on that particular afternoon to travel by that particular train.

"I—I wanted to inquire about a parcel," said Figgins haltingly. "That is—yes, a parcel."

It was true enough. Figgins had inquired about a parcel at the station. There had been no parcel waiting for Figgins, however, and the New House leader would have been more surprised than anyone if there had been! It was an entirely imaginary parcel about which he had inquired! But it had armed him with an excellent excuse for being there to meet that particular train.

"I see," said Ethel. She smiled at Figgins with that frank smile that had won her so many true-blue friends amongst the St. Jim's fellows. "Well, it is very nice to see you!"

Figgins eyes danced.

"Jolly nice of you to say so!" he mumbled.

"Oh, but indeed it is, my dear boy!" beamed Miss Fawcett.

Fatty Wynn rolled into the carriage, grinning cheerily, shook hands, and sat down next to Miss Fawcett, and began to make cheery conversation to that dear old soul. He knew his duty!

"Won't you sit down?" suggested Ethel to Figgins.

"Thanks!" said Figgins, colouring nervously.

But just then the train started off with a jerk, and Figgins sat down beside his girl chum with more violence than grace.

Ethel laughed merrily.

"Always was a clumsy ass, you know!" mumbled Figgins.

"I jolly nearly trod on your toe, I'm afraid——"

"Oh, no, you didn't!" the girl laughed.

"Rather big feet!" grinned Figgins.

"Do you think so?" Cousin Ethel exclaimed, with a mischievous smile. "I didn't think my feet were so very big."

She looked at one of her shoes thoughtfully. Figgins gave a gasp, and stared at her in horror.

"Oh crumbs!" he ejaculated. "I—I—I—that is, you—you——"

"Whose do you mean—mine, or yours?" inquired Ethel demurely.

"You don't really think I meant your feet were big?" gasped Figgins, blushing like a beetroot. "I mean mine were big, you know—my feet, of course! Not yours! Yours are ripping, you know—ahem, that is——"

"Have you been playing much football lately?" asked Ethel, changing the subject rather hastily.

And Figgins, who could talk about football till all was blue, if necessary, though not much of a conversationalist on other topics, was glad to change the subject, too.

The next few minutes were happy ones indeed for Figgins. Fatty Wynn and Miss Fawcett seemed to have quite a lot to talk about, too, and the fat New House junior entertained the old lady charmingly, to Figgins' great relief. But the best of things came to an end, and it seemed no time to Figgins before the train began to slow down again and the hoarse voice of a porter bawled: "Rylcombe!"

"Oh, blow!" groaned Figgins. "Now all those other asses will be here!"

"I beg your pardon?" said Ethel.

"Oh, nothing! Didn't speak!" stammered Figgins. "You know, Gussy and Tom Merry & Co. and some other School House chumps are coming to meet the train here."

"Chumps?" echoed Ethel, in puzzled tones.

"Chaps, I said, didn't I?" said Figgins hastily.

He opened the door and jumped on to the platform, first helping Miss Fawcett to alight and then Ethel.

But there was a very pleasant surprise waiting for Figgins!

The platform was deserted but for a solitary porter. And when they walked through into the station yard, that proved to be empty of St. Jim's fellows, too.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "I felt sure Tommy would be here to meet me!"

"He ought to have been," said Figgins, looking puzzled. "I know he was coming, and so were some of the other chaps."

But, though they waited a few minutes, no one arrived to meet the train, and Figgins began to smile very cheerfully indeed.

"Can't keep you hanging about any longer!" he declared

CHAPTER 14.

Miss Fawcett is Cut Up!

"HEAH they are!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, hurrying along the road with six other School House juniors, had seen the station cab crawling towards them in the distance, and had guessed that it contained Miss Fawcett and his Cousin Ethel.

It was rather a shock to Arthur Augustus to realise, a few moments later, that his guess was only half right, and that Cousin Ethel was missing from the cab and her place filled—very completely filled!—by Fatty Wynn of the New House.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Where the



Tom Merry, his head buried in his hands, did not notice the study door open. A face looked in—the grinning, triumphant face of Bloom. He had scored over the fellow triumph! (See Chapter 16.)

to Miss Fawcett, and hailed a cab. "I s'pose you wouldn't like to walk it, Ethel?" he added doubtfully.

"Oh, but I should!" she told him.

And Figgins looked very bright and cheerful indeed on hearing that.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Figgins. "Now, Fatty, old chap, here's the cab. You'll escort Miss Fawcett to the school, won't you? Ethel and I are walking. I rather think we might go by way of the moor. You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he asked D'Arcy's cousin.

And Ethel Cleveland nodded brightly.

To walk to St. Jim's by way of the moor would take a good deal longer than by road, and Fatty Wynn grinned as he climbed into the cab after Miss Fawcett. The two juniors raised their caps, and the cab rolled away.

"Good!" said Figgins. "It's a ripping day for a walk!"

As they walked together out of the station yard Figgins kept a wary eye on the road. He dreaded lest the St. Jim's party should arrive even now. He felt that it was distinctly impolite of the School House fellows to be late, and he could not understand it; but he was very glad they were late!

Fortune favoured Figgins. The School House party had still failed to put in an appearance as he and Ethel, talking cheerfully, turned off towards the moor.

mewwy dickens is Ethel? And what is that fat New House boundah doin' in the cab?"

Manners, Lowther, Blake, Herries and Digby, and George Bloom were all equally surprised.

The cab came up, and stopped as Blake signalled to the driver. The School House juniors raised their caps. Miss Fawcett beamed upon them, then her smile faded a little when she saw that Tom Merry was not of the party.

"We're terribly sorry to be so late, Miss Fawcett, in meeting the train!" exclaimed Manners, stepping forward. "It's beastly rude of us, I'm afraid! But—"

"Oh, not at all!" responded the old lady kindly. "But where is Tommy?" she added, in a disappointed tone.

"That's just it!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "We couldn't find him anywhere! That's why we're late. We felt so sure that he would be coming to meet you that we waited for him, and we waited a bit too long to get to the station in time, you see."

"We weally can't imagine what has happened to him!" put in Arthur Augustus. "But, Miss Fawcett, where is Ethel? She—"

"She is walking to the school with that nice boy Figgins," explained Miss Fawcett.

"Figgins?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus blankly.

He had forgotten that long-legged youth. Now he remem-

bered that Figgins was to have been with the party to meet the train at Rylcombe.

