

BIG BANGS and BIG SURPRISES IN THIS WEEK'S GRAND SCHOOL YARN !

THE GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.



Celebrating "THE 'FIFTH' AT ST. JIM'S!"

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1929.

A Sparkling Incident from this week's topping tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEVER BEFORE HAVE TOM MERRY & CO.. THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S, ENJOYED SUCH A SENSATIONAL FIREWORK NIGHT AS THAT DESCRIBED IN THE LONG COMPLETE STORY BELOW!



"PLEASE TO REMEMBER THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER!" Tom Merry & Co. have always done their best to act up to the old saying and celebrate the glorious "Fifth" in a suitable manner, and usually they've succeeded. But never was there such an exciting, uproarious and amazing Guy Fawkes' Day as there is this week!



CHAPTER 1.

A Matter of Finance!

"NINEPENCE!"

Tom Merry, captain of the Shell at St. Jim's, carefully disentangled a sixpence and three pennies from a conglomeration of articles withdrawn from his various pockets, and placed them on the table of Study No. 10.

"Ninepence!"

"And fourpence," said Monty Lowther, after a dismal examination of his worldly wealth. "How much can you raise, Harry?"

"One-and threepence, and a bad penny," reported Harry Manners.

"Not counting the giddy bad penny, that makes it just two-and-fourpence," remarked Tom Merry gloomily. "Well, we shan't get much in the way of fireworks out of that."

"It'll buy twenty-eight penny crackers, at all events," said Manners philosophically. "Twenty-eight crackers make a lot of noise, you know."

"Fathead!"

"Ass!" snorted Tom Merry. "Think we're fags from the Third to play about with penny crackers. Don't you realise the matter is serious? The giddy 'Fifth' to-morrow, and no thumping fireworks!"

"I know, but—"

"What about our prestige?" demanded Tom. "Isn't it up to this study to shine on the Fifth—to sparkle and flash and gleam and—and—"

"Bang!" suggested Manners. "With twenty-eight penny crackers—"

"We want to be the big noise, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Besides, what about the New House? What asses we were not to realise that the Fifth was so near! We could have saved up—"

"Pity you bought those new footer-boots, Tommy."

"And pity you bought those new films. And pity Monty bought that pile of silly songs!" snorted Tom Merry.

"What about those Fourth chaps?" said Manners. "Old Gussy's bound to be in funds—"

"My hat! I was forgetting about those chaps," said

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The FIFTH at ST. JIM'S!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Tom, his brow clearing wonderfully. "We'll borrow a quid or so from Gussy. Good wheeze! Come on!"

He jumped up and made for the door, followed by Monty Lowther and Manners. The problem was solved. A little loan from Study No. 6 would tide them over the lean years, so to speak. It would enable them to get in supplies of fireworks for the Fifth.

To-morrow was the Fifth, and there was no time to be lost.

Twenty-eight crackers might make a lot of noise, but the Terrible Three, being important fellows in the Lower School, felt that something more was needed to keep their end up on the Fifth.

There was no need to visit Study No. 6 as it happened, however.

Even as the Terrible Three made for the door it opened violently, propelled from a kick from without. In the doorway stood Jack Blake; behind Blake were Herries

and Digby; behind them was a glimmering eyeglass, and behind the eyeglass was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The chums of Study No. 6 of the Fourth had obligingly presented themselves just when they were wanted.

"Hallo! Just the fellows we were coming to see," said Tom Merry. "Come in! You're welcome as the flowers in May!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, here we are," grinned Blake. "Glad you're pleased to see us. It makes our unpleasant task not quite so unpleasant. I suppose you fellows realise that it's the Fifth to-morrow?"

"We'd almost overlooked it," confessed Tom Merry. "Busy with the footer, you know, and with the 'Weekly.'"

"We almost did, though we hadn't troubled much about it because we were relying on Gussy," explained Blake. "As it is—"

"You—you were relying on Gussy?" stammered Tom, a trifle apprehensively. "What—"

"But Gussy's let us down," said Blake, shaking his head. "Just like him, you know. Always fails us at the critical moment."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake—"

"Let's us down badly," said Blake severely. "Still, though the matter's serious, we've no doubt you fellows will come to the rescue."

"To—to the rescue?"

"Exactly. You see, we're absolutely stony," said Blake. "Scarcely three bob between us. And three bob won't go far with fireworks, will it?"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh; he could not help it.

"Hallo! What's the joke?" asked Blake.

"It isn't a joke, though it's funny," said Tom, with a chuckle. "And though it's funny, it's serious."

"How lucid!" remarked Herries, with heavy sarcasm. "It's funny, and yet it's not a joke, but it's serious. Now we understand."

"No, you don't," said Tom. "But you will when I tell you that we're stony, too."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"We've got exactly two-and-fourpence between us. We were just coming along to ask you fellows to lend us a quid or so to buy fireworks with."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, my hat!"

Blake gave a deep, hollow groan. His chums of Study No. 6 echoed it dismally.

"Well, you—your silly asses!" snorted Blake. "Do you mean to say you've got no cash?"

"Only two-and-fourpence and a bad penny."

"And no fireworks?"

"None!"

"Well, you careless, forgetful asses!" sniffed Blake. "Fancy forgetting the Fifth!"

"What about yourselves?"

"We relied on Gussy," snorted Jack Blake. "It's all his fault."

"Weally, Blake—"

"He should have brought his pater up properly," said Blake. "He hasn't sent Gussy a remittance since last week."

"Weally, Blake, I do not see that my patah ought to send me a fivah evvery week, you know!" said Gussy indignantly.

"Still, if you hadn't paid your dashed tailor with it we shouldn't be so hard up now."

"Bai Jove, I weally do not wemembah whethah I paid Wiggs or not!" said Arthur Augustus, frowning reflectively. "Howevah, as the fivah has gone—"

"Of course you paid him, you dummy!" snorted Blake.

"If you didn't, where is it? Answer me that?"

"I weally wish I could, deah boy. I only wemembah—"

"Blessed if I ever saw such a careless chap with money," said Herries. "Anyway, this is a nice pickle—no cash for fireworks! It's too bad!"

"What's to be done?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Or who?" said Digby.

"We can't rob a bank or burgle the tuckshop till," said Monty Lowther.

"Even to buy fireworks it would hardly do. I suppose there's not much chance of raising a loan from Figgy?"

"Can't borrow from New House worms," said Tom, shaking his head firmly. "Too infra dig."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Figgy would only crow, anyway. They're always calling us paupers, and the School House a casual ward. It would just give them something real to crow about."

"My hat! Yes, rather!"

"No humbling ourselves to the New House crowd," said Tom grimly.

"Anything but that. Still, the position is very serious. Something will have to be done. I suppose you wouldn't like to sell your camera, Manners, old fellow?"

"What?" roared Manners. "You—your fearful ass! I'll sell my camera when you've sold your best bat and your best footer togs, Thomas."

"What about holding an auction of Gussy's clobber?" suggested Lowther. "His best topper's worth a guinea, at least, and, as for his thousand and one ties, and millions of pairs of socks, and—"

"Bai Jove! I should uttably wefuse to sell any of my clobber, you feahful vandal, Lowthah!" said Gussy indignantly. "And you are exaggewatin' in wogard to my ties and socks—"

"Go hon! Hallo, what's that?"

Lowther's eyes had fallen upon a small parcel lying on the table of Study No. 10. It had not been there when they had left the room a few moments before.

Tom Merry picked it up curiously. "It's addressed to me—come by post," he said.

"Perhaps a bundle of banknotes," said Lowther.



"Or a supply of fireworks," said Manners hopefully. "Postmark, Rylcombe," remarked Tom, undoing the parcel. "It can't be much; it's as light as a feather. Why, what the dickens—"

"Bai Jove!"

"A—a Guy Fawkes' mask," stuttered Lowther.

It was. The parcel merely contained a Guy Fawkes mask and a brief note. The mask was a particularly hideous and grotesque specimen, and the note was from Gordon Gay, the leader of the Grammar School juniors in their incessant rivalry and warfare with the St. Jim's juniors.

The note read as follows:

"Dear Tom Merry.—To-morrow is Guy Fawkes day. With a face like yours, I consider it dangerous for you to walk abroad during the festive season. I, therefore, send you the enclosed, and strongly advise you to wear it, in case you happen to be taken for a guy.

"What about a little challenge? I suggest that we hold our shows at different times to be mutually agreed upon, and that you come to ours, and vice versa. This year ours is going to knock yours into a cocked hat.

"Cheerio, old dear! Mind you wear your chest-protector, and don't forget my warning regarding your face.

Your kind uncle,

GORDON GAY.

"M-my hat!" snorted Blake, as Tom read it out. "Cheek!"

"The—the cheeky rotter!" gasped Manners.

Tom Merry's face went crimson with wrath. Never had he been so insulted by his rival.

He flung the mask down and jumped upon it, again and again.

"Cheek!" he spluttered. "The—the cheeky bounder! I—I'll give him mask when I see him!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Gussy, frowning. "I considah those Gwammawians are gettin' too cheeky, deah boys!"

"There'll be fireworks when I see this bounder again!" vowed Tom Merry, breathing hard. "But this is serious, you fellows. If we refuse the challenge they'll crow no end. And we've no cash for fireworks, and no guy, either. It's—it's—"

"Awful!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. eyed each other glumly, almost in despair. Gordon Gay's challenge had made matters very serious indeed. At all costs St. Jim's must put up a good show of fireworks this year, or be laughed to scorn by their Grammarian rivals.

"Isn't there any way we can raise cash?" groaned Herries.

"Everybody in the School House seems to be hard up just now," said Tom gloomily. "I've written to my guardian, but I shan't get a reply until the day after to-morrow, and that'll be too late."

"And my patah is away."

"Blow your pater!" growled Blake. "If you hadn't paid your tailor, you dummy—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "Looks to me as if we shall have to fall back on Figgy after all."

"But you said—"

"I know I did," assented Tom Merry, shaking his curly head thoughtfully. "But this challenge from Gay has altered matters. It isn't a case of House rivalry now. School House and New House should stand together against the common foe—the giddy Grammarians."

"Oh, that—that's so, I suppose!"

"We needn't try to borrow cash from Figgy," said Tom. "But we can join forces and pool resources. Usually the New House paddle their own canoe on the Fifth. But this time St. Jim's must stand together against the foe."

"H'm!"

"Y-es," murmured Blake. "If Figgy will."

"We can only try 'em. And I don't see why they shouldn't in the circus," said Tom. "Let's go and see Figgy now."

"Oh, all right! No need for us all to go, though."

"Yes, there jolly well is," said Tom. "In case there's trouble. You never know with those New House worms!"

And on second thoughts Blake agreed that there was more safety in numbers. Visiting the New House was a risky proceeding at the best of times.

CHAPTER 2.

Saved!

FIGGINS, Kerr, and Wynn were in their study when the School House party arrived. The New House trio were busy unpacking a huge box of fireworks.

The School House fellows eyed the pile enviously as they marched into the study. Obviously Figgins & Co. were in funds.

"Hallo! What do you School House cripples want?"

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demanding Figgins, eyeing them suspiciously. "If you're hunting for trouble—"

"It's pax," said Tom Merry affably. "You needn't grab that ruler, Kerr. We shan't hurt you. This is a peaceful visit."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'd like to see any School House bounder hurt us!" snorted Kerr.

"Sorry! I meant to say this is a friendly visit," amended Tom hurriedly. "You see—"

"Yaas, wathah! It is like this, Figgy, deah boy—"

"You ring off, Gussy, and leave this to me," said Tom.

"It's like this, Figgy. We're in an awful hole—"

"Not now. You're in the New House," said Figgy pleasantly. "You've just come from an awful hole, you mean—that casual ward you call the School House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn laughed dutifully.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom, determined to be amiable at all costs. "The fact is, it's the Fifth to-morrow, and—"

"And you've got the wind up—eh?" said Figgy sympathetically. "Well, if I had a face like yours I think I should, too. I should be afraid of being taken for a guy. Take my tip and keep out of sight until to-morrow's over."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Wynn again.

"You—you footling ass!" gasped Tom Merry, his patience and peaceable intentions sorely tried. "I suppose you call that funny, Figgy?"

"Not so funny as your face, old chap. I thought you were all wearing masks when you came in, in fact."

"Look here, we're not standing this!" hooted Blake.

"Why, you cheeky New House wasters—"

"Hold on, Blake!" said Tom hastily. "Only their rot! Look here, Figgy—"

"Too painful, old chap. Ask me to do something not quite so torturing."

"Or wear a Guy Fawkes mask first," grinned Kerr.

Tom Merry crimsoned and clenched his fists. But the thought of their desperate position kept his wrath in check.

"You—you funny ass, Figgy!" he gasped. "Look! I mean, just listen a second! The fact is we're stony, with no funds for fireworks to-morrow. And we thought—"

"We'd lend you some cash—what?" said Figgy airily.

"Well, my hat! I always knew the School House was a casual ward, and that the paupers in it—"

"Oh, ring off that rot!" snorted Tom, going crimson.

"You see what it means, you ass! We can't allow the Grammarians to crow over us. We want you New House men to join forces."

"Can't be did," said Figgins promptly. "But you measly paupers needn't worry about St. Jim's. You leave the honour of St. Jim's to us—the New House. Gay ought to have sent the challenge to us, really. Still, I accept it, and I'll drop him a line."

"Well, you cheeky rotter!"

"Eh? Aren't I solving the problem?" asked Figgy, with a wink at the grinning Kerr and Wynn. "We've got plenty of fireworks—enough to give a better show than the Grammar School, anyway. And if you casual warders would like to lend a hand we'll allow you to let off some of our squibs," ended Figgins generously. "How's that?"

"Why, you—you— Then you won't join forces?" spluttered Tom.

"Certainly not, Thomas! This is where the New House is going to shine," grinned Figgins cheerfully. "The New House is going to uphold the honour and glory of St. Jim's, and the silly old School House can sing small once again."

"Why, you mean rotters—"

"You've got a guy in old Gussy, and you can bring him along to-morrow night," said Figgins airily. "We'll allow—"

"Bai Jove! I uttably wefuse to be insulted like this!" shouted Arthur Augustus excitedly. "I insist upon givin' that insultin' New House worm a feahful thwashin'!"

"Gussy, old man—"

But the blood of all the D'Arcys was boiling in Gussy's veins. He pocketed his eyeglass turned back his cuffs, and rushed at Figgins.

The next moment a wild and furious scrap was in progress between the humorous Figgins and the irate Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom.

"We might have expected this," observed Blake. "Still, now we know we can expect no help from these worms, we might as well help Gussy to mop them up. Pile in!"

"What-ho!"

Even Tom Merry himself, for all his peaceable intentions, was not averse to piling in now. He had writhed under Figgy's humorous remarks, and only the hope of getting help from the New House held him in check. Now

that hope had vanished, Tom's only thought was to avenge Figgins & Co's deadly insults.

"On the ball, chaps!" he roared. "We'll show 'em what's what! We'll give 'em paupers! We'll make guys of 'em!"

"Yes, rather!"

George Figgins was too busy attending to the wrathful Arthur Augustus to heed anything else; but Kerr gave a yell as Tom Merry and Blake rushed at him together.

"Rescue, New House!" he bawled, in alarm. "School House rotters! This way, chaps! Reddy, Lawrence, French—rescue!"

Kerr's yell rang far and wide.

Against seven fellows Kerr knew that he and his chums would stand little chance, and the thought of being turned into a guy did not appeal to him in the slightest.

In a moment or two the New House trio were struggling desperately against the odds.

But it was only for a moment or two.

There sounded hurried footsteps outside, and then the door flew open and Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen appeared.

They asked no questions—they just piled in with a will.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "We'll have a crowd here soon!"

Never had Tom spoken truer words. Redfern & Co. were followed almost at once by French, Jimson, Koumi Rao, and a host of New House fellows.

Before they quite knew where they were, Tom Merry & Co. found themselves flat on their backs, blinking up dizzily into the grinning faces of the New House men seated on their respective chests.

It was only what they might have expected. Visiting the New House was often like entering a hornets' nest.

"Hold 'em down!" gasped George Figgins breathlessly.

"We'll teach the bounders to come throwing their weight about here! Like their check!"

"Up with them!"

"Bai Jove! Figgay, you feahful wuffian, pway— Ow! Mind my clobber! Yawwooooh!"

Gussy's expostulations ended in a shriek as he was lifted, whirled over, and rushed from the room. One after the other the other hapless School House prisoners followed, amid the laughter of the New House fellows.

In single file they were frog-marched to the head of the stairs. They struggled furiously, but they struggled in vain against such odds.

"Now, down they go like Jack and Jill," said Figgins cheerfully. "Hallo, here's something fallen out of Gussy's pocket! Here you are, Gussy!" He picked up a letter from the floor and, doubling it up, crammed it down between Gussy's collar and his neck. "Now, down with 'em!"

"Yawwoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"Yooooop!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!"

One after the other the unfortunate School House men were rolled down the stairs. They arrived at the bottom in a struggling, yelling, breathless heap.

But they did not struggle there long. As Figgins & Co. started downstairs after them they leaped to their feet and fled.

Not until they had reached the School House



"Figgay, you feahful wuffian— Ow! Mind my clobber! Yawwooooh!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's expostulations ended in a shriek as he was lifted, whirled over, and rushed from Figgins & Co.'s study. The other School House prisoners followed, and in single file they were frog-marched to the head of the stairs. (See Chapter 2.)

side of the quad did they stop. There Tom Merry called a halt, and they got out their handkerchiefs and started to rub vigorously at their black faces. They did not want to enter the School House looking like Christy minstrels!

They panted and groaned as they rubbed and rubbed.

"Ow!" gurgled Tom Merry.

"I'm a mass of bumps!" groaned Blake. "Ow, ow! Wow! This is all—ow, ow!—Gussy's fault."

"Ow! Yes, rather!"

"Bump him!" gasped Herries sulphurously. "If he hadn't gone for Figgay—"

"Weally, you fellows— Oh, gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus, who had been struggling to get the letter which Figgay had stuffed down the back of his neck, gave a sudden, astonished gasp.

He had managed to get the doubled-up envelope out now, and as his chums glared, he drew out something from it—something that rustled crisply as he fingered it.

It was a five-pound note!

Arthur Augustus blinked at it—his chums blinked at it. "Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus at last. "What

an extraordinary thing, dear boys! I was not aware that I had it in my pocket! It dropped out when those wuffians fwoag-marched me, you know!"

"Well, you—you—"

"How vewy, vewy lucky!" said Arthur Augustus, almost happily. "I told you that I had a feelin' that I hadn't paid my tailah, after all, Blake, didn't I? I simply couldn't wemembah whethah I had or not, you know. Howevah—"

"And that's your last fiver?" yelled Blake.

"Yaas!"

"And you've had it in your pocket all the time?"

"Oh, yaas! You see—"

"And we've been worrying and at our wits' end about money, and trying to borrow right and left?"

"Ahem! Yaas! But weally—"

"And now we've just humbled ourselves to those New House worms and been put through the mill, all for nothing?" howled Blake.

"Ya-a-as! I weally could not wemembah—"

Arthur Augustus got no further than that. The sight of that fiver, welcome or not, proved the last straw to Gussy's chums. All their worrying and scheming about cash had been quite unnecessary. Their unfortunate visit to the New House had also been unnecessary. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, all the time, had had a five-pound note in his pocket!

It really was the limit.

As one man Tom Merry & Co. fell upon Arthur Augustus, and that astonished youth went to earth with a fearful bump.

"Yawoooooop!"

His wild yell floated over the quad.

It was followed by a series of wild yells as he was lifted and bumped again and again by his irate chums.

Then Tom Merry & Co. marched into the School House to seek the nearest bath-room, leaving Arthur Augustus sitting in the quad in a rumpled heap, gasping and groaning as if for a wager.

CHAPTER 3.

Friends No Longer!

"Gussy, old fellow—"

"Gussy, dear old chap—"

Both Jack Blake and Herries spoke in honeyed tones.

Blake & Co. were a happy little family, and they were very much attached to each other. But to have heard Gussy's chums then one would have thought he was a long-lost brother.

Tea was over in Study No. 6. After a much-needed wash and a good tea, Blake, Herries, and Digby were feeling themselves again.

But Arthur Augustus was not, apparently.

Over tea Blake, Herries, and Digby had discussed Guy Fawkes' night, and what the fiver should be spent on.

Arthur Augustus had preserved a stony silence—he had taken no part in the discussion.

A deep frown adorned Gussy's noble brow. He did not reply when his chums spoke to him. He refused even to look at them. When even asked to pass the jam, or the sardines, Arthur Augustus obeyed without a word, frigidly and with icy dignity.

The fact was that Arthur Augustus was annoyed with his chums; he was, as Blake put it, on his high horse.

Really it was a most awkward time for Arthur Augustus to ride his high horse. To-morrow was bonfire night. Only with the aid of Gussy's fiver could the chums of the School House enjoy bonfire night as it should be enjoyed. Certainly the general rule in the study was to share and share alike what came in the way of remittances. Indeed, Gussy's chums had become to look upon his numerous "fivers" as much their property as his—almost.

But it was becoming increasingly clear that the general rule was not going to apply in this case—at least, it was

clear that Arthur Augustus was not going to allow his chums to spend the fiver.

Blake had asked for it kindly, feeling it would be safer in his charge and that he could spend it to better account than Arthur Augustus.

The swell of the Fourth had met his request with chilly silence.

"Gussy, old man!" began Blake again pleadingly. "What about that fiver?"

Silence.

"It's firework day to-morrow!" said Herries, breathing hard. "There's no time to go to Wayland to get a stock of fireworks in. And if we don't look lively the village shop will be sold out!"

"All the best stuff gone, anyway!" added Digby.

"Let's get off now, Gussy! No time to be lost, old fellow! You can buy the stuff, of course, and we'll advise you! Dash it all, you're not going to let your pals down!"

Arthur Augustus spoke then.

"I have no intention whatever of lettin' you down, Jack Blake," he said frigidly, "though I no longah weward you as fwiends. You have tweated me with wuffianly wudeness, and I wefuse to speak to you."

"But do listen, old man—"

"I wefuse to listen, or speak! We are no longah on speakin' terms. It was not my fault that that wottah Figgay and his fwiends assaulted us as they did!" said Arthur Augustus, his voice rising indignantly. "Nor could I help forgettin' whethah I had paid my tailah or not! I considah you a gang of unjust wuffians."

"Look here, Gussy, we've already told you we're sorry about that, old fellow. We acted hastily, and we apologise most humbly."

"Fearfully humbly!" said Herries.

"Awfully, fearfully humbly!" added Digby.

But the soft answer—and even the apology—did not turn away Gussy's wrath. Possibly Gussy did not feel that either the soft answer or apology was as sincere as it might have been.

"I wegwet I cannot accept your apology!" said Gussy coldly.

"But the fiver—"

"The fivah is safe in my charge, and is my pwperty, I may point out!"

"But the thumping fireworks—"

"I will attend to the fireworks, deah—I mean, you fellows!"

"But—"

"I wefuse to discuss the mattah," said Arthur Augustus haughtily. "I do not intend to let you down, howevah, in weward to the fireworks. I will purchase them myself, and will distwibute them."

And, having finished his tea, Arthur Augustus rose gracefully from the table.

His chums drew their breath in relief. They had feared that, in his great wrath, Arthur Augustus did not intend to spend the money on fireworks.

"Oh, good!" said Blake. "That's all right, then, Gussy! But hadn't you better let me do the buying, old chap?"

"You'll only make a muck of it," said Herries, rather incautiously.

Arthur Augustus regarded Herries icily through his monocle.

"I shall not make a muck of it, Hewwies!" he said. "I considah you an impertinent wottah! I wefuse eithah to allow you wottahs to buy the things, or to accompany me to the village!"

"But, look here, Gussy—"

"Wats!"

Taking his silk hat from the bookshelves, Arthur Augustus marched out of the study.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Blake.

Knowing Arthur Augustus as he did, Blake had sudden misgivings regarding the fiver—and especially the fireworks.

"Better go after the footling dummy!" suggested Herries. "We'll clear away first!" said Blake, rising from the table. "But we'd better keep an eye on him when he gets the stuff, in case he runs into the Grammarians. Oh, the awful ass! No good going after him now, though—only put his back up mere."

The juniors hurriedly cleared the tea-table, and were just about to start out when the Terrible Three looked in.

"You chaps ready for the village?" asked Tom. "Hallo, where's Gussy?"

"And his fiver?"

Blake explained, and the Terrible Three agreed that it would be just as well to follow Arthur Augustus and to see he did not run into trouble.

"We were asses to put his giddy back up just now!" admitted Tom Merry. "Still, he'll come round all right. Let's get off—perhaps we'll catch him up!"

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This was a very forlorn hope, however, had they known it. For good fortune had favoured Arthur Augustus.

On reaching the school gates he came across Kildare, just starting for the village on his motor-bike and sidecar.

"Going to the village, kid?" asked Kildare.

"Yaas, Kildare!"

"Hop in, then!" suggested Kildare good-naturedly.

Arthur Augustus "hopped in." The roads were very muddy, and he was only too glad of a lift to save spattering his elegant bags.

Kildare very soon whizzed into Rylcombe, and set Gussy down just outside the post office. Thanking him gracefully, Arthur Augustus sauntered down the High Street, making a mental list of the fireworks he intended to purchase. Indignant though he felt towards his chums, Arthur Augustus intended to do what he considered the "wight" thing. Five pounds would purchase quite a decent supply of fireworks—possibly more than the little general dealer's shop in Rylcombe could supply.

Unfortunately for his good intentions, however, D'Arcy had to pass Riggs', the outfitter's, on his way to the general store!

Mr. Riggs was standing in his shop doorway as Gussy came along, and he gave the swell of St. Jim's an extremely affable greeting. Gussy was one of Mr. Riggs' best customers.

"Good-evening, Master D'Arcy!" he said. "I was wondering when I should have the pleasure of seeing you again, sir!"

Arthur Augustus stopped. Obviously Mr. Riggs expected him to halt for a chat, and Arthur Augustus was far too good-natured and polite to dream of going on.

"Good-evenin', Mr. Wiggs!" he returned. "It is wathah foggay!"

"Very foggy; but one must expect fogs at this time of the year, Master D'Arcy. By the way, sir, you may be interested to know I have just got a new stock of neckwear—quite the latest, sir! Possibly you may like to step inside to look over them, Master D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove! I am wathah in a huvwuy to—to—"

Arthur Augustus paused. It was a great temptation. The offer was as great a temptation to Arthur Augustus as a free visit to a cinema would be to a less serious-minded mortal. Moreover, Gussy remembered having asked Mr. Riggs to let him know when he had a new selection of neckties in stock.

Under the circumstances refusal was out of the question—for the swell of the Fourth.

He stepped inside.

The neckties proved to be beautiful creations—certainly quite the very latest. Arthur Augustus' delight became almost ecstatic as he feasted his eyes upon them. He selected a dozen—just to be going on with, as he explained to Mr. Riggs.

"Shall I put them on the account, Master D'Arcy?"

"Er—" Arthur Augustus hesitated. There was rather a certain shade of expectancy in Mr. Riggs' unctuous voice, however. "Er—well, pewwaps I had bettah pay now, Mr. Wiggs!"

"Very good, sir! Ahem! You received my little account the other day, of course, Master D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus blushed. The account was in his pocket now, along with the fiver. The swell of the Fourth was a prompt payer, and very particular in such matters. Yet his monthly account with Mr. Riggs certainly was a few days overdue. Gussy had intended to pay it when the fiver came a day or two ago, and he had quite forgotten whether he had actually paid or not until finding the fiver placed in the envelope with the bill.

Mr. Riggs knew Arthur Augustus well, and he had no fear of having to wait long for his money. Yet it was quite clear to Arthur Augustus now that he wanted it—possibly he had accounts to meet himself and was hard up.

The fiver began to burn a hole in Gussy's pocket.

"Bai Jove! Oh, yaas, I did weceive your account, Mr. Wiggs!" he stammered, blushing again. "I wegwet vewy much—"

"Please do not mention it, Master D'Arcy. There—ahem!—is no hurry—no hurry at all!" exclaimed Mr. Riggs, waving his hand. "To-morrow will do just as well—quite as well, my dear sir! Do not let that worry you, Master D'Arcy!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Quite—quite obviously Mr. Riggs wanted his account settled quickly—which was certainly somewhat unusual and unexpected. And Arthur Augustus knew there was no likelihood of any fiver coming his way for several days at least.

There was, obviously, nothing else for it.

Rather than let it worry him, Arthur Augustus plunged his hand into his pocket and produced the bill and the five-pound note. With many more profuse assurances that there was no hurry, Mr. Riggs took the fiver and receipted the

bill, promising to send up the neckties that day to the school.

When the unhappy Arthur Augustus found himself in the street some moments later he realised, to his dismay, that he had exactly twelve-and-six out of the fiver to expend on fireworks!

"Oh, bai Jove!" he mumbled. "How feahfully unforch. I suppose Mr. Wiggs is in wathah low watah at the moment, and weally wants the money. Gweat Scott! those youngstahs will be vewy annoyed indeed—especially as they are expectin' five pounds' worth. Howevah, it cannot be helped, and aftah all, twelve-and-six will buy quite a lot of cwackers and wockets and things! Yaas, wathah!"

But as he proceeded dismally to the general stores Arthur Augustus could not help being assailed by doubts.

CHAPTER 4.

Pulling Gussy's Leg!

"HALLO! What cheer, Gussy, old dear!" Arthur Augustus jumped as a hand was clapped on his elegant shoulder.

He recognised the cheery voice of Gordon Gay, the Grammarian leader. At the same moment he wheeled round, and found himself staring into Gay's grinning features.

Arthur Augustus was standing in Crabb's, the general stores, in the High Street. He had done his very best with the cash at his disposal, and now Mr. Crabb was busy wrapping up his parcel of assorted fireworks.