"Yes," grinned Fatty Wynn. "Figgy and I buzzed over to Wayland. Figgy was inquiring about a parcel at the station. We—er—happened to see Miss Fawcett and Miss Cleveland on the train, and came along to Rylcombe with them."

"But Figgy told me yestahday that he was goin' to inquire about a parcel at Wayland!"

"His mistake!" said David Llewellyn Wynn blandly; and Lowther chuckled.

"Well, I suppose if we go up the woad we shall meet them?" said Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Figgins has a lot of cheek!" he added, in an undertone, to Blake. "I am suah Ethel will not want to walk to St. Jim's with a New House boundah!"

"Afraid you wouldn't meet 'em, Gussy," said Wynn. "They decided to walk to the school by way of the moor. You'd be sure to miss 'em."

"Bai Jove!"

Miss Fawcett was talking to Bloom; and Wynn, knowing that the new fellow was a friend of hers, jumped out of the cab.

"I am sure you and Bloom would like to drive to St. Jim's together," he said, and politely insisted that they should do so.

The cab rolled on, with Bloom escorting Miss Fawcett in the ancient vehicle, and the other juniors turned to retrace their steps to the school.

The cab vanished round the bend, and the swell of St. Jim's turned his eyeglass frigidly upon Fatty Wynn.

"Weally, you New House boundahs have a feahful cheek!" he exclaimed. "Figgins—"

"Bow-wow!" returned Fatty Wynn.

"Look heah, Wynn—"

"Can't! Your waistcoat hurts the eyes!"

Arthur Augustus relapsed into a chilly silence.

"I wonder what on earth Tommy's up to?" remarked Manners thoughtfully as the party walked on. "It seems extraordinary that he never turned up to meet Miss Fawcett."

"It is queer," agreed Digby. "I felt sure he said he was coming to the station."

"He did say so," asserted Manners, frowning.

"Well, he biked into Wayland with me and Figgy," put in Fatty Wynn. "But he told us he was going back to the school to join you chaps for the station. And he had heaps of time to get back to St. Jim's on a bike."

"Must have changed his mind," Blake commented.

"About Figgy—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, cheese it, Gussy!" growled Herries. "You talk too much!"

And once again Arthur Augustus D'Arcy relapsed into an indignant silence on the subject of George Figgins of the New House.

"I am so disappointed that Tommy has not come to meet me," said Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

The cab was creaking along Rylcombe Lane on its way to St. Jim's. Bloom, facing Miss Fawcett in the cab, nodded.

"Yes," he said slowly. "I expect you are."

"Tommy always comes to meet me when he is not playing football or cricket, Georgie," affirmed Miss Fawcett.

"And I understand that he is not playing to-day?"

"Oh, no."

"I can't understand it. Can you think of any reason that could have kept him from meeting me?" inquired the old lady.

Bloom could have supplied a very good reason had he cared to do so, but he shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't. It seems—well—rather inconsiderate of him, doesn't it? I wouldn't say a word against Tom, of course, but—"

"Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't! But I cannot think it is owing to lack of consideration for me! I know dear Tommy is very fond of me, Georgie."

"Oh, yes! Rather! I'm sure he's very fond of you!"

"I expect he has talked to you a lot about me, has he not?" beamed the old lady tenderly.

Bloom seemed to hesitate.

"Well, no," he said awkwardly. "I'm afraid I can't say he has. When he talks, it's usually about the football, you know. He's very fond of telling about his feats at football. I don't mean that he swanks," he added hastily. "Some of the boys say he swanks too much, but I tell them they misjudge him. It is simply that he is so keen on footer that he likes to talk about all the goals he has scored, and so on."

Miss Fawcett held up her hands in dismay, and stared at Bloom through her spectacles wide-eyed, looking quite shocked.

"Oh, Georgie! You really mean to say Tommy talks in a

vainglorious manner? I know he is very good at football, but to me he never boasts about it!"

"Oh, he knows you don't understand much about football, you see," said Bloom easily. "Not that he does swank, anyway, as I have said. Some of the chaps say he does—that's why he is not quite so popular as most chaps—"

Miss Fawcett's face was a picture of distress.

"But I always understood he was most popular!" she breathed, in dismay.

Bloom coughed awkwardly.

"I—I'm sorry if I have said anything I shouldn't have," he muttered. "But I can't lie. I'm afraid Tom is not very popular. Of course, when you are at the school, for politeness the chaps pretend to like him a lot. That's to please you. It's a pity—a rotten pity! I wish he were more popular, but I can't help but see that in some ways it is his own fault. I try to show him where he could improve himself—"

Bloom broke off and shrugged his shoulders gravely. The cab rumbled on.

Miss Fawcett leaned back in her seat and stared at the cushions with a look in her eyes that Bloom had never seen before. The gentle, beaming tenderness that usually lit up the old lady's face was now replaced by one of the deepest bewilderment and distress.

Bloom grinned inwardly. Outwardly, his face retained its expression of faint regret.

"All this is news to me," said Miss Fawcett at last, in a low voice that was not quite steady. "But, of course, you have been with him at the school several days, and are sharing the same room, and you have seen him in his daily life at St. Jim's as I have not. I always imagined he was one of the most popular boys at the school!"

Bloom did not reply.

"If—if you can see any faults that should be corrected, I feel sure you will try to help him cure them," she went on.

"Oh, I will. I have tried already!"

"That is kind of you!" The old lady smiled faintly. "I wonder why he has not come to meet me?"

"Well—" Bloom broke off.

"Yes? Tell me," urged Miss Fawcett.

"I did hear him say something about going to Wayland. There is a cinema there, you know. I know he's keen on cinemas. I shouldn't wonder if he decided to go in, knowing that I should be going to meet you in any case, with some of his pals."

"But—but you don't think Tommy would spend the afternoon in a cinematograph when he knew I was visiting the school to-day?" cried the old lady pathetically.

"I—I hope not, I'm sure" said Bloom, in rather a distressed tone.

"No, it cannot be!" Miss Fawcett exclaimed, with sudden determination. "I will not believe that! I feel sure that something unavoidable has detained him, and that he will be waiting for me at the gates!"

"That's right!" smiled Bloom. "He's sure to be there! Don't worry! If he isn't of course—but then, he will be, I feel sure!"