It made rather a bulky parcel, and Arthur Augustus was eyeing it rather doubtfully, when Gay came into the shop.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, adjusting his monocle, which had dropped out as a result of Gay's playful thump. "Bai Jove! I am vewy pleased to see you, Gay, but I do wish you would not gweet me so woughly. You have put me into quite a fluttah, bai Jove!"

"Sorry, old scout!" chuckled Gordon Gay. "Only my exuberant spirits, old bean. What are you after, Gussy—fireworks?"

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"Same here!" said Gordon Gay affably. "We're going to knock spots off your show this year, my lad. We've got a ripping stock already, and I'm just after some more."

"You are vewy lucky, deah boy. Unfortunately, we are wathah stonay at present, y'know," said Arthur Augustus. "In fact," said Gussy confidentially, "this parcel of fireworks is all we have at present!"

"Hard lines!" said Gordon Gay. "Still just as well, or you little fellows might burn your little selves!"

"Bai Jove! What—"

"But how's the footer going, Gussy?" asked Gay hurriedly. "I say, have you seen Carboy's face?"

"Carboy's face?" echoed Gussy. "Why, what—"

"Just go and look at it. He's outside," said Gordon Gay. "It's a sight!"

"Bai Jove!"

All unsuspectingly, Arthur Augustus went to the doorway and looked out.

Knowing what a terrific and incurable practical joker Gay was, Arthur Augustus really ought to have been suspicious. But he wasn't, and he went to look at Carboy's face, naturally thinking that Carboy's face had met with some sort of an accident.

As he went, Gordon Gay chuckled softly, and glanced swiftly round the little shop.

Mr. Crabb, having finished serving Gussy, was busy putting away boxes, and had his back to him. Mrs. Crabb was busy gossiping with an elderly lady at the far end of the counter. On the counter itself were two parcels—Gussy's parcel of fireworks, and another parcel, somewhat similar in size and shape.

Who the other parcel belonged to, Gordon Gay neither knew nor cared—though he fancied it belonged to the garrulous old lady in the shawl.

With another swift glance round, Gordon Gay changed the places of the two parcels. He acted like lightning, and his queer action was unobserved by anyone in the shop.

He was only just in time, however. Arthur Augustus returned to him the next moment.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "There is nothin' at all the mattah with Carboy's face that I can see, deah boy!"

"Nothing more than usual, of course!" said Gay blandly. "But it is a sight, isn't it? I've always told him he ought to wear a mask with a face like that!"

Arthur Augustus looked at him.

"Bai Jove! I—I believe you are pullin' my leg, Gay, you wottah!"

"Go hon!"

"I considah you an uttah ass, Gay!"

"Thanks, old scout! Your opinion is of great and momentous weight, Gussy! Being a born idiot yourself, you—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus turned away frigidly. He picked up the bulky parcel that was on the spot where his own parcel had reposed, and, with a polite "Good-evening!" to Mr. Crabb, left the shop.

Outside the shop were Frank Monk and Carboy.

"Hallo, Gussy!" called Frank Monk. "Been buying fireworks?"

Arthur Augustus walked on in a state of indignation. The parcel was much heavier than he had expected it to be, and he rather wished now that he had allowed Mr. Crabb to send it. Only the fear of the shopkeeper forgetting it had caused him to bring it with him.

Still, he did not like carrying such a big parcel, and he was glad when he reached the outskirts of the village.

There he met Tom Merry & Co hurrying along.

"Hallo, here you are, Gussy!" said Blake, trying to speak as if nothing had happened between them. "Just coming along to meet— My hat! What have you got there—no fireworks?"

Arthur Augustus gave him a haughty look, and attempted to pass without answering.

"Here, hold on, Gussy!" snorted Blake, quite losing patience. "Dash it all, drop this rot! What about the fireworks, you ass? Are there fireworks in there?"

Arthur Augustus halted. There was uneasiness as well as lofty dignity in his expression now. What his chums would say when they know how the fiver had been spent, he could only guess.

"Yaas. There are fireworks in this parcel, Jack Blake!" he said coldly. "Kindly allow me to pass. As I have already told you, I do not now regard you as friends!"

"But—but do you mean to say there are five quids' worth of fireworks in there?" yelled Herries.

"Not at all! You—you see, it—it—"

Gussy paused, hardly knowing how to make his awkward explanation. And as he paused, a newcomer appeared on the scene. It was the old lady in the shawl, and she appeared to have been hurrying. She halted and waved her gamp at Arthur Augustus.

"You young rascal!" she observed shrilly. "Give me back that parcel at once!"

"Bai Jove! Are you addressin' me, ma'am?"

"Of course I am, young fellow! Just you 'and over that parcel sharp!"

Arthur Augustus blinked at her in amazement.

"But, my good woman—" he began.

"I'm not your good woman!" retorted the lady, waving her gamp again at the astonished Arthur Augustus. "Just you 'and over that there parcel before I lay this gamp round your ears!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Nice thing, ain't it?" gasped the lady indignantly. "Nice thing for a young gent like you to pinch a woman's parcel almost before her very eyes!"

"Bai Jove! But—but I have not taken your parcel, ma'am!" protested Gussy. "You are makin' a mistake and—"

"Don't tell no lies about it, you bare-faced young villain!" almost shrieked the old lady. "Makin' me come runnin' after you like this! Mister Crabb sez as you must 'ave took it!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Blake, with a deep chuckle, as the juniors stared at Gussy's crimson features. "Fancy old Gussy taking to pinching things from ladies! Oh, Gussy!"

"How could you, Gussy?" said Monty Lowther reprovingly. "This comes of allowing him out without his keepers!"

"Hand the lady back her parcel, Gussy. I'm surprised at you!" said Blake severely.

Arthur Augustus trembled in his agitation.

"I tell you I have not taken this person's parcel, Blake!" he shouted. "She is labahwin' undah a misapprehension! This is my parcel, and it contains fireworks, you cacklin' wottahs!"

"Well, the—the bare-faced young rascal!" stuttered the village lady. "Are you goin' to 'and over my parcel, or am I to call a policeman, young man?"

"Oh, gwat Scott!" Arthur Augustus was flustered and distressed at the unpleasant happening; but he was built of stern stuff, and even the lady's forbidding and threatening appearance did not make him forfeit his dignity or his rights. "Watah not, ma'am! You are mistaken, my good lady, and I certainly cannot hand ovah my parcel!"

The lady glared at her—apparently looking for a policeman. But in Rylcombe, as everywhere, policemen were not to be found when wanted—fortunately, in this case, for Arthur Augustus, perhaps. In the emergency the good lady realised she would have to rely upon herself.

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"You—you barefaced young scamp!" she shrieked. "Then you ain't 'anding over that there parcel what don't belong to you?"

"Watah not, ma'am. As it belongs to me, I must wefuse to do so. Wight is wight, and— Oh, gwat Scott!"

What happened next was sudden and startling—especially to Arthur Augustus. Apparently the old lady was very short-tempered and impatient. Finding no constable near to see justice done, she determined to attend to the matter herself.

She rushed at Arthur Augustus, her gamp waving menacingly.

"Look out, Gussy!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Whether the lady intended to use the gamp as a weapon or only as a persuasive measure, Gussy did not stay to inquire. He gave one horrified gasp, then turned tail and bolted.

He fairly flew.

Determined as he was to stand up for his rights—or what he believed to be his rights—Arthur Augustus forgot that determination in that moment of excitement. He also forgot the dignity and repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

With the big, bulky parcel under his arm, one hand clutching his topper, and his eyeglass streaming out behind him at the end of its cord, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tore for his life.

For several yards the lady gasped and panted in pursuit, shouting at the top of her somewhat unladylike voice. But she was not built for speed, and she gave it up, almost bursting with breathless indignation and wrath.

But Arthur Augustus did not stop or even dare to look round until the gates of St. Jim's hove in sight.

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Mistake!

"H A, ha, ha!"
The Terrible Three and Blake, Herries, and Digby roared; they could not help it. That there was a little mistake somewhere they realised well enough. It was quite usual for Arthur Augustus to make little mistakes. He had a genius for getting himself into trouble of some sort or other.

Not knowing that it was scarcely the fault of the swell of the Fourth this time, his chums howled as they saw him streaking for the distant horizon.

But their laughter ceased abruptly as the lady came back and glared at them.

"Go on—laugh, you young scamps!" panted the lady, trembling with emotion. "Which I'll report this to your 'cadmaster, you see if I don't! I see it now. It's one of your schoolboy larks, is it? Upsettin' a lady and makin' her hurry like this!" added the lady, in great and overpowering indignation. "A joke—to take a lady's property, like this!"

"He must have taken it by mistake, ma'am," said Blake. "It's all right. You'll get it—"

"All right, is it?" articulated the lady explosively. "A laughing matter, is it? I'll make you laugh the other side of your faces, you young himps!"

"Sorry, ma'am! But— Oh, my hat!"

Tom Merry did not finish. Like Arthur Augustus the juniors did not stay to argue the point further. They stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

Possibly the impatient and irate lady imagined they were also in the plot—had aided Arthur Augustus in what she now believed was a schoolboy lark.

At all events she behaved towards them as if she did.

She raised her gamp aloft and took a stride towards them.

That one stride was enough. Not wanting to make a closer acquaintance with the terrible old lady's gamp, Tom Merry & Co. streaked in the wake of the fleeing Arthur Augustus.

They pulled up a hundred yards nearer to St. Jim's, with a bend in the lane hiding the wildly gesticulating old lady from their sight.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jack Blake, gurgling. "What a scream! Old Gussy will be the death of me yet!"

"Too bad!" gasped Tom Merry. "Too bad to upset that old girl like that! Wonder what on earth Gussy has been up to?"

"Looks as if he's got the old girl's parcel instead of his own!" opined Lowther. "At least, she thinks he has. We'll soon know, anyway!"

They hurried towards the school, anxious to get an explanation of the extraordinary happening from Arthur Augustus. They found him sprawled in the armchair in Study No. 6, apparently in a state of exhaustion. On the table lay the big, bulky parcel that was the bone of contention.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, as they looked at him in a grinning crowd. "Bai Jove! That feahful woman has put me in quite a fluttah, deah boys. It is most extwaordinawy! Can you explain it?"

"Explain it!" said Monty Lowther, with mock indignation. "It is for you to explain, D'Arcy! I'm surprised at you—robbing a poor old woman like that!"

"Shameful!" said Manners.

"Shocking!" said Digby, shaking his head. "We shall have to drop Gussy's acquaintance after this, you fellows!"

"Oh, of course!"
 "Nothing else for it! Scandalous!" said Lowther, eyeing the stupefied Gussy severely. "I expect this will mean the sack for Gussy—probably choky!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowthah, you feahful ass—"

"Two years in a reformatory, at least," suggested Digby. "Did you just play the sneak-thief, Gussy, or was it a case of robbery with violence? If it was—"

"Weally, Digbay—"

"Who ever would have dreamed such a thing of Gussy?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared in stupefaction at the contents of the parcel.

They were not fireworks—far from it!

Almost dazedly Arthur Augustus picked out the first article and blinked at it.

It was a small, aluminium frying-pan, new and shiny.

Blake plunged his hand into the parcel and brought to light a scrubbing-brush.



"Look out, Gussy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave one horrified gasp as the old lady rushed at him, her gamp waving furiously; then he turned tail and bolted. With the big, bulky parcel under one arm, one hand clutching his topper, and his eyeglass streaming at the end of its cord, Gussy flew for his life. (See Chapter 4.)

gasped Blake, rolling his eyes in pretended horror. "I suppose it was a sudden temptation—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"That's it," said Lowther. "What a disgrace for the school! Oh, Gussy!"

"Robbing a poor old lady!"

"Dishonouring the noble name of D'Arcy!"

"And the school! What will the newspapers say about it? Schoolboy criminal! Isn't it frightful?"

"Shocking! Gussy—"

"You feahful asses—" shouted Arthur Augustus, jumping up in great wrath. "Will you dwy up? I know you are onlay waggin'—"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy's chums burst into a roar.

Arthur Augustus glowered at them, almost frothing at the mouth in his deep indignation.

"You—you feahful wottahs!" he choked. "I will vewy soon show you what is in that wotten parcel!"

Almost beside himself with emotion, the swell of the Fourth jumped to the table and began to tear at the string round the parcel. He tugged and tore, and at last the string snapped, and then he tore the parcel open.

As he did so there was a yell.

Lowther had a lucky dip, so to speak, and held up—a pair of lady's stockings!

Tom Merry & Co. blinked at them, and then they howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gazed from the frying-pan to the pair of woollen stockings with eyes nearly starting from his head.

He almost fainted.

There were other articles in the parcel—a packet of soap, a red and white spotted handkerchief, a tin of treacle, and various other articles of a domestic and family nature. Mr. Crabb's establishment was the usual village store where most things from a packet of pins to a pair of gloves or a quart of paraffin could be purchased.

Evidently the old lady had purchased quite a variety of articles there.

At all events, even Arthur Augustus was now convinced that he had made a mistake.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he stutered, dropping the frying-pan as if it had become suddenly red-hot. "Oh, gwcat Scott! So—so that is why that feahful old person was aftah me, deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cacklin' wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus, blushing

furiously. "Cannot you fellows see that the mattah is sewious! There has been a mistake!"

"A master-take, you mean!" gurgled Lowther, unable to resist a pun. "A Master D'Arcy-take, in fact! Oh, Gussy! And you vowed you hadn't robbed that old lady! Oh, Gussy!"

"Shocking!"

"Will you stop it?" shrieked Arthur Augustus, dancing about in his towering wrath. "Cannot you wottahs see that a wotten mistake—"

"D'Arcy!"

It was a sharp, rasping voice from the doorway.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ratty!" groaned Tom Merry, suddenly straightening his face.

It was "Ratty"—otherwise Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House.

In the ordinary way the sight of Mr. Ratcliff in their study doorway would have astonished the juniors, for Mr. Ratcliff's place was in the New House.

But they were scarcely surprised now. That morning Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton had gone off to London to attend an educational conference, leaving Mr. Ratcliff in charge of the school. Naturally, being a very officious sort of person, Mr. Ratcliff had also taken charge of the Head's study, and of the School House.

So Tom Merry & Co. were scarcely surprised to see him turn up now. Mr. Ratcliff was a kill-joy, and the sound of their hilarious laughter was bound to attract him to the spot.

But they were surprised to see, just behind Mr. Ratcliff, the somewhat portly form of an elderly lady in a shawl.

It was the old lady who had chased Gussy—and them.

"M-mum-my hat!" gasped Blake.

"Now for it!" chuckled Lowther.

Lowther saw an interesting interview ahead.

Evidently it was not their hilarity, after all, that had attracted the unpopular Housemaster of the New House.

They knew what it really was, just as well as the unlucky Arthur Augustus did.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped, wishing the earth would open up and swallow him. "That—that feahful person again! Oh cwumbs!"

Mr. Ratcliff glowered about the room.

"D'Arcy!" he said at last, his sharp eyes resting on Gussy's crimson features. "You will come with me at once to the visitors' room! A common person from the village is there, and she states—"

"Common person, am I?" hooted Mrs. Moggridge, almost in his ear. "How dare you call me a common person! Common person yourself, old vinegar-face!"

Mr. Ratcliff leaped almost a foot into the air. Quite obviously he had had no idea the good lady was just behind him.

"G-good gracious!" he stuttered. "Madam, how dare you refer to me in such terms? Bless my soul! You were requested to remain in the visitors' room, my good woman. You had no right whatever to trespass farther into the school precincts! How dare you, I say?"

He glared round at the lady, his acid features pink with wrath. He objected to being called "old vinegar-face," as was natural, especially as he must have been well aware that it was well within the truth.

But if he glared, the good lady glared still more. And then, quite suddenly, she caught sight of Arthur Augustus, and she instantly transferred her glare to him.

"Why, there he is!" she cried shrilly. "Yes, that's the young villain as stole my parcel—at least, it's 'im as took the wrong parcel, like!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Mrs. Moggridge pushed her way into the room.

It was only then that the juniors realised she was carrying a parcel—rather a bulky parcel, almost similar in shape and size to the one Gussy had brought home.

At about the same moment the lady spotted the opened parcel on the table.

"Lawks!" she puffed. "And there's my parcel, too! Here, just you wrap that there parcel up agen, young man, and 'and it over, sharp. And if there's anythin' missin'—"

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus began to get some inkling of the mystery as he sighted the second parcel. "I weally assuah you, my deah madam, that nothin' whatevah has been touched," he gasped. "Wathah not! Appawntly, a wegweattable cwwah has been made—an unfortunate mistake—"

"Mistake you calls it, hey?" snorted Mrs. Moggridge. "If it ain't a joke, then it's criminal carelessness—that's what I calls it. Here's me, 'ad to rush all this way, out o' breath, not to mention bein' flustered and flurried till I 'ardly know where I am! If I 'ad you, you careless young himp—"

"Will you be silent, ma'am!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Kindly leave me to deal with this—this disgraceful matter. D'Arcy, did you, or did you not, knowingly take this—this person's property?"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, sir! I—I must have taken it in mistake for my own parcel—a parcel of fireworks. This—this lady has actually charged me with stealin' the wotten thing," ended Gussy indignantly. "She wefused to accept my assuawence—"

"Of course I did!" hooted the lady. "'Ow did I know as you took it in mistake for your own? I thought as you'd pinched it till Mister Crabb's errand boy came arter me on 'is bike just arter you'd bolted. He'd got this parcel, what I s'pose is yours, and he said as you must 'ave took mine for it. I told 'im as I'd bring it along and get it changed for me own, and 'ere I am! Now jest you 'and over that property of mine, sharp!"

"Oh, yaas, ma'am!"

Arthur Augustus jumped to obey, for Mrs. Moggridge was handling her gamp in a businesslike manner. Tom Merry helped him to pack and tie up the parcel again, the rest of the juniors looking on, trying hard to hide their smiles. During that brief interval the justly incensed old lady returned Mr. Ratcliff's glares with interest, and then, as Tom Merry handed over her parcel, she threw the other on the table with an expressive sniff.

Had it been a heavy parcel it would, doubtless enough, have remained on the table. But, despite its bulk, it was remarkably light, and the laws of force and gravitation did the rest.

It slithered across the smooth top of the study table, and seeing it was overshooting the mark, Tom Merry made a frantic grab at it as it slid off the edge of the table.

Unfortunately only his elbow caught it, and thus deflected, and given added force, it rebounded and plunged full into the fire.

It wedged itself in the grate, and a smother of smoke and flame licked round it.

"Look out!" yelled Tom.

He made another frantic grab, an instant too late. The brown paper burst into flame, and then followed a sudden hissing sound, and a—

BANG!

It was a truly terrific explosion, and it fairly blew the parcel to pieces. It did more, for that first alarming explosion was instantly followed by a series of bangs and crashes and fizzings as a perfect cascade of fireworks—rip-raps, crackers of various kinds, catherine-wheels, rockets, roman candles, golden rains, and coloured fires—whizzed and jumped and flew about the room.

Mrs. Moggridge gave one wild shriek and collapsed into the armchair, while Mr. Ratcliff almost leaped out of his skin.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"That's done it!"

A rocket soared upwards, missed Mr. Ratcliff's acid face by an inch, and struck the wall. Rip-raps and crackers flew out of the fire and scattered about the room, amid an uproar of yells and crackings and bangings. To add to the general alarm sparks were flying about in a highly dangerous manner.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Quick, you fellows, or the blessed place will be on fire!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was too flabbergasted to move, but his chums regained their wits in a moment. They rushed about, jumping and stamping on the sparks and on the fireworks.

For several breathless, exciting moments they plunged about, Mrs. Moggridge's shrieks adding to the general din. Round the open doorway a crowd of startled juniors and seniors gazed in on the scene of havoc and confusion in scared wonder.

It was soon over, however.

Tom Merry stamped out the last spark from a cushion and blinked round through the smoke in great relief.

"Phew!" he gasped. "Those curtains all right, Blake?"

Oh, good!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The last of the fireworks had already spluttered out, and all danger of fire was now past.

Mrs. Moggridge sat up, her florid features quite pale. Apparently she had recovered from her brief faint.

"Lawks!" she gasped faintly. "Lawks! What's 'appened?"

"All right now, ma'am!" panted Tom Merry. "It was only the fireworks in that parcel!"

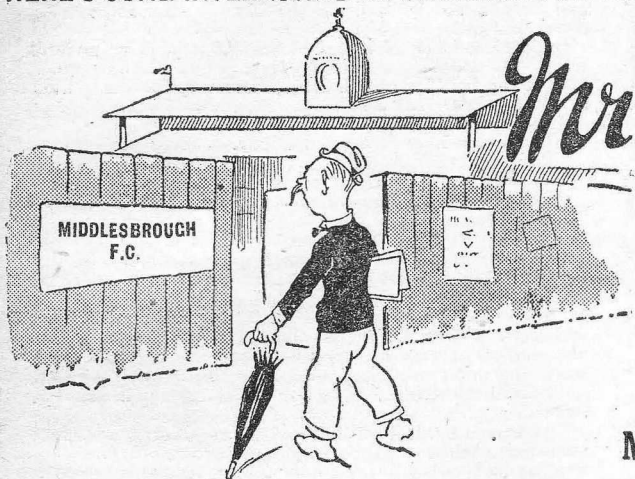
He blinked in quite a scared way at Mr. Ratcliff. That gentleman's face was ashen as he staggered to his feet. A glance at it showed Tom that they might expect another exhibition of fireworks of another kind from Mr. Ratcliff.

The Housemaster got his breath back at last.

"G-good gracious!" he gasped. "G-gug-good heavens! Is—is it all over, Merry? Is the danger—"

(Continued on page 12.)

HERE'S SOME INTERESTING INFORMATION FOR YOU FOOTER FANS!



Mr. Parker POPS IN

TO SEE
MIDDLESBROUGH!

It's a wonderful job our special football representative has, going about the country getting inside information about famous football clubs. Even if he does sometimes come out "on his neck" he always brings with him the real goods—as you'll see from the interesting article below!

I HAVE a very frank and full confession to make at the very start this week. I don't think these notes about the Middlesbrough football team will be very good. In fact, I am quite sure they will be bad, and I must really ask your forgiveness by way of a start.

"Granted," did you say? Thank you very much indeed! The trouble is that I have such a headache. I usually do a bit of talking myself, but at the Middlesbrough ground I was just talked to and talked to on all the subjects under the sun, until I had to come away before my cranium split completely.

So beware, my lads, and never go near Ayresome Park when the fellows who belong to that club are not actually playing. If you do, they will talk you completely off your head. That's how I feel.

The trouble in the first place is that there isn't any sort of warning outside the ground. It sounds quite nice, doesn't it—Ayresome Park? It sounds the sort of place into which you can go for a quiet rest. Well, I suppose a spider's web seems to be exactly the sort of place where a fly can take a quiet rest, but it isn't. Neither is Ayresome Park.

The Patient Angler!

IT was very early in the morning when I poked my nose into this nice-sounding football ground, but I have never yet known anybody get up sufficiently early enough in the morning to find Mr. "Pat" McWilliam asleep. He's the manager, you know, and is said to get so much money as wages that he is up every morning waiting for the banks to open so that he can put some money in.

Personally, I don't believe that story. Going right into the office, I found "Pat" all right, but I suddenly got the idea that I had run into the wrong place. He wasn't puzzling over the history of football teams; he wasn't thinking about his eleven for the following Saturday. He was fiddling about with some fish-hooks. "What I am wondering," said Pat, talking more to himself than to me, "is whether I should have caught that pike this morning if I had used that hook instead of this one."

Now, of course, I don't know the least thing about fishing for pike, or fishing of any other kind. But Mr. Peter McWilliam, the fellow who played for Scotland, you know, is just dead keen on fishing. On any sort of thing which inhabits the waters, from whales to tiddlers, this manager of Middlesbrough will talk for hours.

As fishing is not in my line, I left the office to have a look round for some of the

players. I found them all right. There was Jacky Carr, for instance. Now, Jacky is the long-standing player on the books. Indeed, if he had started growing a beard when he first played for Middlesbrough, it would now have done good service as a carpet for Mr. Phil Bach's office.

The Human Porcupine!

"HOW did you manage to get back into the First Division?" I asked Jacky.

"Well," he said, "it was like this. We were playing Chelsea, and I took with me some pigeons and told a friend to release one every time we scored a goal. There was one—a fine bird that—which went home in record time. You should see those pigeons of mine; they're just wonderful. My best is a—"

Of course, I don't know anything about pigeons, but I just had to stand there for half an hour while Jacky Carr talked the most learned stuff about his homers, his buff orpingtons (I'm not sure about that strain)—and so on and so on.

Of course, the Middlesbrough team used to be made up almost entirely of members of the Carr family, but Jacky is the only one left now. All the lads call him "Daddy," and one of the oldest inhabitants of Middlesbrough told me a story—which he declared was true—of the day when Jacky Carr first played for 'Boro. He came up for a trial, and there was some fun in the dressing-room. They could not find a pair of pants which were anything like small enough for such a wee kiddie, and the shirts were the same trouble—all too large. Eventually, a messenger was sent out quickly to the nearest shop for a packet of pins; knickers and shirt much too large were put on Jacky, all the pins were used to keep the garments in approximately their proper positions, and Jacky was sent on to the field.

The game had not been long in progress, so the story goes, when wee Jacky charged an opponent. The man immediately protested to the referee, declaring that he didn't mind playing against footballers, but objected to being charged by a porcupine.

From Jackie Carr I was turned over to John Smith, the full-back, who immediately went off into a long discourse on farming, and I didn't dare go near to Pease, because I felt sure he would talk to me about the virtues of pease-pudding, and for my part, pease-pudding has no virtues.

Patience Rewarded!

THEN by way of going from one thing to another, there is Robert Bruce on the staff of the 'Boro, and, of

course, he comes from Scotland, and wants to talk Scottish history all the time in a very Scotch accent. Manager McWilliam must have known a bit of history, too, for he signed Robert Bruce on last season. The 'Boro were then in the Second Division, but, of course, they wanted to go up into the First Division. And you know the story of the spider, which was always trying to get to the top of that silken thread which hung down from the roof, and how Robert Bruce watched it. Well, the modern Robert Bruce, inspired by that story, told the Middlesbrough players that if they kept on trying to get to the top they would do it. And they did it. That's why they are now in the First Division again.

Really, it is a strange collection of footballers they have gathered together at Middlesbrough. Owen Williams, who used to play for Clapton Orient, knows all about the handicaps and the form of the greatest runners of to-day and yesterday. Owen has done some sprinting other than down the touch-line and he has won some medals, too.

Something for Nothing!

THERE are two fellows in the Middlesbrough side who have medals of which they have a right to be proud—because they got them for doing nothing. Jack Carr is one of them, for he received a medal for being a spectator at an International match, for which he was selected as twelfth man.

The other is Reg Freeman, the full-back. On an occasion of an English League match, a player named Maitland was chosen, but almost at the last minute it was discovered that Maitland was a Scotsman by birth. So Freeman, who was reserve, was ordered to strip and get ready to take Maitland's place. Just as Freeman was stripped, however, there came a new order to the effect that Maitland was to play after all. But at the end of the match Freeman got a medal—for stripping!

McFarlane, the newcomer from Scotland, and a left half almost as canny as McWilliam himself ever was, is an expert in briar pipes, while Jack Elkes, who has gone north from Tottenham, is the champion leg-puller of football. One of these days I shall get my own back on Elkes, because he has such long legs that if I do get hold of them he will have them pulled unmercifully. I won't tell you how I had mine pulled by Elkes—it would be unfair to myself. The best Elkes' yarn concerns a medal which he received when he went to Australia with an England team. Some time after returning, he accidentally dropped it into the fire. When he got it out, the coating had been burnt off, and on one side there was designed a rugby player, and on the other a cricket player. Jack would have told me many other stories, but after a big struggle I got away, and was making for the door when George Camsell called out: "Hi! Stop while I tell you how I got a 'birdie' at the third yesterday afternoon."

But I had already had more than enough of birds and things, so I didn't stop for the story. But on the wall outside the ground I chalked these words: "Bring an encyclopedia all ye who enter here."

"NOSEX."

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"The 'Fifth' at St. Jim's!"

(Continued from page 10.)

"Safe enough now, sir," said Tom reassuringly. "The curtain's a bit burned, but that's practically all."

"All!" almost shrieked the Housemaster. "I—I have never been so—so astounded, never experienced such a scandalous, nerve-racking experience in my life! Monstrous! I—I—"

"It was only the fireworks—in that parcel, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Silence, Merry!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. He pointed a shaking forefinger at the lady in the armchair. "Woman, you are responsible for this—this outrage, an outrage that might have had serious results. Go! Leave this school at once, or I will immediately telephone for the police to remove you!"

"Oh—oh laws!" gasped Mrs. Moggridge. The good lady had undoubtedly had a fright. She was still white, and she staggered up from the chair, looking quite limp. The exhibition of fireworks had quite put the damper on her own display, so to speak. She was as limp as a damp squib herself, and all the fight had left her.

"Laws!" she repeated, her voice quite subdued. "Which I'll be only too pleased to get out of this awful place. But you mark my words, you in that gown, I'll 'ave you all up for this, you see if I don't!" She grabbed at her parcel which she had dropped on the floor in her fright. "Woman, eh? Old woman yourself—and a rascally old woman you looks in that there gown!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Blake, almost choking. Kildare stepped into the room, his hand over his mouth. He had soon grasped the position.

"This way, ma'am," he said. He smiled in a friendly way at Mrs. Moggridge—and Eric Kildare had a smile which few could resist. Almost meekly, though she glared back at Mr. Ratcliff fiercely enough, Mrs. Moggridge followed Kildare, and the grinning crowd round the doorway parted to let them through.

Thus Mrs. Moggridge departed from St. Jim's with her parcel, and Mr. Ratcliff was even more relieved than Arthur Augustus to see her depart.

"G-good gracious!" he gasped faintly. "What a terrible woman! Never—never in all my experience have I been so insulted!"

"Bai Jove! Nor I, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus feelingly. "She actually charged me—"

"Silence!" "Oh, bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Silence, D'Arcy!" barked Mr. Ratcliff. "You, sir, are responsible for this disgraceful affair, and you alone!"