His tone was so sympathetic and kind that Miss Fawcett quite cheered up. And with the old horse joggling along sleepily, the cab rolled on towards the gates of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 15.

Late Arrivals!

"SEEN Ethel, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up to Manners and Monty Lowther in the quad and put that question to them rather anxiously.

"No," said Manners. "We haven't."

"Nor that boundah, Figgins?"

"Nor Figgins."

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus frowned deeply. "It's vewy stwange! They should be back by now, even if they did go by the moor!"

"Yes," agreed Monty Lowther. "It's funny they haven't turned up yet, Gussy."

"It is neahly tea-time! I'm wathah wowwied!"

Even Manners and Lowther were surprised that Figgins and Cousin Ethel had not yet put in an appearance.

"Have you seen Tom Merry, anyway?" inquired Manners.

"Not a sign, deah boy!"

"It's queer, his staying in Wayland!" exclaimed Lowther, frowning. "Not a bit like him to disappoint Miss Fawcett like this!"

"The poor old lady is quite cut-up," growled Manners. "Tom ought to be ashamed of himself!"

"She jolly nearly cried," said Monty Lowther, "when she found he wasn't waiting to meet her at the gates when she arrived. Clive saw her come up in the cab with Bloom, and told me so. It's rotten!"

"Fwightfully wotten!" agreed the swell of St. Jim's

sympathetically. "Poor old soul! I'm surprised at Tom Mewwy! But then, evewyone seems to be disappeawin' this afternoon!"

"Lucky, Bloom's here to console her!" growled Manners. "That worm seems to be decent enough to be kind to her, anyway, which is something in his favour. He's taking her round the school now. She never gets tired of seeing the old buildings."

"Here they are!" muttered Monty Lowther.

Bloom and Miss Fawcett had appeared in the quad from the direction of the Cloisters. Manners, Lowther, and Arthur Augustus went towards them.

"Been seein' ovah some of the old buildings again, Miss Fawcett?" inquired Arthur Augustus, with his most charming smile.

"Yes," answered Miss Fawcett. "Georgie has been very kind."

Her kind old face still bore signs of her distress at the continued non-appearance of Tom Merry. But she was trying to hide her feelings bravely, it was clear. There was a quiet dignity about the little old lady that went straight to the hearts of the three School House juniors.

"Now, what about tea?" suggested Arthur Augustus. "Studdy No. 6 will be honahed if you will take tea there this time, just for once! Please say you will!"

Manners and Lowther shot the swell of St. Jim's a grateful look. His idea was plain. If she took tea in Study No. 6 the absence of Tom Merry would be a little less in evidence than if she took tea in Tom Merry's own study—with no Tom there!

"I—I suppose Tom Merry hasn't turned up yet?" asked Bloom in a troubled voice.

"I'm afraid not," said Manners regretfully. "I can't understand—"

"It does not matter," said Miss Fawcett quietly, though her eyes seemed wet. She smiled faintly at Arthur Augustus. "I shall be delighted to have tea in your study, Arthur."

"That's great! Blake and Hewwies and Dig have been pwepawin' it. Will you come along now?" suggested Arthur Augustus. "You chaps, too, of course," he added, glancing at Manners and Lowther and Bloom.

The little party turned towards the School House, walking very slowly to keep pace with the old lady's steps.

"I suppose Ethel has arrived by now?" she remarked, as they entered the House.

"Er—no!" replied Arthur Augustus. "Wathah remarkable, but—er—no. No doubt she will be heah very shortly."

In Study No. 6, Blake, Herries, and Dig had been very busy, and they had a most attractive tea-table ready for their guests. As far as they knew, Tom Merry and Ethel and Figgins had all arrived at the school by now, and so they had laid for them as well. Consequently, there were three empty places when the juniors and the little old lady sat down to tea.

The juniors tried to make cheerful talk. But the atmosphere in Study No. 6 was not a gay one. Miss Fawcett tried bravely to hide her feelings, but that she was bitterly hurt was realised by all those present. Bloom was very quiet. He was seated next to the old lady, and she seemed to appreciate his air of silent sympathy, for when she spoke to him she would smile tenderly.

And then, half-way through tea, there was a sudden tap on the door. It opened, and George Figgins entered the study.

"Sorry I'm late!" exclaimed Figgins rather uncomfortably. "Fact is—"

"Where is Ethel?" demanded Arthur Augustus, rising to his feet and eyeing Figgy frigidly through his eyeglass.

"She's not coming here to tea," returned Figgins. "She is with Mrs. Holmes now. You see—"

"Can you explain why you took such an extwaordinawily long time to bwing my cousin to the school?" inquired Arthur Augustus bitingly. "We have all been gettin' most anxious. I considah—"

"It's like this—"

"I am all attention, waitin' for your explanation!"

"Well, give me a chance to speak, please!" exclaimed Figgins sharply. "The fact is, she had an accident.

Nothing serious—don't be alarmed. She slipped in a rut and sprained her ankle. I had to help her all the way back to the school. Naturally, it took a long time. I'm ever so sorry it has happened, of course; and she has asked me to say how sorry she is. Gussy, not to be able to have tea with you to-day. But I took her straight to the Head's house, of course, and Mrs. Holmes is having her ankle attended to. It's rotten luck!" added Figgins regretfully. "She says she hopes you will go and see her later."

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins was as honest and truthful a chap as one could have found at St. Jim's, as Arthur Augustus knew. He stepped up to the New House junior and wrung his hand warmly.

"Pway accept my apologies for speakin' as I did just now!" he exclaimed. "You're a bwick, Figgay!"

Figgins coloured.

"I—I don't deserve thanks particularly," he admitted frankly. "I mean I enjoyed looking after her, you know. But I did feel sick about her ankle; I felt partly responsible in a way, having taken her that way. Though it might have happened anywhere."

"Oh, poor Ethel!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "You are sure she is not badly hurt?"

"Quite!" Figgins assured her. "Only a strain. You mustn't worry about her; she told me to tell you that particularly."

"Well, come and have some tea," said Blake. "We——"

He broke off sharply.

A step had sounded in the passage. There was a sudden exclamation from George Bloom. He stared at the figure framed in the doorway, with a curious look on his bulldog face.

Tom Merry had arrived at last!

CHAPTER 16.

Bloom's Hour of Triumph!

THERE was a little cry from Miss Fawcett.