"Bai Jove. Onlay a moment ago you said that tewwible lady was responsible. Weally, sir—"

"Silence!" thundered the irate Housemaster. "How dare you bandy words with me, D'Arcy! By your criminal carelessness you have brought ridicule and contempt upon me, your temporary headmaster! You will follow me at once to the Head's study!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Silence! Come!" It was a bellow. With a dismal glance at his chums Arthur Augustus followed the sour-tempered Housemaster as he whisked away towards the Head's study. As the temporary headmaster, Mr. Ratcliff had, of course, taken charge of the Head's study as well as St. Jim's and everything else that could be taken charge of. Mr. Ratcliff liked power, and he always made the most of it when he got it.

There was a gleam in Mr. Ratcliff's eyes now, and his lips were tightly compressed. Mr. Ratcliff believed that the School House was undisciplined and slack, and he had always wished to have the chance to show his disciplinary methods there. He had his chance now, and the hapless Arthur Augustus was his first victim.

CHAPTER 6. Still Hope!

"HA, ha, ha!" Tom Merry & Co. could not help laughing. The sad result of Gussy's little mistake was certainly amusing—to outsiders. Though they knew no details yet, the affair was now more or less clear to them.

Once again Arthur Augustus had blundered. It was, as Blake remarked, just what they might have expected of old Gussy.

Yet the juniors—or Blake, Herries, and Digby, at least—looked rather grim as they had time now to look over the damage done. A big hole was burnt in the curtains, another

in the hearthrug, and numerous holes in carpet, cushions, and covers, not to mention the litter of burnt cartridge-paper and other fragments of the fireworks.

Blake closed the door to shut out the inquisitive, grinning sightseers, and they started on their job of cleaning up.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Blake, becoming serious. "What a mess! That—that ass!"

"That awful dummy!" gasped Herries.

"That born idiot!" snorted Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three roared again.

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry as Blake glared at him.

"But it was funny. Twig old Ratty's chivvy when the old girl called him a rascally old woman in a gown? Ha, ha, ha! Wouldn't it have been ripping if she'd laid about the old rotter with her gamp? Isn't Gussy a dream?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've got to thank Gussy for a ripping entertainment!" said Lowther regretfully. "It was a pity it didn't last longer. I was so hoping to see the old girl go for Ratty! I don't think I've ever been so disappointed in my life! Still, I'm rather sorry for old Gussy—he'll get it hot from Ratty!"

"Yes, he certainly will," said Tom Merry, his laugh vanishing suddenly. "Oh, my hat! Poor old Gussy! It was too bad, really! Let's hope Ratty doesn't lay it on too thickly!"

"I was forgetting that, too!" said Blake. "Poor old Gussy—always getting it in the neck! But what about the fireworks? Those can't be all he's bought. Five quid will buy—"

"Must be having the rest sent on," said Tom Merry. "I expect they were all Crabb had in stock at the moment. He'll be getting more in from Wayland to-morrow, and will send 'em on, I expect. It's a pity that little lot was burnt, though."

"Rotten! Still, old Ratty got a shock, and that's something to the good!" said Lowther.

"But what about our curtains and things?" said Blake wrathfully. "That—that ass, Gussy—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hollo, here he is!"

Arthur Augustus tottered into the study. He was almost doubled up, and his aristocratic features wore a most woful expression.

"Had it badly, old chap?" asked Tom sympathetically.

"Gwoogh! Ow-ow-ow!"

"How many?"

"Gwoogh! Foah on each hand, bai Jove!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Watty," panted Arthur Augustus, with great depth of feeling, "deserves to be boiled in oil!"

"He does if he gave you eight," said Tom. "And we know how he can lay it on, old fellow. Hard lines!"

"He isn't our blessed Housemaster!" said Herries warmly. "He's got no right—"

"I pointed that out to the feahful wuffian!" groaned Arthur Augustus, collapsing into the chair so lately occupied by Mrs. Moggridge. "I told him he was ovah-stwainin' his authowity, and takin' advantage of his tempowawy position! I wufused to be caned by him! But he insisted and gave me eight! Ow-ow-ow!"

"Oh, my hat! You told him that—all that?" yelled Blake.

"Yaas!"

"Well, you awful ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Still, it was a terrific licking just for making a careless mistake," said Tom, shaking his head.

"I did not make a careless mistake, Tom Mewwy!" shouted Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It was all that wottah Gay's fault!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Gay—Gordon Gay?"

"Yaas. I have thought it ovah, and am bound to say that I believe Gordon Gay was responsible!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in a voice that trembled with emotion. "The feahful wottah—"

"But—but how on earth could Gay—"

"Gay was in the shop at the time!" shouted Gussy excitedly and indignantly. "He tickled me into goin' to the door while the feahful spoofoah changed the parcels on the countah! I weally suspected some sort of twick at the time!"

And his noble features flushed with wrath. Arthur Augustus went on to tell of Gordon Gay's little ruse.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry, trying hard not to smile. "It certainly looks like it, Gussy; it's just the sort of thing Gay would do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "So that's how it happened."

"I see no reason for wotten cacklin', Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus heatedly. "It was a wotten twick, and I shall give Gay a feahful thwashin' when I see the wottah! He has caused wawious people a great deal of annoyance, and has also caused me to get an undeserved thwashin' fwom that wottah, Watty!"

And the unfortunate Arthur Augustus hugged his burning palms again, his expression showing the wrath and indignation that seethed within him.

"Well, my hat!" said Blake. "Still, you would go off on your own, Gussy. If you'd waited for us, and been with us, it would never have happened. Let this be a last-lesson to you."

"Wats! Wubbish! Wot!"

"But what about the fireworks?" demanded Tom anxiously. "It's a pity that little lot's been wasted. Still, so long as Crabb's sending the rest along in time—"

"When did he say he'd send 'em?" asked Blake.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus blinked at his chums in sudden uneasiness.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"You told him to be sure to send them before evening to-morrow, of course?" said Blake.

"And I hope you ordered some decent rockets!" said Lowther.

"And plenty of rip-raps," said Tom anxiously. "Those are the things for fun—easy to chuck round a senior's legs. Now—"

"We must save some of those for old Ratty!" said Lowther. "If we drop a few down his chimney—"

"Oh, bai Jove! Weally, you fellows—"

Again Arthur Augustus paused and blinked at his chums.

Tom Merry gave a sudden gasp as he saw the look on Gussy's face.

"Gussy, you ass, what— You haven't gone and forgotten to order more—" he began.

"If you have, for goodness' sake tell us now, and some of us can run over for more! Hand the cash over—"

"Oh, bai Jove! The—the fact is, you fellows, I was obliged to spend the west of the money!" stammered Arthur Augustus feebly. "You see, my outfittah's bill came to ovah four pounds, and—"

"What?" It was a yell.

"It was most unfortunate," explained Gussy feebly.

"Mr. Wiggs happened to be outside his shop, and he called me inside and mentioned his bill. Appawntly he is in need of the monay, and so I was obliged to pay him, you know."

"What?" yelled Blake again. "You—you mean those fireworks were all you bought?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And that you've paid a thumping tailor's bill with the rest of the fiver?" howled Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Answer me, you ass!" shrieked Blake wildly.

"Weally, Blake, I wish you would not woah at me so! You are well awah that I stwongly object to bein' woahed at!"

"Oh, you—you—"

"It was weally most unfortunate, and I vewy much wegwet the necessity, you fellows!" mumbled Gussy. "But all the fivah has gone, and now all the fireworks have gone. It was most unfortunate that that feahful wottah Gay changed those parcels!"

"Oh, you—you—you—"

"But, as you must agwee, it was all his fault," said Gussy. "All his fault fwom beginnin' to end. We should, at least, have twelve-and-sixpence worth, you know. Howevah—"

"And now we've no fireworks and no money, either!" yelled Herries, his rather leisurely brain grasping the facts at last. "Well—well, of all the—the—"

"Of all the born idiots!"

"Of all the—the raving chumps!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Smash him!" howled Herries. "This is all through his getting on his silly, thumping high horse! Bump him! Teach him a lesson, the silly owl!"

"Here, hold on!" said Tom Merry, laughing ruefully. "It can't be helped now, and eight from old Ratty's enough for Gussy without us starting on him!"

"That's so!" said Blake, breathing hard. "But of all the—the—"

"Bai Jove! How could I help it, Blake, you feahful wottah!" shouted Gussy indignantly. "I shall certainly wefuse to be bumped or smashed, Hewwies!"

"Help it!" gasped Blake, restraining the desire to smite his noble chum hip and thigh. "Help it, you born idiot! Why did you pay old Riggs? At a time like this, too! Let us down after all! You could have sent the thumping bill to your pater, or Riggs could have waited a few days

longer. You've never kept him waiting before, and he knows his money's safe. Oh, you—you—"

"Wats! Wubbish! I wefuse to be wated at in this mannah!" snorted Arthur Augustus, trembling with indignation. "I expected sympathy fwom you fellows. I wefuse to be blamed for what is not my fault!"

"But, you born idiot—"

"I wefuse to be called a born idiot!"

"But listen—"

"I wefuse to listen!"

"It's all your fault—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus got up and made for the door, his noble head in the air. Apparently he was well on his high horse once again. The door opened and closed behind him—with a bang that rang along the length of the passage.

"Well," exclaimed Blake eloquently—"well, upon my word! Dished and done again! No fireworks, and no money. Did you ever see such a fathead?"

"The frozen limit!"

"Rotten!"

"Rotten isn't the word for it!" groaned Tom Merry. "I fancied something was wrong when I saw him with the parcel. Well, it can't be helped, I suppose. No good ragging Gussy now it's done. Besides, he's had enough for one day. All we can do—"

He paused as the door was kicked open, almost expecting Arthur Augustus to appear again. But it was Bernard Glyn.

"Oh, here you are!" said Glyn, with a snort. "Where the thump have you been?"

Tom Merry & Co. stared at the inventor of the Shell.

"Why, what's up?" demanded Manners.

"I want you chaps to help me make some fireworks," explained Glyn. "I've got a heap of stuff up in the top box-room."

"Oh, good man!"

(Continued on next page.)

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"Ripping!"

Seven gloomy faces brightened up at once.

"I'd have started work before, only I hadn't the cash," said Glyn. "Noble and Dane are helping, but I want more hands. I want you fellows. You helped me last year, you'll remember, and you know the job. I've got lots of powder and cardboard and stuff. We'll have quite a decent stock by to-morrow night if we stick at it."

"But prep, you ass—"

"I've not forgotten prep. We work before and after prep, and then we get up after lights out and get going again."

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a combined groan.

"We did that last time," said Glyn warmly. "No way to get the things made in time otherwise. Take us all our time even then, as I'm busy on a guy of old Ratty. I want to make it really like the dear old chap this time. If you aren't on, you slackers—"

"Oh, we're on!" said Tom, with a rueful laugh. "Anything for a quiet life, and to get fireworks for to-morrow night. Yes, you can count me in for one."

"I suppose we'd better all turn up," said Blake resignedly. "No other way to get 'em done in time."

"None," said Glyn. "Is it a go, then?"

"Yes, you ass!"

"Right!" grinned Glyn, rubbing a soot-black hand across his grimy, perspiring brow. "I'll get back to it, then. Come along as soon as you can."

And the inventive genius and amateur firework manufacturer departed in great haste. Bernard Glyn always was in a great hurry over everything. Tom Merry & Co., looking a trifle more cheerful now, went off to change into old clothes—a very necessary precaution when working for the schoolboy inventor. Smelly chemicals were apt to get spilled, explosions were apt to occur—all sorts of accidents were liable to happen when Glyn was busy. One had to be ready for anything, in fact.

CHAPTER 7.

In the Still Hours!

"EXTWAORDINAWY!"

To Arthur Augustus D'Arcy it certainly was.

The swell of the Fourth had not allowed the sun to go down on his wrath.

Unfortunately, however, he had had little chance to disclose that fact to his chums. He had scarcely seen any of them that evening. It was a complete mystery to Arthur Augustus. Blake and the others had completely vanished from Study No. 6 before prep, and also after prep.

Actually Arthur Augustus, secretly, was anxious to show that he was ready to forgive and forget, providing his chums were willing to oblige with a suitable apology for their treatment of him. Unfortunately they, on their part, were apparently not at all anxious to do that.

They had completely ignored his noble existence.

That they were "up to something" Gussy was assured. But what that something was, was a complete mystery to Arthur Augustus.

It puzzled and worried him. Moreover, he was already feeling very lonely. Arthur Augustus was a fellow who did not care to be silent for long. He was, as Blake rudely described it, over fond of wagging his chin. But that evening in his own study, at least, Arthur Augustus had found none to heed its wagging, so to speak.

Arthur Augustus could not help feeling sorry that he had mounted the high horse again; he very often did when his chums happened to take him seriously. Obviously, they had done so now, else why were they ignoring his existence, and leaving him to his own devices?

Really, it was puzzling and disturbing.

Blake & Co. turned up at bed-time, and Arthur Augustus eyed them covertly, and noticed that they whispered together like Guy Fawkes' conspirators. He heard Herries whisper something about lights out, and being sure to wake. What did that mean?

Arthur Augustus was beginning to worry about it. He always claimed that without his influence and the benefit of wisdom and advice his chums would come to grief, and possibly get into bad company and follow wicked ways. Now he feared that something of the sort was about to come about, now his chums were cutting themselves off from the fount of wisdom—otherwise himself.

"Extwaordinawy!" he repeated to himself, as he climbed into bed and shot a stealthy glance at Blake's bed. I have a vey good mind to wisk a loss of dignity and speak to Blake."

After a moment's reflection Arthur Augustus decided to take the terrific risk.

"Blake!" he exclaimed, rather coldly.

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Silence.

"Blake, deah boy," he said again, this time a trifle less coldly, "what is the mattah? I twust you youngstahs are not contemplan' mischief, you know?"

No answer.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I am quite suah you are awake, Blake. I insist upon an answer, you wottah! I wish to make it cleah, also, that I am weady to speak and be fwiends again, pwovidin' I get a satisfactory apology."

Again no answer.

Arthur Augustus gave it up then. He lay seething in-



The great bonfire flared high into the November sky and lit up the night. Gay & Co. were burned amid great excitement and enthusiasm, three rousing

wardly with wrath and injured dignity. He had offered the olive branch, and his chums had refused it. Very well. So let it be. All the same, Arthur Augustus determined to keep awake to see if there was anything in the remarks he had overheard Herries make.

Gradually the usual chatter and sleepy remarks of the Fourth-Formers dwindled away into silence, and still Arthur Augustus remained awake.

His reward came at last.

There came a sudden movement from Blake's bed. In the gloom Arthur Augustus glimpsed his chum slipping out of bed.

But he remained still as a mouse.

"You fellows awake?" murmured Blake.

"All serene," answered a voice from Herries' bed.

And Herries also climbed softly out of bed. A moment later they had awakened Digby, who followed their example after a few seconds argument. Evidently Digby did not like leaving his warm bed.

All three dressed quickly, and they had almost finished

when the door creaked open, and a dim form entered the dormitory.