In the silence that followed, Tom Merry stepped into the study. A faint flush of colour had entered his face, but otherwise he was quite cool.

With a smile, he turned to Miss Fawcett and bent down and kissed her.

"I'm beastly sorry not to have been along before!" he told her. He smiled. "But better late than never, eh?"

He pulled up a chair beside Miss Fawcett.

"Been anywhere particular, old man?" asked Monty Lowther, with apparent carelessness. "We've missed you."

Before answering, Tom's eyes swept the faces around him. His gaze seemed to rest upon Bloom's face a trifle longer than elsewhere. Bloom met his eyes unflinchingly.

"No," said Tom Merry quietly, "nowhere particular."

His eyes fell to his plate. Bloom drew a deep breath—perhaps of relief.

Despite his cool exterior, inwardly Tom's mind was seething.

He knew that Bloom, with the help of Racke & Co., had kidnapped him with the deliberate intent of keeping him from meeting Miss Fawcett; guessed, too, that the intention behind the act was to put him in a bad light with the old lady.

But the chief thing Tom wanted now was to save her from pain. How could he tell her that he had been kidnapped by Bloom and his friends, and with that intention? He could not—clearly. The knowledge would give Miss Fawcett too much distress.

Tom had already come to the conclusion that he must shield Bloom at any cost, for Miss Fawcett's sake. And Bloom understood.

"Been to Wayland, haven't you, Tom?" he remarked, with calm impudence. "Miss Fawcett wondered if you had been to the cinema."

"No," said Tom, without looking at him, "I didn't go to the cinema."

"But surely," said Miss Fawcett in a trembling voice, "when you knew I was coming to St. Jim's this afternoon you did not stay in Wayland for no reason at all?"

"I—I had to go and get some footer boots," muttered Tom, colouring. "After that I—well, it was a topping afternoon, and I cycled round a bit. Sorry I am so late for tea, though."

There was rather an odd look on the face of George Figgins as he watched Tom Merry. There was an odd look on the face of each of the juniors, if it came to that. They simply could not understand Tom. Bloom alone knew the truth.

That the captain of the Shell should while away the afternoon in Wayland astonished them, since he had known that Miss Fawcett, to whom they had always imagined him to be so devoted, was visiting St. Jim's.

"My hat! It's a bit thick of Tom Merry!" whispered Herries to Digby; and Digby nodded.

There was an awkward silence. Then Blake glanced at Miss Fawcett, and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"I rather think we chaps ought to go and inquire about Miss Cleveland," he said hastily, jumping up.

And the other juniors, realising what Blake meant, jumped up, too—Bloom with the rest. Without fuss they all slipped from the study, leaving Tom alone with Miss Fawcett.

Tom Merry, sick at heart, munched on at an iced bun—but without tasting it.

He dared not look at Miss Fawcett. He knew that he had hurt her feelings—quite how deeply he did not as yet realise. But he believed that he was giving her far less pain than would have been the case had he admitted the true reason for his disappearance from St. Jim's that afternoon, and so he meant to stick to his intention of shielding Bloom.

"Darling," whispered Miss Fawcett brokenly, "I—I don't blame you. I should have realised it before, but I was silly—it was rather conceited of me, perhaps, to imagine that a bright boy like you could have any interest left in an old woman like me."

"But—but—" Tom clutched her hand. "You—you don't understand!" he cried hoarsely.

Gently Miss Fawcett disengaged her hand from his.

"Oh, but I do, I do!" she told him, and smiled brokenly through her tears. "I will go now. Please do not follow me. I—I want to go alone."

Rooted to the spot, Tom watched her turn, open the door, and vanish, closing the door softly behind her. The shock had left him dazed.

"She might not listen to the truth now, even if I told it her!" he told himself, with quivering lips.

But could he tell, in any case? How could he "sneak" on Bloom, even to save himself? That would be too cowardly, too contemptible, it seemed to Tom. He would not stoop to that!

Softly the door of the study opened. Tom, his head still buried in his hands, did not notice it. A face looked in—the grinning, triumphant face of Bloom.

The door closed again, and Bloom tiptoed away, well satisfied with his work.

CHAPTER 17.

Cousin Ethel Explains!

WITH steady steps, Miss Priscilla Fawcett hurried across the quad in the dusk.

She held herself erect, with a world of dignity in her little figure. Her eyes were still wet, but she was pluckily determined to give way to weakness no more. Terribly hurt though her feelings had been, she would betray her distress no more.

There was a sound of quick, overtaking footsteps behind her. She turned her head—half in hope, perhaps. But it was George Bloom who was hurrying after her.

"Miss Fawcett!"

"Well, my dear?"

"You are going?"

Miss Fawcett inclined her head, and smiled faintly.

"Yes. But first I am going to see Mrs. Holmes and Ethel Cleveland. I shall ask Doctor Holmes to telephone for a cab to take me to the station."

"I'm sorry," said Bloom. "But it is natural, isn't it, that I should feel a little bitter against Tom, seeing how he has hurt you?"

Miss Fawcett's face softened into a misty smile.

"I suppose it is," she said slowly. "You, at any rate, are always very sweet to me, Georgie. And now I must go in to Mrs. Holmes. Good-bye."

"I want to go with you to the station," said Bloom.

"That is kind of you!"

"Rather not! I'll see you later, then."

Bloom stood and watched the old lady enter the Head's house, then turned away, chuckling.

In Mrs. Holmes' drawing-room Miss Fawcett found Cousin Ethel alone.

Ethel Cleveland was sitting in a big chair by the fire, with her injured foot raised on a stool. Her face lighted up brightly when Miss Fawcett entered the room.

"I was sorry to hear that you have hurt your ankle, my dear!" she exclaimed, with concern, but Ethel laughed airily.

"Why, it is nothing at all!" she said frankly. "I'm not a bit hurt! I can't walk at present, that is all; but I shall be able to do so in a day or two. It is only just a strain."

"It was so fortunate that you had that nice boy Figgins to look after you!" smiled the old lady, who was making a very brave effort to appear quite cheerful.

Miss Fawcett sat down in a chair beside Ethel's. Suddenly the girl looked hard at the old lady, and Miss Fawcett, seeing that look, glanced away swiftly.

"Why," cried Ethel sharply, "you have been crying!"

Miss Fawcett did not answer.

"Now," said Ethel severely, "you are going to tell me all about it! What is the matter?"

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Miss Fawcett did not want to tell, but Ethel was insistent. And in the end the old lady told her.

"Do you really believe this of Tom Merry—that he deliberately slighted you by staying away from the school when he knew that you had come to visit him?" asked Ethel.

"I have to believe it, since he admits it."

"Well, it isn't true."

"Not—not true? What do you mean? What—what—"

"Listen!" said Cousin Ethel, in an odd voice. "When I had strained my ankle, and Figgins was helping me back to the school through Rylcombe Woods, we passed one of the woodmen's huts, and heard a knocking inside. Figgins found Tom Merry in the hut, tied hand and foot, and gagged. But he had heard us passing, and had managed to kick the wall with his feet."

Miss Fawcett stared at Ethel dumbly.

"Figgins released him, of course. There was a pocket-book lying in the hut, with a boy's name on it, and Figgins asked if that was the boy who had been responsible for the kidnapping, and Tom admitted that it was. But he asked us not to say a word about it."

"My dear!" gasped Miss Fawcett at last, with shining eyes. "But—but why did Tommy not tell me—"

"Because he did not want you to know the name of the boy who had been the cause of it all—the boy whose pocket-book we found," returned Ethel quickly.

"But I must know, of course, who the wicked boy was! Why, he must have done this to make me think ill of Tommy!"

For a moment Ethel did not speak. Then a look of determination came into her face.

"I said I would not tell the name," she said. "But I agreed to that without realising how important it would be that I should tell. I consider it is my duty to tell you now, to clear Tom's name. Well, it was Bloom."

"Georgie!"

Miss Fawcett stared in shocked bewilderment at Ethel.

"Oh! But—but why—"

"It seems that Bloom has made himself Tom's enemy, in spite of Tom's wish for friendship in the first place," explained Ethel. "You are not vexed with me for telling you this?"

"Vexed! Oh, of course not! I can never thank you enough!" Miss Fawcett's face set in remarkably grim lines for that sweet old lady. "The wicked boy! It was only right for you to tell me about him! It was foolish of dear Tommy to try and shield him; but, of course, he did it for my sake! I must go and find Tommy at once and say how sorry I am—"

The door opened.

"Master Merry!" announced the maid; and Tom entered, with pale, set face.

"I heard you were here!" he said hoarsely. "I couldn't let you leave St. Jim's without—"

Miss Fawcett gave him a wonderful smile.

"There is no need to tell me anything, Tommy dear," she said happily. "I know all. Ethel has explained. But," she added grimly, and she grasped her umbrella tightly, "I am going to see Master Georgie Bloom before I leave the school!"

And the little old lady, with her umbrella gripped so firmly, looked quite warlike enough to have dealt with a dozen Blooms, there and then!

But it was not Miss Priscilla Fawcett who gave George Bloom the thrashing he deserved, but Tom Merry. Now that Miss Fawcett knew the truth about the boy she had asked Tom to befriend, there was no further reason for Tom to refrain from dealing with the newcomer to Study No. 10. So he dealt with him!

When Bloom left the gym after his meeting there with Tom Merry, he looked as though he were sorry he had ever set eyes on St. Jim's—as indeed he was!

So fed up with the famous old school was Bloom, in fact, that he wrote home and asked if he could be removed to some other seat of learning! A request which his people promptly granted.

And so, a week later, George Bloom rolled away from St. Jim's in the station cab, with his luggage piled on top. And the School House juniors, together with one or two New House fellows—Figgins was one—gave a lusty cheer as the cab passed out of the gates of St. Jim's and vanished down the road.

That parting cheer, which reached the ears of the fellow who sat sulking in the cab, was the last and only farewell accorded to Tom Merry's protegee!

THE END.

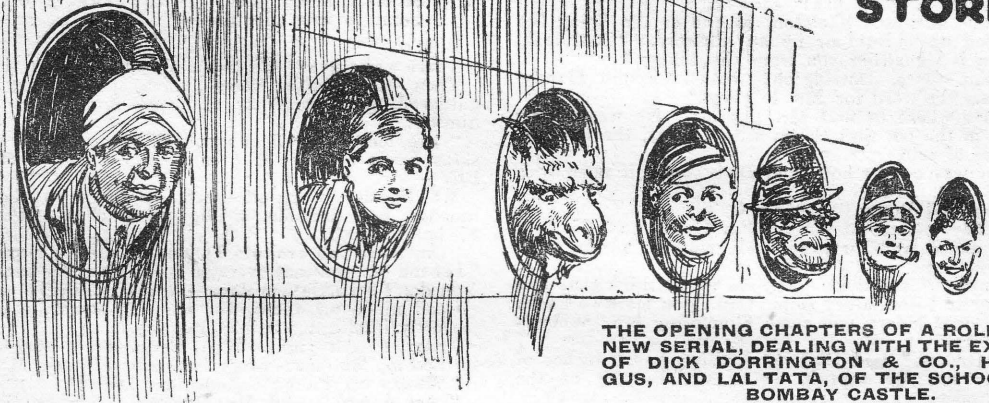
(There will be another rattling fine school story of Tom Merry & Co., in next week's GEM, entitled: "THE SPORTS CRANK." Make sure of reading it, by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL!

Hallo, GEM readers! We're the Chums of the school ship, Bombay Castle, sailing under Eastern skies in search of Adventure. And do we find any? You bet! Just sample these first few chapters—you'll be yelling for the rest afterward!

CHUMS of the BOMBAY CASTLE

by DUNCAN STORM



THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF A ROLICKING NEW SERIAL, DEALING WITH THE EXPLOITS OF DICK DORRINGTON & CO., HORACE, GUS, AND LAL TATA, OF THE SCHOOL SHIP BOMBAY CASTLE.

CHAPTER 1. Twelve Detained!

IT was baking hot on the famous school ship Bombay Castle. The ship was steaming easily over a flat sea, as blue as a Margate poster. The few catspaws that rippled the oily water were travelling the same way as the ship.

Afternoon school had been dismissed. Scorcher Wilkinson had swished the whole of the Sixth Form, being a bit irritable with prickly heat.

Mr. Chatterjee Lal Tata, master of mathematics and of Hindustani, had been unable to do anything at all with the renowned Glory Hole Gang, who would learn neither his language nor his mathematics.