It proved to be Tom Merry. "You chaps ready?" he said. "Oh, good! You haven't wakened old Gussy?"

"Rather not. We don't want this job mucked up, too." "I should think not. Gussy's a dear old chap, but he's such an awful ass," chuckled Tom Merry. "Much better not to risk it. Let the dear old blunderer slumber on in peace."

The four figures silently left the dormitory, and the door closed softly behind them.



cheery faces of the St. Jim's juniors. The effigies of Gordon and of Mr. Ratcliff met a similar fate to the accompaniment of (See Chapter 11.)

"Hallo, here you are, you slackers!" "Yes, here we are, Glyn!" grinned Tom Merry, as he blinked round the upper box-room. "My hat! This show looks like a cross between a rubbish heap, a chemical factory, and a cardboard-box factory."

"It smells like a chemical factory, anyway!" said Lowther. "Phew! Likewise hah!"

"Don't gas!" "What?"

"Don't waste time gassing; get on with the job!" snorted Bernard Glyn. "Dane and Noble and I have been on the job ten minutes or more. Get busy, and don't wag your chin so much!"

"Oh, my gat!" The Terrible Three, with Blake, Herries, and Digby, got busy. They took off their jackets, rolled up their sleeves, and got to work at the exciting occupation of manufacturing fireworks.

In the light from an electric lamp belonging to Glyn the good work went an apace, under the guidance and watchful eye of the schoolboy inventor. The box-room itself was a

sight. Tubes and jars and evil-looking and worse-smelling liquids and tools of all kinds were spread about in confusion. Sheets and scraps of cardboard, wooden laths, blue touch-paper, bottles of paste—all sorts of materials used for the manufacture of fireworks was strewn about boxes and floor, and the whole room smelled of gum, gunpowder, and chemicals.

On the dusty floor was a box nearly full of finished fireworks, many of them weird and wonderful-looking things of Glyn's own design.

Glyn himself was busy at work on his guy—which already bore a distinct and creditable resemblance to the sour-featured Mr. Ratcliff. The rest were busy with the fireworks themselves—some making tubes and cases, others filling them with powder, while the rest completed the finished articles with touch-paper and gum.

Tom Merry & Co. were soon as black and sticky and smelly as Glyn & Co.

While St. Jim's slumbered, Tom Merry & Co. and Glyn & Co. worked on like niggers in the common cause, to provide St. Jim's with thrills and excitement on the following night.

But suddenly Tom Merry paused in his work and gave a warning hiss.

"Quiet! Someone coming!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Work ceased as if by magic, and in dead silence the workers waited, listening.

There was no doubt about it. From the stairs leading to the box-room came a stealthy creak—a stealthy footstep, undoubtedly.

With a swift movement Bernard Glyn switched off the electric lamp, plunging the box-room into deep darkness.

The stealthy footsteps reached the landing outside the door. Silence followed, and the conspirators held their breath.

Who was it?

The silence was unnerving. Whoever it was outside the box-room door he was acting with great secrecy and caution. That it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy not one of the juniors dreamed—nor did they dream that Arthur Augustus was excessively cautious because he was determined to show his disparaging chums that he was not the fellow to "muck up" things.

The door creaked painfully as it was pushed slowly open. The firework manufacturers made out a dim form in the doorway. Then they heard a murmured voice:

"Bai Jove! There does not appeah to be anyone heah, aifah all!"

Scratch!

Arthur Augustus struck a match, and was just about to hold it above his head when the spirit of mischief seized upon Monty Lowther.

The next moment a deep, blood-curdling groan echoed through the box-room.

"Grruuuuuuugh!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The effect upon Arthur Augustus was startling—as might be expected.

He leaped nearly a foot into the air, and the lighted match fell from his nerveless fingers.

Unfortunately it dropped, still alight, into some of the half-finished fireworks on a packing-case.

The result was inevitable.

There was a sudden hiss, a splutter, and then—

Bang!

Through the silence of the night the explosion sounded like pealing, rolling thunder.

And it was followed almost instantly by a second explosion and the flash of burning paper.

What happened next Arthur Augustus, least of all, knew. He must have imagined the end of the world had come as the rest of the fireworks were set alight and got to work in real earnest.

Bang, bang, bang!

Whiz! Splutter, splutter! Whizz! Whirr! Bang!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great pip!"

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

In a matter of seconds the whole of the fireworks in the box awakened to sudden life, as if testifying to Glyn's genius. The box-room, that had been in darkness a few moments before, was lit up by a terrific succession of brilliant lights of all colours.

The air was full of flying, shooting fireworks, and Gussy's shriek of alarm was drowned in the general uproar of noise.

For several exciting, nerve-wracking minutes pandemonium reigned in the upper box-room at St. Jim's.

"Keep your wits, for goodness' sake!" yelled Tom Merry, realising that matters might be serious. "Jump on 'em—stamp 'em out, you idiots! Quick! We'll have the whole school on fire if we aren't quick!"

"Oh, great pip!"

Tom's yell was heard, and the import of his warning sank in. Even Arthur Augustus regained his scattered wits and began to work frantically to prevent a catastrophe.

Already the packing-case was alight, while all over the floor paper and cardboard was burning. The air in the little room was full of smoke and acrid with burning chemicals.

Stamping on paper and sparks and fireworks, the juniors worked like madmen. Glyn soon had his electric lamp lit again, and this made the task much easier for the scared juniors. Already from downstairs came sounds of movement and voices calling in alarm.

But Tom Merry & Co. were much too busy to hear or heed. They were bound to be found out now, and the only thing was to prevent a fire if they could.

Luckily they could, and did.

But it proved to be at the cost of discovery.

Racing feet sounded on the stairs; lights flashed from below. Tom Merry was just stamping out the last, spluttering firework when Kildare, a torch in his hand, dashed into the box-room. Behind Kildare was Darrell, Knox, Baker, and North.

"Good heavens!" panted Kildare, blinking round and coughing as the fumes reached him. "What—what—"

"Great Scott!" gasped Darrell.

The pyjama-clad seniors stared blankly at the scene of havoc. Tom Merry & Co. and Glyn & Co. stood with streaming eyes and blackened faces, looking as guilty as Guy Fawkes must have done when caught in the act. It was a sad scene—a tragic scene.

Glyn blinked about him, almost on the point of weeping. His fireworks had gone off—they were not duds—yet he was not pleased. He felt no thrill of honest pride. He only felt overpowering dismay and wrath. The luckless Arthur Augustus fairly wilted under his homicidal glare.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped feebly.

Despite his determination to exercise great caution, and thus avoid "mucking up" things, he had done it again, though Lowther certainly was not guiltless in the matter.

"Oh, m-mum-my hat!" groaned Tom Merry, rubbing his smarting eyes. "Now for it! It—it's all right, Kildare—no danger! We—we've managed to put it out."

"Great Scott!" choked Kildare. "You—you have, you reckless young rascals. Good gad, you'll get it hot for this, my lads! Oh, my hat!"

"Kildare, what—what— Good heavens!"

Mr. Ratcliff, in a pink dressing-gown, pushed his way through the crowd round the doorway. His eyes nearly started from his head as he viewed the startling scene and the tragic figures of the conspirators. He coughed and sneezed violently, and then he pointed a shaking forefinger at Tom Merry and his dismal chums.

"You—you young villains!" he stuttered. "What—what does this mean? Good heavens! Kildare, what—what—"

"Looks as if the young scamps have been making fireworks, sir!" commented Kildare grimly. "I suppose something went wrong, and they went off before they should."

"Dashed nearly set the place on fire by the look of things," said Gerald Knox. "Look at that packing-case! Gad! It's been a near thing, sir! We might have all been burned in our beds, Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Ratcliff almost exploded with indignant rage as the affair became clearer to him. He had insisted upon sleeping in the School House for reasons best known to himself. And he felt thankful he had done so now. Here was clear, convincing proof that the School House was unruly and undisciplined! This sort of thing never happened in the New House. He would be able to point this out to Dr. Holmes on his return.

The New House master thrilled inwardly with joy at the thought. Outwardly he retained his air of outraged and scandalised anger.

"G-good heavens!" he gasped, his voice thrilling with indignation. "Upon my word. Manufacturing dangerous fireworks on the premises—in the middle of the night! Monstrous! Outrageous! Abominable! Scandalous! We might all have been, as Knox says, burned to death in our beds as we slept! This is the second time this day that a serious conflagration has been narrowly averted! And these boys—the very same reckless scapgraces—are responsible."

He paused for breath and pointed a shaking finger at the unhappy Bernard Glyn.

"You, I presume, are the ringleader in this, Glyn," he articulated. "Your abominable experiments have long been a source of danger to the school. After this, I presume, I am justified in hoping that you will be expelled!"

"We're all equally to blame, Mr. Ratcliff!" said Tom Merry. "It's no more Glyn's fault than anyone's!"

"Silence, Merry!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "You have all amply earned expulsion, in my opinion. Since the outrage early this evening, when a junior study narrowly escaped fire, I have been considering the advisability of banning fire-

work exhibitions at this school to-morrow. After this—this more serious outrage, I consider it my bare duty to do so!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

There was a chorus of exclamations from seniors as well as juniors.

"You mean to stop the usual bonfire night show to-morrow, sir?" ejaculated Kildare blankly.

"Exactly! It has long been my view that such exhibitions are dangerous, not to speak of the waste of time and money!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "If Dr. Holmes has not returned by to-morrow evening I shall feel it my duty to forbid fireworks completely. Considering the extremely narrow escape we have just had of a very serious conflagration, I consider I am fully justified in taking that course."

"But, sir—" began Kildare.

"That will do, Kildare!" rasped Mr. Ratcliff, raising a bony hand. "I was already seriously considering doing this, and now this outrage has settled the matter! I am quite sure that Dr. Holmes will support my decision when he returns. But enough! Kildare, kindly see the boys to bed at once!"

"And—and these juniors, sir?" said Kildare, nodding at Tom Merry & Co.

"You will see to it that they clean themselves and also retire without delay, Kildare! Unfortunately, I have no power to expel them, and the matter must rest until Dr. Holmes returns."

"Very good, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff gave a last glare from the box-room, and whisked away. Apparently he took it quite for granted that the firework manufacturers would be expelled as a matter of course. Had he not thought so he would undoubtedly have taken their punishment in hand himself—and been pleased to do so. Mr. Ratcliff was like that.

The crowd dispersed, buzzing with the news of Mr. Ratcliff's latest edict. No bonfire at St. Jim's—no fireworks! It was almost past belief. Dismay and consternation quite overshadowed the possible humour in the tragic happenings in the box-room, and the luckless plight of the firework makers.

But Mr. Ratcliff was temporary headmaster, and whether he had the power or not, they knew he meant it and would carry it into effect.

St. Jim's retired to rest again, seething with wrath and dismay.

It was ten minutes and more before Tom Merry & Co. got back to their dormitories. In the Fourth dormitory Jack Blake got his first chance to speak his mind.

"Well," he exploded, as the door closed behind Kildare. "Well, did you ever? That—that born idiot! That blithering imbecile. That—that—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Old Watty is all that, deah boys. He must be pottay—"

"Ratty!" choked Blake. "I don't mean Ratty—"

"Then whom—"

"You, you born idiot!" exploded Blake. "You, you blithering imbecile, you raving, chump-headed, block-headed, wooden-headed chunk of lunacy! You, you—you—"

Words failed Jack Blake in that moment of supreme and overpowering emotion.

"Weally, Blake," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I see no reason why you should blame me! It was all Lowthah's fault. He startled me, you know, and I dwooped the match! I suppose that was what did it! In any case, you were to blame also for not tellin' me your plans, and— What—oh cwikey! Yoooop!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus felt himself seized on all sides as if by innumerable hands, and he descended to the dormitory floor with a terrific concussion.

Why they had treated Arthur Augustus thus Blake and the others did not explain—they left it to Gussy's imagination. When Arthur Augustus tottered to his feet at last his chums were in bed. For several thrilling seconds Arthur Augustus stood still, seething with intense indignation. And then he also climbed into bed. He did not feel equal to thrashing Blake, Herries, and Digby together or singly just then!

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy's Brain-Wave!

WHEN the Fourth turned out at rising-bell the following morning Arthur Augustus did not speak to his chums. He studiously refrained even from looking at them.

But he heard them. That morning, Blake, Herries, and Digby were most eloquent. All the fellows wanted to know the details of the previous night's happenings. Blake,

Herries, and Digby gave all details. They did not spare Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus squirmed and writhed as he heard the outspoken comments of the Fourth. But he manfully restrained the desire to explain his point of view. Hard as it was, he controlled his burning desire to thrash his faithless chums.

Naturally enough, Mr. Ratcliff's threat to ban all firework celebrations came as a shock and a blow to the Fourth. It caused consternation and seething discontent. The remarks that floated around concerning Mr. Horace Ratcliff would have made that gentleman's hair stand on end could he have heard them. The whole school, for that matter, had a great deal to say about Mr. Ratcliff.

The question still was, would he carry out his threat? And on that point even the most sanguine were forced to admit that there was very little chance of Mr. Ratcliff relenting.

The Fifth was a great day at St. Jim's. On that famous day the juniors expected some latitude, and usually got it. They were given an extra hour in the evening in which to celebrate the Fifth in time-honoured style, with bonfire, fireworks, guys, and plenty of fun.

And now this had happened. For the first time on record St. Jim's were to be deprived of the opportunity of perpetuating the memory of the infamous Guy Fawkes.

The startling news buzzed round the school in a very short time. In the New House it did not cause much surprise in the circumstances. They knew Mr. Horace Ratcliff. None the less they were as angry and mutinous about it as were the School House.

For it was very soon known to be true enough. After breakfast an announcement appeared on the notice-board in both Houses to the effect that the usual arrangements for the school bonfire were cancelled, and that no fireworks or celebrations of any kind were to mark the arrival of the Fifth of November at St. Jim's.

Mr. Ratcliff had kept his word. It was known that he had kept it against the mild protestations of Messrs. Lathom, Linton, and several other masters, and that Kildare and Darrell had had quite a stormy scene with Mr. Ratcliff over it.

But there it was, the fiat had gone forth. Mr. Ratcliff was in power, and whether he was in the right or not, did not trouble that irritable, unreasonable gentleman.

To do him justice, however, it was clear that he honestly believed that the Head would approve of the step he had taken in the circumstances.

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry glumly, as he joined Blake, Herries, and Digby at breakfast. "No good blaming old Gussy, either!"

"My fault as much as his, I suppose," admitted Lowther ruefully. "Still, it's rotten!"

"Beastly rotten!"

"All the fireworks are gone, anyway!" said Tom. "We shouldn't have been able to make much of a show! Keep smiling! How's Gussy? Has he come round yet?"

Blake shook his head and grinned.

"Not yet. He's still riding the high horse! Poor old ass. It was too bad of us to bump him last night. He looks fearfully down in the mouth! Hallo, there he is!"

Arthur Augustus hove in sight. He changed his direction as he sighted his chums.

"This won't do!" said Blake. "It's gone on long enough. We'll have to apologise, and bring the ass round."

"Yes, rather!"

All were agreed upon that. Arthur Augustus could not be allowed to ride the high horse for ever.

They cut across to intercept him.

"Gussy, old fellow——"

"Gussy, old man——"

Arthur Augustus halted. He jammed his eyeglass more firmly into place, and regarded his chums coldly.

But he did not speak.

"Gussy, old man," said Blake, in honeyed tones. "We want your advice."

"We need it," said Herries.

"As for recent differences," said Tom Merry solemnly, "we want to express our regret!"

"Deep regret!" said Lowther. "Awfully deep!"

"We apologise if we've offended you in any way," said Blake. "We bumped you last night. But we've thought matters over since, and we've come to the conclusion it was more Lowther's fault than yours."

"I admit it," said Lowther contritely. "I'll consider myself bumped, if you like!"

"But the trouble now," went on Blake, "is that we're badly in need of a fellow with brains. Something's got to be done. We're all booked for a stiff licking—probably a flogging when the Head returns. The Head won't sack us just to please dear old Ratty. But we shall get it hot!"

"Very hot!" said Herries feelingly.

"Therefore we mean to have our money's worth!" said Blake grimly. "We can't very well defy old Ratty. But something's got to be done. We're not going to be dished and done out of our bonfire without a kick. The question is, what's to be done?"

"That is the question," said Tom Merry. "If you can help us with advice or suggestions, Gussy——"

"Bai Jove!"

To ask Arthur Augustus for advice was usually to please him greatly. He was obviously pleased now.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured, his noble face clearing. "Very well, deah boys. I will accept your apologies. That wotah, Gordon Gay, was responsible for the othah fireworks bein' destroyed, and Lowthah was responsible for that unfortunate accident last night. I twust you youngstahs will not jump to hasty conclusions again and thwow blame upon the w'ong partay."

"We'll try not to," said Blake humbly. "So it's all serene now, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy quite cheerily. "And as we regards Watty's ban on the bonfire this evenin', I think I can advise you. In fact, I have a vewy valuable suggestion, deah boys!"

"Oh!"

"Oh—er—good, old chap!"

"Cough it up!" said Tom Merry, without showing much enthusiasm.

The juniors had only aimed to please Gussy—not to get advice.

"The fact is," said Gussy calmly, "I also had determined that somethin' must be done, and ovah breakfast a weally brilliant bwain-wave stwuck me!"

"I thought you were looking a bit stunned over breakfast, old chap," said Lowther affably. "But cough it up!"

"I realised that somethin' must be done to make Watty change his mind," said Gussy. "Therefore I concentrated on ways and means. And suddenly I wemembahed Colonel Bland!"

"Oh! Oh, yes!"

"He's a school govannah, and an old boy, you know," said Gussy. "And he comes wound neahly evewy day to have a chat with Taggles and a look wound. He's wathah a nuisance at times."

"We know that," grinned Tom. "Everybody knows it. The old buffer's got an idea the school's part of his giddy estate. Go hon!"

"Vewy well. If you'll wemembah, he also came to our bonfire last yeah," said Gussy. "There was a wov because someone—I believe it was that young scapegwace Watty—tied a jumpin' ewackah to his tail!"



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"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"He's wathah a waxy old buffah," said Gussy. "Still, he takes a gweat intahwest in sports and things, and is just the vevy person to make Watty change his mind."

"Oh, I see!" grinned Blake. "You mean us to ask the old chap to intercede on our behalf, what?"

"Not at all," said Gussy coolly. "My ideah is to impersonate Colonel Bland, to visit Watty, and to force him to waise the wotten ban."

"Oh!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I wathah flattah myself I could take the old chap off easily," resumed Gussy cheerfully. "I should mention a desiah to see the St. Jim's fireworks first, you know. Then, when Watty explains that the bonfire is cancelled, I shall express gweat indignation, and insist upon the ban bein' removed. Wathah a bwain-wave, what?"

"Oh, great pip!"

The juniors looked at each other.

"Blessed if there isn't something in the weeze!" said Lowther, his eyes dancing. "Out of the mouths of babes and—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Dry up, Monty!" said Tom Merry. "Go on, Gussy!"

"You know what Watty is!" said Gussy, quite pleased at the interest his masterly scheme was arousing. "He isn't above twyin' to crawl wound the school govahnahs, you know. He fawns wound old Bland, and neahly licks his boots at times. He would nevah dare to wefuse anythin' the colonel insisted upon."

"Phew! That's so!"

"So there you are!" said Arthur Augustus, smiling round at his chums. "The colonel—othahwise myself dressed up as the colonel—would do the twick, and all would be mewwy and bwight!"

"It's rather a nobby scheme," said Blake, taking a deep breath. "There's only one flaw that I can see. That is—Gussy couldn't do it. He would make a fearful muck of it!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Lowther's the man for the job," said Tom. "Gussy, old chap, all honour to you for a masterly weeze. But Lowther's the man for the job. I wouldn't dare to tackle it myself. But Monty's a dab at impersonations. You know that well enough!"

"Trust me!" grinned Lowther. "Gussy, old man, you can leave this to me, and you can have the glory!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

Arthur Augustus paused. As the originator of the scheme he felt entitled to the job. Yet he could not help feeling rather doubtful as to his ability to carry such a daring impersonation through to the end.

"If you weally think you can do it, bettah, Lowthah—"

"Just a little!" chuckled Monty.

"Vewy well, then," said Arthur Augustus, with some reluctance. "I will give place to you, deah boy, and I do twust you will not make a feahful hash of it!"

"Trust Monty!" said Tom Merry. "It's a really ripping idea, and is fool-proof, as far as I can see."

"Supposing old Bland turns up after-wards and sees Ratty, though?" said Herries.

"Old Bland doesn't like Ratty. We know that," said Tom. "He isn't likely to go near him. In fact, Railton's the only master, bai the Head, he ever worries. It's fool-proof, I tell you. You'll tackle it, Monty?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good egg! Hallo, there's the bell! We'll do it, Gussy! You're a genius, old chap!"

"Hear, hear!"

And Tom Merry & Co. went into classes that morning fairly simmering with excitement and anticipation. If all went well with Gussy's great "weeze"—and there seemed no reason why it shouldn't—then the tyrannical Ratty would be dishd, diddled, and done, and St. Jim's would celebrate the glorious Fifth, after all!

CHAPTER 9.

Spooking Ratty!

"HERE he comes!"

"Phew! Doesn't he look just it?"

"Good old Lowther!"

Dinner was over at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry and Manners, and Blake & Co. of the Fourth, were strolling in the quadrangle. For ten minutes and more they had been pacing up and down, and a close observer would have noted that they kept near the gates, which seemed to have a peculiar interest for them.

And they had.

Twenty minutes ago Monty Lowther, the most daring practical joker in the School House, had vanished through the gates carrying a bulky bag. In that bag was a suit of

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clothes, rags for padding, and grease-paints, a wig and moustaches, and various other articles of make-up. And Monty Lowther's chums had been waiting rather anxiously for his return.

Now, here he was, as large as life, if not larger.

Nobody would have known it was Monty Lowther, however.

He wore a rather loud "check" suit of plus-fours and a big cap. He sported a mop of iron-grey hair, and a pair of fierce, iron-grey moustaches, with eyebrows to match. His face was brick-red, as if burnt by tropical suns at some time or other. He carried a big stick, which he whisked about briskly as he walked.

At a glance a stranger would have called him a retired Army officer. Anyone who knew Colonel Bland, of Rylcombe Grange, would have pointed him out as that somewhat crusty old martinet.

"Is it Monty, or is it the real, genuine goods?" breathed Blake. "Blessed if I can tell!"

"It's Monty right enough!" chuckled Tom Merry gleefully. "The dear old colonel's taller than that—though nobody would spot the difference unless they knew Monty's game. Isn't old Lowther a genius?"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally could not have done bettah my—"

"Hallo, old Taggy's spotted him!"

Taggles, the school porter, was standing outside his lodge. Besides being a school governor and a neighbour, Colonel Bland had once been a boy at St. Jim's, and had known old Taggles, the school porter, when he had worked at the school as a youth. He was quite attached to the old fellow, in fact, and he always made a point of having a chat with him.

But he did not stay for a chat now, and Taggles took his pipe out of his mouth and stared after him blankly. Obviously Taggles was surprised at being, so to speak, cut dead by his old friend, the colonel. Possibly Monty Lowther was not risking a chat with Taggles.

The colonel made as if to stop to speak to Tom Merry & Co., but suddenly he changed his direction. They understood why the next moment.

Crossing over from the School House towards the New House was a well-known, angular figure in cap and gown.

It was Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

"Phew! Now for it!" murmured Blake. "Oh, my hat! Lowther's got the nerve of a whole regiment!"

There was no doubt about that. His stride did not falter as he crossed to intercept the Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff sighted the portly, upright figure, and halted, glad of an opportunity of ingratiating himself with a school governor. Mr. Ratcliff was ambitious, and it was quite on the cards that Dr. Holmes would retire some day. In that case Mr. Horace Ratcliff hoped to become the headmaster—a very vain hope, had he only known it.

"Ah! How do you do, colonel?" he smirked. "A—er—nice afternoon, sir."

"Well, it isn't raining, and it isn't snowing," admitted the colonel, in his deep voice. "Looks like being a nice evening for the fireworks, Ratcliff!"

"The—the fireworks, sir?"

"Yes, fireworks!" snorted the colonel, who—as Monty well knew—hated to have to repeat himself. "I am looking forward keenly to the bonfire this evening, Ratcliff. Gad! It makes me feel a boy again! You'll be there, of course, Ratcliff?"

Mr. Ratcliff coloured.

"I—I shall not, sir," he stammered rather stiffly. "I—I am rather surprised to hear you express the desire to see them again, colonel. Last year, I understood, you were very angry when a rascally boy tied a firework to your coat-tails, sir—"

"Begad! So he did, the young rascal!" laughed Colonel Bland. "Ha, ha! Well, boys will be boys! I'll take care no young rascal does it this evening! Begad, I'm looking forward to this evening like—like a fag in the Third, Ratcliff!"

"I—I regret very much to hear that, sir!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "The—the fact is, the firework display at this school has been cancelled. If this is a disappointment to you, colonel, I must express my—"

"WHAT!" barked Colonel Bland, in his best—or, rather, Monty Lowther's best—barrack-square manner.

"The firework display has—er—been forbidden, sir! I—I much regret that you—"

The Housemaster paused, quite startled at the glare in the old gentleman's eyes.

"WHAT!" he barked again. "No fireworks—the Fifth of November at St. Jim's and no fireworks! Good gad! Never have I heard such utter nonsense, Ratcliff. Where is the headmaster? Where can I find him, I say?"

Mr. Ratcliff wiped his brow.

"Dr. Holmes is away in London, sir," he explained. "Mr. Railton is also away, and I am in charge here until the Head returns. On two occasions yesterday the school

narrowly escaped a serious conflagration owing to fireworks, and, in the circumstances, I felt it my bare duty to cancel the arrangements for the bonfire. In my opinion fireworks are a danger to life and property."

"D-dud-do you, begad!" ejaculated Colonel Bland. "Then allow me to tell you, sir, that your opinion is that of a crank and—and a nervous washer woman, Ratcliff!"

"Sir——"
"Utter nonsense!" stormed the colonel angrily. "Depriving the whole school, and myself, of an exciting and educational spectacle. Robbing the youngsters of their rights and privileges, begad! I won't allow it, sir!"

"Colonel Bland, I——"

"I tell you I won't allow it, Ratcliff!" repeated Colonel Bland heatedly. "Dr. Holmes would never countenance such a tyrannical order, sir! Of that I am convinced! As a member of the governing body of this school, I must insist upon that infamous order being cancelled immediately, Ratcliff! I insist! Yes, begad! I insist, sir!"

"My—my dear sir——" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff, scarlet in the face. "My—my dear colonel, if—if you insist——"

"I do insist! Begad! I've looked forward for weeks to the school's usual firework display!" stormed the portly old gentleman, thumping his stick on the ground. "No firework display—no bonfire—no guy! Good gad! What is the old school coming to? Utter rubbish and nonsense!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped helplessly. All the wind was taken out of his sails. His hope of creating a favourable impression upon the powers that be was vanishing—unless he acted quickly.

"My dear colonel," he gulped, "if you object to my order, then most certainly it shall be cancelled. It will give me the greatest of pleasure to fall in with your wishes in respect to the bonfire. Possibly my order was somewhat hasty and ill-considered. But my sole object was the safety of this school. The order banning the bonfire and fireworks shall be cancelled at once, sir!"

"Can I rely upon that, Ratcliff?"

"Sir——" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Then I am satisfied—doocidly satisfied!" said the colonel hurriedly, noting the scarlet in the Housemaster's face. "Begad! I wouldn't have missed the old school's bonfire for worlds—not for worlds, sir! Boys will be boys, Ratcliff, and, jumping crackers or no jumping crackers, I'll be along to see the fun to-night, begad!"

And, with a farewell wave of his big stick, Colonel Bland stumped away towards the gates. As a matter of fact, Monty was conscious of the alarming fact that his padding was slipping down below his waistcoat, and he was only too anxious to cut the conversation short.

He stumped towards the gates, saluted old Taggles with a wave of his stick, and vanished into Rylcombe Lane.

Mr. Ratcliff gasped, and then, with almost a fiendish expression on his sour features, he stalked back into the School House.

Five minutes later a resounding cheer came from Big Hall when Eric Kildare pinned up a new notice on the board there—a notice signed by Mr. Ratcliff that cancelled his previous order.

Fifteen minutes later Monty Lowther came through the gates and sauntered into the quad, with a smile on his mischievous face.

His chums were waiting for him in the quad, and they surrounded him, and fairly waltzed him round and round,



BANG! With a terrific explosion the parcel of fireworks blew up. And that first alarming explosion was instantly followed by a series of bangs and cracks and fizzings as a perfect cascade of fireworks whizzed and jumped and flew about the study. (See Chapter 5.)

"It came off, then?" he gasped breathlessly, when they released him at last.

"Like a giddy charm!" chortled Tom Merry. "Monty, old boy, you've deserved well of your country. And Gussy's retrieved his giddy honour!"

"Weally, Tom Merry——"

"Now, don't spoil things by wagging your chin, Gussy, you——"

"I was onlay goin' to wemark, deah boys, that it would be wathah a good ideah to go ovah to tell the glad news to Figgay. They should be vewy gratefule to us, you know, and, in the cires, they might agwee to whack out their big stock of fireworks!"

"Good wheeze!" laughed Tom Merry. "Who said old Gussy hadn't a brain? Perish the thought! Come on! We'll tackle Figgy now, before afternoon lessons!"

And they did. And in their overwhelming gratitude and joy, George Figgins and his merry men were only too glad to "whack out" their supply of fireworks with their rivals. Thus all was merry and bright again—for the time being!

CHAPTER 10.

Awful Luck!

"NOW'S our chance!" said Wally D'Arcy.

"Couldn't have a better," agreed Curly Gibson, with a chuckle. "We owe old Taggy something for getting us licked this morning. Fancy reporting chaps just for chucking a small rip-rap through his silly old window! Mean, I call it!"