He had invited the whole lot to come back to Class-room A for an hour's detention after supper, at eight p.m. "You are lazy lots of young scoundrels!" said Mr. Lal Tata, grabbing the blackboard off its easel. "You have less intelligence than yonder orang-outang!"

And he pointed at old Cecil, the pet orang-outang of the ship, who shared all the troubles of the Glory Hole Gang and half their joys. By custom, Cecil was allowed to sit in a chair behind the blackboard, for he would not keep away from the boys, even when they were in class.

Then Lal had turned the blackboard round to have a clean surface ready for the detention class.

And there, written in fair round letters, was the inscription:

"You Dirty Dog!"

Lal was staggered.

He knew that rare old Cecil, intelligent as he was, could not write. Yet, there it was, written on the board as large as life.

"Who wrote this insulting messages on boards?" Lal demanded angrily.

There was no answer.

It had cost the Glory Hole Gang a whole tin of Mackintosh's Toffee and a week's hard work to teach old Cecil to trace these lines. They were not going to give Cecil away.

And Lal had been lecturing a lot on Cecil lately, declaring that the supposed descent of man from the anthropoid apes was a fraud, and that an ape could never be taught to do anything.

"That is Jules Verne's foolsomeness," he had remarked. "Jules Verne was clever fellow. But he never went out of Paris, and he was very inaccurate observer!"

"Perhaps it was Cecil who wrote it, sir," suggested Dick Dorrington, the brightest of the class. "I'll just run over him and see if he has any chalk on him."

Dick ran over Cecil's pockets, making a great show of detective work and taking the opportunity to wipe the chalk off Cecil's paws.

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"Go back to your seat at once, Dorrington!" yelled Lal. "Some other monkeys have done this. You are not going to put blame on innocent animals. You shall all do two hours of detention to-night, and I will give order that you have only bread and cheese supper!"

Something like a groan went up from Skelton, known to the world as Skelton. Skelton was a cadaverous youth with an enormous appetite, and to stop his supper was to hit him where he lived.

"Please, sir," he said, putting up his hand, "the doctor says I mustn't eat cheese at night!"

"All right, Skelton!" snapped Lal. "You can eat bread! No answers, please! Class is dismissed."

The boys tramped out of the class-room rather wearily. They agreed that the jape had been a great success, but a costly one.

Even Cecil looked depressed about it. He knew that they were booked for detention. There was no need to inform Cecil on this point. He had been kept in too many times with the usual old gang whose names were put on the slate at the entrance to the saloon.

It read:

"DETENTION.

The following boys will present themselves at Class-room A, eight p.m., for Hindustani and mathematics.

1. James Handyman
2. Arthur Skelton
3. Chipperfield Prodgers
4. Angus Macpherson
5. Hamish Mac Cosh
6. William Waffles
7. Algernon Cuff
8. Montague Ikstein
9. Reginald Walker
10. Ruy Lopez
11. Richard Dorrington
12. Thomas Porkis

"(Signed) CHATTERJEE LAL TATA, M.A.
"(Calcutta University)."

Old Cecil was number thirteen, and looked it. He was a rare sport and never deserted his pals, but he hated sitting on that chair out of sight whilst his chums sweated at lessons.

His venerable topper was bashed in over his ears. His shell jacket had burst at the shoulder, and his Eton trousers, patched with a gunny bag across the seat, were parting with their patch through so much sitting in detention.

"Did you ever know such a beast, as that fat Hindu?"

remarked Dick Dorrington, as they strolled along the deck outside Lal's cabin.

"Hush, Dick!" said Algy Cuff, grinning. "He will hear you!"

Lal did hear.

He put his round face out at his cabin window.

"Torrington!" said he. "You will write for me five hundred times the lines: 'Fat Hindu,' and 'Beast,' are most objectionable and ungentlemanly expressions."

"Please, sir—" began Dick.

Mr. Lal Tata waved a fat finger like a pork sausage in front of his nose.

"It is no good to tell me, Dick Dorrington, that I am not the fat Hindu and the beast," he answered. "You have asked for tremendous impots, and you have got them!"

Somewhat crestfallen, Dick drifted away forward to look at the flying fish that were breaking from the bow-wave in flights like swallows.

"Wish I was a flying fish!" said he.

"I don't!" answered Skeleton, as one of the flying fish was snapped up in mid-air by an albacore. "But, look, the captain is signalling you from the bridge."

"Hey, you, there, Dorrington!" called Captain Handyman. "Pass the word for Mr. Pugsley!"

Dick knew where to find Mr. Pugsley. He was having a pull out of the pot that cheers with Greasy, the butcher, and a game of crib.

The door was on the hook and Dick swung it open with a bang.

"What me old Puggo!" he began.

Mr. Pugsley, gunner of the Bombay Castle, took his pipe out of his mouth and surveyed Dick, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Coo lummy!" said he. "Anyone would think that this was a bloomin' reformatory ship. Can't you learn to knock at a cabin door before you come blundering in? Where's your manners?"

"Sorry, Greasy," said Dick, apologising to the owner of the cabin. "but the captain wants Mr. Pugsley on the bridge—at once."

Mr. Pugsley laid down his hand.

"Did 'e say 'At once'?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Dick.

"Then mark my words," said Mr. Pugsley. "There's something up the wind. The skipper never breaks into a man's tea same way as you break into other folk's cabins, Master Dick."

"Shall I play your hand with Greasy?" asked Dick, eager to atone for his thoughtlessness.

"No fear!" answered Mr. Pugsley. "There's money on it. You leave the cards alone!"

And, taking his cap, he went off at his usual leisurely walk.

CHAPTER 2.

An Admiralty Job!

GREASY, the butcher, nodded at Dick meaningly. "Thought there was something up," said he. "I saw Marconi come out of 'is 'utch with a slip for the skipper a few minutes ago. Maybe something's goin' to happen!"

"I hope to goodness it is," said Dick. "That old boulder has named us all for detention for two hours to-night. Think of that, Greasy!"

"If 'e'd named you all for a jolly good-hidin' he wouldn't 'ave been far out. I expect you deserve it!" answered Greasy, without the slightest sympathy.

Dick grinned.

"We've taught old Cecil to write," said he. "It's never been done before."

"You'll 'ave that monkey forging cheques afore you done with 'im," said Greasy, shaking his head. "He's got more brains be'ind 'is ugly dial than any o' you kids. But here 'e is! What, me ole Cecil!"

Cecil entered the cabin, seated himself on the bunk, and sucked a banana he had pinched from the bundle belonging to Sweeney Todd.

He slung the skin politely outside the cabin into the alleyway, and helped himself to a couple of cigarettes from Greasy's box.

"Make yourself at 'ome, Cecil!" said Greasy, not without sarcasm. "Why, you fag scrounger, that's the best part of a packet you've 'ad off me in the las' two days! But there goes Puggo's whistle. There's something doing!"

Dicky brightened up as he heard the long-drawn call of Mr. Pugsley's whistle, which was caught up and repeated by the Malay serangs.

"Hurrah!" he cried, banging Cecil's topper down over his ears in his delight. "Hear that, Cecil?"

Cecil grunted amiably. He knew that it was the call for the D.S.B., the Duty Steamboat.

It meant that the Glory Hole Gang, who manned this particular craft, would be called away in half an hour or so, and that they would be free of all scholastic duties and discipline.

"I wonder what's up?" exclaimed Dick.

"If you wait 'ere," said Greasy, "Puggo will be back to finish his game of crib when 'e's set the crew to getting the D.S.B. ready. But he comes this way!" said Greasy, as Mr. Pugsley came running briskly down the tiers of ladders from the bridge and made his way across the well deck.

Mr. Pugsley was singing. He never sang unless he was in high good-humour.

Dick could hear him now coming along the deck.

"Come to your Marthas, come, come, come!

The water's a-warmin' in the sun, sun, sun.

So come along, dear. There's nothing to fear.

Come to your Marthas—"

Biff!

There was a heavy fall in the alleyway outside the cabin.

Then came the aggrieved voice of Mr. Pugsley as he gathered himself together, and came into the cabin rubbing himself.

"'Ere, look 'ere! That monkey's been chuckin' his banana skins about again. If I catch him this end of the ship I'll—"

Mr. Pugsley broke off short, for there was Cecil, grim, hideous, and amiable, sitting alongside Greasy, studying his hand of crib.

"Oh, there you are, ole Tarzan!" he said, more amiably. "Let me tell you that overside is the place for banana skins. You don't sprinkle 'em down the alleyways like confetti."

Cecil made an apogetic grunting sound in his throat, perfectly intelligible to Mr. Pugsley.

"Sorry? All right. Well, don't do it again. You've bruised my 'am-bones properly this time!" said Mr. Pugsley.

"What's up, Puggo?" demanded Dick eagerly.

"Arf a mo'," said Mr. Pugsley. "When the Spanish Armada was coming, Drake finished 'is game of bowls on Plymouth 'Oe. I'm just going to take sixpence orf ole Greasy. Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six, a pair's eight, and one for 'is nob finishes the game. Down comes the 'ammer and up goes the donkey. I'll trouble you for a bender, Greasy!"

"Why, you blooming cardsharper!" said Greasy, weighing out the sixpence. "Now what's up?"

"Duty Steamboat for six o'clock," announced Mr. Pugsley. "I'm drawing a week's fresh rations from you, Greasy, and a fortnight of salt 'orse. We are off on an Admiralty job!"

"An Admiralty job!" exclaimed Dick and Greasy in chorus.

"Six-hundred-mile trip," added Mr. Pugsley. "We are going to circumnavigate the Island of Pahang."

"What for?" demanded Dick.

"Ever heard of a steamer called the Star of the East?" asked Mr. Pugsley, with annoying slowness.

"No."

"Ever heard of Claude Fairbrother, the famous picture star?" asked Mr. Pugsley.

"Have we ever 'eard of Doug Fairbanks!" said Greasy sarcastically. "O' course we've 'eard of Claude Fairbrother, the Flappers' Dream. 'E's the one that's been married six times, like 'Enery the Eighth."

"Well, 'im and Jane Paterson—that's Mrs. Claude Fairbrother the Sixth, and his leadin' lady—and the Star of the East, and Ike Goldberg, the Screen King, and a whole ship-load of screen actors, have disappeared in these seas. They've insheed—they've gone—they've disappeared, and we got a wireless from a cruiser just now, asking us to join in the search."

Dick bounded from his perch out on deck, followed by Cecil, to spread the glad news.

Claude Fairbrother was one of the most popular stars of the movie world. Indeed, it was said that he was putting Doug's nose out of joint. He was a tremendous lad, who played in the most thrilling dramas which appealed to the boys, and who had a considering look in his eyes which appealed to the girls.

There was nothing that the girls liked better at home, or, for the matter of that, all over the world, than to take half a pound of chocolates to the dark corner of the local Splendide, together with a clean handkerchief, so that they could cry and eat chocolates all the time while they saw Claude Fairbrother on the screen.

Claude Fairbrother was the actor who had the bed of real gold, and who washed himself in an eau de Cologne bath, with a fountain in the middle of it.

Claude Fairbrother's screw was £200,000 a year, and his motor-car was the largest in the world short of a six-wheel bus.

Mr. Lal Tata had composed himself to slumber after the toils of the afternoon, when he was aroused by the call through his cabin window:

"Roll out, Lal! Show a leg!"

"Go away, boys!" murmured Mr. Lal Tata drowsily. "I will attend to you later on, in detention."

"There isn't going to be any detention!" cried Arty Dove. "The D.S.B. is going to pipe away at six o'clock. We are going right round the Island of Pahang, six hundred miles."

Mr. Lal Tata sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"What foolsome job is this?" he demanded.

"We are going to search for a missing ship and a gang of film actors. They are making films, and they've disappeared."

Mr. Lal Tata groaned. There was nothing he hated more than these cruises in the Duty Steamboat. They were always beset with hairbreadth adventures, and Mr. Lal Tata hated hairbreadth adventures in real life, though he loved them in books.

The boys were getting a bit of their own back.

"These are most dangerous waters," grumbled old Lal. "full of sharks, fevers, and pirates, not to speak of coral reefs."

"That's why we are going round the island instead of

too much about this enormous island and the pirate-infested archipelagoes which surrounded it.

There was no getting out of it.

"Tell Mr. Pugsley, with compliments of Mr. Lal Tata, that he will be ready at six o'clock," said he. "Also tell him that one foolsome fellow makes many. One fool actor, thinking to make films in savage islands, gets thousands of fools to applaud him. His fool ship gets missing, and other fools are sent to find him!"

The boys rushed off to the D.S.B., which was a tangle of gear, with the crew working all round her, whilst Mr. Pugsley ran over the engine, which was his pride. The Duty Steamboat was not a steamboat at all, but a handsome barge, rigged in the style of a fishing smack, with a



As soon as Horace, the goat, saw Lal's trousers in front of him, he lowered his head and charged. **Crash!** Straight over the side of the Bombay Castle Lal sailed, to hit the sea with a gigantic splash. (See overleaf.)

the ship, sir," answered Porkis. "You've got half an hour to pack up, sir; we shall be raising the island soon. Mr. Pugsley says."

"You are not going to bring that absurd goat Horace?" mumbled Lal, from inside the cabin.

"Rather, sir!" said Dick Dorrington. "We've got special permission. Old Horace hasn't been ashore for a month, and his coat is all coming out. He looks like a second-hand door-mat!"

"Then we shall not bring the crocodile Gus!" said Mr. Lal Tata, hoping to get away from the ship's pets.

"Skipper says that Gus is to be put ashore for a good scrubbing," said Dick. "Gus has been in the cricket-bag now for six weeks, and he's wanting a wash badly!"

Mr. Lal Tata groaned. He opened the cabin window which gave a view forward. There, on the port bow, the rugged outlines of the Island of Pahang were already rising from the transparent blue sea, like a scene from fairyland, with one or two native fishing craft showing their queer, pointed sails on the horizon.

Pahang was no fairyland to Mr. Lal Tata. He knew

Kelvin engine, which, starting up on petrol, would run on paraffin.

The boys were almost too excited for tea. They rushed down into the saloon and back again, and only Skelton was left surrounded by dishes of jam and cakes. Skelton never allowed anything to interfere with his regular meals.

As there was no one there to invite him, Skelton looked after himself.

"Have some plum-squish, Mr. Skelton!" said he.

"Try this Dundee-cake, Mr. Skelton!" he added.

"You haven't had any of those muffins, Mr. Skelton," he continued.

And so he went on till he had worked all round the menu.

Bungaloo Island!

UPSTAIRS, the boys were assisting with the D.S.B. The full quota of paraffin, petrol, and water were put aboard. Then Greasy came staggering along the deck with meat for the ice-chest, followed by pantry-men with the full rations of tinned goods and stuff from the galley.

They were followed up by Monsteur Jollibois, the head cook, who led three stewards, each with covered-baskets full of good things that were outside the boat's stores.

It was ten minutes to six. The boys rushed forward, and soon came back shouldering an enormous cricket-bag, which needed three to carry it. This contained Gus, the crocodile, in a state of musky coma.

They rushed forward again, as the sun was sinking in the west and the deck-lights were starting, then raced back again with a mailbag on a trolley, cheering wildly.

For the neck of the mail-bag was tied round the neck of a huge Egyptian goat, whose great horns curled viciously and whose green eyes sparkled with malevolence.

This was rare old Horace, the mascot of the Glory Holo Gang.

Captain Handyman, neat, pointed of beard, and envious of the joy of the lads, came down from the bridge. He carried a tin case of charts for Mr. Pugsley and his written instructions.

The falls were ready for lowering, and the ship was sloping to a dead stop.

"Not too much weight in her when you lower, Mr. Pugsley," said the captain. "She's a heavy hull!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded Mr. Pugsley.

"And don't forget that the Iceberg National Picture Syndicate has offered two thousand pounds reward for this actor chap!" added Captain Handyman. "Mind you don't allow yourself to be dished for the reward!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"And they offer ten thousand for the rolls of film which have already been taken by the Star of the East Company," added Captain Handyman. "So if you see any watertight tin boxes about don't try to open them."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

At three minutes to six the keel of the D.S.B. touched the darkening sea. At one minute to six the boys and the stores were on board. They waited only for Lal and for Horace the goat.

"We want Horace!" chorused the gang in the boat.

Up on deck, Mr. Lal Tata, fat and dignified, with his umbrella and new pink silk turban, had made his appearance. He carried a suitcase packed with three clean shirts and some dozens of boys' libraries, which he was very fond of reading.

"Is all on board?" he asked the quartermaster, looking down from the blank space where the rail had been removed for the lowering of the boat.

"All but you and the goat, sir," answered the quarter-

master. "Look out!" he added suddenly. "Look out, you nigger!" he added, forgetting the respect that he generally showed Mr. Lal Tata.

But the warning came too late. Horace, the goat, by an old trick, had quietly worked his horn into one of the cords which secured the mailbag. Snapping this with the enormous leverage of his powerful neck, he had slipped out of the mailbag, and in the gathering shadows of night had stepped close behind Mr. Lal Tata.

Horace was always all right when he had been a bit with old Lal, but he could not stand coloured men or negroes, in any shape or form. In the old days, when he had been a kid in Egypt, he had been maltreated by all sorts of Copts and Egyptians and Soudanese kids, and he had never forgotten it.

As soon as he saw Lal's baggy white trousers in front of him, standing at the edge of the ship, he lowered his massive head.

"It now strikes six!" Lal had just said, looking at his watch.

Horace struck one!

Lal sailed far out into the air from the ship's side, clearing the D.S.B. and everything. From a height of forty feet he fell like a shooting-star, and hit the water with a plonk, sending up a fountain like a torpedo.

His bag fell into the boat, smashing down on the head of Pongo Walker just as that worthy had set the gramophone running to the tune of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'!"

Then, with a tremendous thump, Horace arrived, head-first on the cabin roof, so that it seemed to be raining goats and luggage.

Lal popped up, and clung to the bathook which Dick Dorrington had hooked into the slack of his pants.

"That goat!" he panted, as Dick pulled him on board dripping, and sat him down in a pool of water. "That goat fellow! I will not sail with him!"

"Slip!" Dick called. "Shove off, forrard!"

Mr. Pugsley turned over the engine from petrol to paraffin, and the Duty Steamboat sheered off from the massive hull of the Bombay Castie.

"That goat!" panted Mr. Lal Tata.

"Too late now, sir!" said Dick. "We are off!"

In the violet of the dusk the Bombay Castle was sliding away from the D.S.B., her long lines of glittering ports showing like a town afloat. Heads were thrust out of scuttles, and the crew, gathered along the rail, cheered and shouted parting messages.

(Like it, boys? What-ho! Then look out for next week's spiffing instalment.)

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