"Jolly mean!" said Reggie Manners. "Taggy must be taught not to report Third men! We'll make the old hunks jump this time!"

"He was snoozing in his armchair," grinned Wally. "It must have made him jump. He wants livening up a bit!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"If we shin up the wall into his garden and cut across to the front wall by the gates, he'll never spot us this time," said Wally D'Arcy of the Third. "If he doesn't spot us he can't report us, can he? Easy as falling off a form!"

"Yes, rather."

"Come on!"

And Wally set the example by shinning up Taggles' garden.

wall. As the old porter was leaning against the doorpost of his lodge at the front he did not see the invasion of the fags.

But others did. Sauntering across the quadrangle Tom Merry sighted the fags swarming over the wall.

"Those kids are breaking bounds," he chuckled. "Wonder what they're up to?"

"Some game against Taggles, I bet!" grinned Blake. "Let 'em rip! I believe Taggy got them licked this morning, and old Ratty fairly laid it on! I expect they're out to get their own back."

With smiling faces, Tom Merry & Co. watched the last of the daring fags disappear over Taggles' back garden wall.

Only Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Wally is a feathful young wascal!" he said. "As his eldah bwothah—"

"Keep off the grass and let 'em rip!" advised Blake. "You know what always happens to you when you chip in on their little games. Let 'em rip!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo, there they go!"

From where they stood the chums of the School House could see the front wall that joined the lodge on to the school wall as well as that of the backyard.

On the front wall had appeared four youthful heads—the smiling faces of Wally & Co.

They were craning their necks to watch Taggles, who was still dozing by his front door, his pipe in his mouth.

But just as suddenly the fags vanished from sight again. For at that moment a gentleman came through the gates—an elderly military gentleman in plus fours, carrying a big stick. One glimpse of that brick-red face and fierce, iron-grey moustache was enough.

"Colonel Bland," chuckled Lowther. "The real, genuine, gilt-edged article this time. No spurious imitation. The very latest thing in colonels, you men!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A face appeared, peering over the wall again with great caution. It was Wally D'Arcy.

He watched the colonel, who had stopped to chat with Taggy.

The next instant three more cheeky, youthful faces popped into view. All four appeared to hold a hurried consultation, and then quite suddenly four arms were raised aloft.

Another instant and four objects, emitting faint sparks,

whizzed from their hands and fell at the feet of Colonel Bland and Taggles. Wally had decided on vengeance, colonel or no colonel.

The faces vanished instantly from the wall, and the next instant—

Bang! R-r-r-rip—r-rip! Bang!

Bang, bang, bang!

Colonel Bland leaped fully two feet into the air. Then, obeying the laws of Nature, he came down again, stumbled backwards over the boot-scraper outside the lodge door, and sat down with a bump and a fearful yell.

Taggles also did a remarkable acrobatic feat—he sprang backwards, almost swallowing his pipe, and cracked his head against the doorpost. That crack elicited a fearful howl.

Meanwhile, the rip-raps and jumping crackers continued their fell work, to the utter confusion and alarm of Taggles and Colonel Bland.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "The—the weckless young wascals!"

Certainly Wally & Co. had acted recklessly.

Colonel Bland looked quite pale when he staggered to his feet as the last of the fireworks spluttered into silence.

He was trembling with wrath!

In his Army career the old warrior had had plenty of gunpowder and explosions. But those days were over, and he looked quite shaken now.

He gazed about blankly for a few moments, and then, ignoring the groaning, gasping Taggles, he shook his stick at the onlookers, and made tracks for the School House.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "That's done it! Monty, look out for trouble now!"

The last thing the juniors wanted was an interview between Mr. Ratcliff and Colonel Bland.

Obviously, the justly irate colonel wanted an interview with someone in authority. He did not reach the School House steps, however. Quite suddenly a window went up with a whiz—the window of the headmaster's study.

Mr. Ratcliff glared out.

He had heard the reports of fireworks, and the sound was like a red rag to a bull. Letting fireworks off in the quadrangle was forbidden.

Colonel Bland sighted him. He stopped and shook his stick up at the startled Mr. Ratcliff.

"G-good heavens!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, quite scared at the expression on the old gentleman's face. "What—what—"

"An abominable outrage!" hooted Colonel Bland. "Is this confounded school a bear-garden, Ratcliff? I ask you, is this—this—"

The colonel choked.

"What ever has happened, colonel?" gasped the Housemaster. "You appear—"

"I—I have been treated with gross contempt, sir—actually assaulted. Ratcliff!" roared the colonel. "Some of your young villains have actually dared to throw confounded fireworks at me! I have received a severe shock; I have had a severe fall! I insist upon instant action being taken! Fireworks, begad! Last year the very same thing happened, and if your headmaster had listened to me this would never have happened!"

"What—what—"

"I reported a somewhat similar outrage last year," roared Colonel Bland. "I strongly protested to Dr. Holmes, and urged him—almost ordered him—to forbid fireworks being brought into the school in future. Dr. Holmes chose to ignore me; he refused to grant my demand that no more bonfires or fireworks should be allowed at St. Jim's. And now—now this has happened! I—I—I—"

Mr. Ratcliff was amazed. But he almost smiled. Considering the fact that the colonel, only a few hours before, had insulted and ridiculed him for forbidding any Guy Fawkes' celebrations, the present position had a somewhat humorous aspect—in Mr. Ratcliff's view.

"My dear colonel," he said somewhat dryly, "you have changed your views considerably since this afternoon."

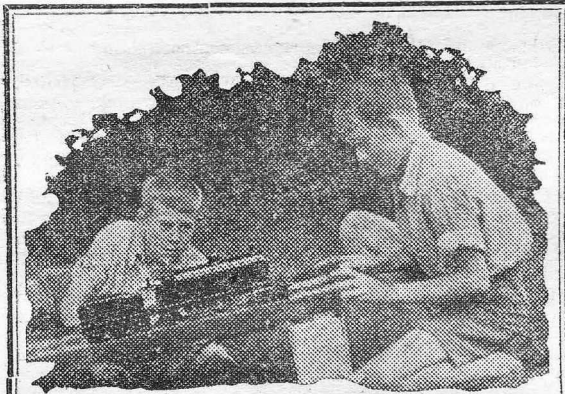
"What—what— Begad! Ratcliff, how dare you—how dare you, I say! Where is Dr. Holmes? I insist upon seeing Dr. Holmes at once, sir—at once!"

"As I told you this afternoon, sir, Dr. Holmes is—"

"Is the man mad?" almost raved the colonel. "I haven't spoken to you before to-day—never been near the confounded place. I insist upon interviewing the doctor—"

"Good gracious!" Mr. Ratcliff was sure now that the colonel was somewhat the worse for drink. "My dear colonel, Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton are away in London. I am in charge until—"

"Then let me tell you this, sir," bellowed Colonel Bland, "I do not approve of fireworks at this school. In my opinion they are dangerous—dashed dangerous, begad! And as a member of the governing board I shall make it my business to insist upon all fireworks being forbidden! You hear me, sir—forbidden! Those—those young villains—"



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"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. His eyes were gleaming now. Being forced to withdraw his order banning the bonfire had made Mr. Ratcliff writhe with helpless fury. Now—

"Then—then you do not approve of fireworks and bonfires, Colonel Bland?" he articulated.

"Haven't you heard me say so, confound it!" hooted the old gentleman. "I detest the confounded noisy things. I—I—"

"Then do I understand that you will not object, sir, if I cancel the school firework celebrations this evening, colonel?" gasped the Housemaster eagerly.

"Object! Of course I shall not object, Ratcliff! In that course you have my hearty approval, begad! Huh!"

"Very good, sir!" almost purred Mr. Ratcliff. "I will certainly do as you approve. I will also do my utmost to discover the juniors who have, as you claim, assaulted you. Will you come inside, colonel?"

"No, I will not, Ratcliff. I am considerably shaken, and will leave you to discover and deal with the scoundrels!" hooted the old gentleman. And with that he strode away, still sizzling with rage. The scared and utterly dismayed juniors watched him vanish through the school gates.

"Well," choked Tom Merry—"well, my only Sunday tile! Did you ever, in all your born days, see such awful luck?"

And Tom's chums agreed with utter disgust that they

never had! They tramped into the House dismally to spread the sad and tragic news. They were too dispirited even to adopt Blake's suggestion to go and ring the necks of Wally & Co. And the news was soon proved to be true enough when Kildare pinned yet another announcement on the notice-board.

Once again fireworks were banned at St. Jim's! And this time it really did seem hopeless. And it was while Tom Merry & Co. were blinking dismally at the notice that Darrell called to the captain of the Shell.

"Wanted on the phone in the prefects' room, kid," he said.

"Thanks, Darrell!"

The call proved to be from Gordon Gay, and he fairly gasped as Tom told him the news.

"I was wondering why the dickens you hadn't got into touch with us to arrange times for the shows," said Gay over the wires. "Cee-whiz! Poor little dears! Did their nurses forbid the little fellows to play with fireworks?"

"Look here, you rotter—"

"But I tell you what!" answered Gay, with a chuckle.

"Why not come to ours, old chap—all the lot of you? Pass the word round that every St. Jim's fellow is welcome to come to our show."

"No, but— I say, that's awfully decent of you, Gay—"

(Continued on next page.)

ASK THE ORACLE!



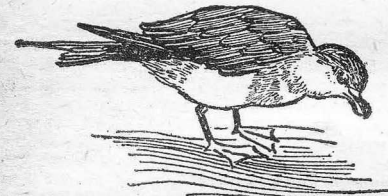
The Oracle advertised the fact the other day that he would willingly retire on a pension of £10,000 a year if the Editor wished. But as this character has such a big band of supporters



it was suggested that he should keep on his job—at his present salary—and so please both the Editor and his readers!

Q. What is an amelefederoculpedali-couprentombrosoparacloucyele?

A. A water-machine recently invented by a Frenchman and with motive power consisting of pedals and a sail. It is pronounced as it is spelt!



This, my young bird fanciers, is an Arctic skua. It lives amongst the snows of the north—and enjoys it!

Q. What is a sku a?

A. Curiously enough, this question has been sent in by three readers. The sku is a bird—not a lizard, as one of my chums seems to suppose—and it is closely allied to the gull. In all, there are seven species, and the largest British specimen is the Great Skua. The skuas, however, are found as widely distributed as the Poles, where numbers of them live. In some ways they are uncommonly lazy and seldom trouble to catch fish for themselves. They prefer to chase smaller gulls and make them disgorge fish which they then secure.

Q. What is a gowk?

A. Bill Bennell, of Clerkenwell, London, E.C., has written to me on a paper bag (which, I deduce, had once been used for peppermint humbugs), stating that when he went for a week-end into the country some time ago a rustic called him a gowk. Bill wants to know the meaning of this, and whether he should have "landed the bloke one on the kisser." Reading on in Bill's letter, I find that the reason the rustic addressed the remark to him was that Bill had been requested by the farmer with whom he stayed to groom one

of his horses, and "to be careful to clean out his hoofs well." After being in the stable a couple of hours, the rustic arrived to find Bill still standing by the animal and waiting, brush in hand. And, as Bill himself explained, he was waiting for the animal to lie down so that he could get to work on the hoofs. Whereupon the rustic murmured something about a "gowk," which the amateur groom failed to understand. A gowk, Bill, is merely a simpleton, a looby, zany, nincompoop, badaud, blockhead, dullard, tom-fool, hoddly-doddy, dizzard, loon, or witting. Take your choice. As to whether you ought to have socked the rustic—well, that depends on his size and weight!

Q. Who was Thomas Hood?

A. A great and humorous poet who lived between the years 1799 and 1845. Among many poems he wrote the famous "Song of the Shirt," which first was published in "Punch," and the dramatic "Eugene Aram." Here, "Tony," is a sample of his work from the poem called "No!"

"No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease—

No comfortable feel in any member—
No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds,
No-venber! "

Q. Is it true that prehistoric schoolmasters used to maintain order in Form with a club?

A. So great-grandfather used to tell grandmother, "Ginger" Jones. In the Museum of Geology I once saw a stone tablet that recorded how a prehistoric dude was reproved by his teacher with a club for keeping a young dinosaur under his desk. "I say," was all the protest made by the victim, "how stunning!"

Q. What is the size of the London police force?

A. It has about 19,800 members,

"Keen on Maths." If their boots were put in a pile in Piccadilly Circus they would stop all the traffic. If the men themselves were laid end to end across the Isle of Thanet, some of 'em would be drowned in the sea. If the combined power exerted daily in hitching up their belts could be applied elsewhere, it would be sufficient to drive the Big Wheel which was at Blackpool or raise a 100-gallon vat of ginger-beer ten feet from the floor. By the way, chum, if you are really keen on maths you deserve to be commemorated in your school by a stained glass window!

Q. How many statues containing horses are there in London?

A. Eleven, "Country Cousin"—ten too many. The one at the south side of Trafalgar Square is almost picturesque.

Q. What is the difference between gold panning and gold mining?

A. In answer to your question, Fred Wicklow and others, I would point out that there are various ways of getting gold. A primitive method is for the miner to put sand from the bed of a creek into a shallow pan, and by a swinging motion, wash it out with water. As the sand is washed away, the heavier particles of gold remain in the bottom of the pan. But often gold is found in rock which has to be mined perhaps by hydraulic power. When the rock has been broken it is crushed to fine powder by a stamp battery. The gold is then obtained from it by mixing in mercury, to which the particles adhere to form amalgam.



Here we have an old prospector "panning" gold from a stream in Western Australia. They "pan" gold in other parts of the world, as a matter of fact, but this fellow finds Australia best for gleaming metal!

"Not at all!" said Gay cheerfully. "Roll up in your giddy thousands, old top—I'll make it right! Listen! We're going to have a procession through the village—we've had to hire a field for the job away from the school, and arranged a procession to it at six prompt. If your crowd will join us in the High Street—how's that?"

"Oh, good!" gasped Tom Merry. "Good man, Gay! We're on like a bird. I'll tell all our chaps, and you can expect us at about six in the village. And blow old Ratty!"

"Right-ho! It's a go, then! Cherio!"

Another soft chuckle came over the wires, and Tom hung up the receiver, and hurried to tell the glad news to his chums and all concerned. The juniors of St. Jim's, at least, were not going to be done out of their fireworks, after all. Gordon Gay had come to the rescue, and all agreed that a combined show with the Grammarians would provide more fun than even their own show would have done. And once more all was merry and bright!

CHAPTER 11.
Too Bad!

"HERE they come!"

"Oh, good!"

"Join in at the giddy end of the procession, chaps!" called Tom Merry.

Quite a huge crowd of St. Jim's fellows were waiting at the far end of the High Street on the outskirts of Rylcombe. Tom Merry had passed the word round, and all had jumped at the chance the kindly-disposed Gordon Gay had offered them.

Figgins & Co. were there in full force, and with them was their guy—a weird and wonderful imitation of Mr. Horace Ratchiff. Glyn also had his guy with him—also an imitation of Mr. Horace Ratchiff, not quite so weird and wonderful, but much more lifelike.

There was a cheer as a blaze of torches came into view along the High Street. Then the sounds of a band were heard—weird and wonderful sounds. Apparently it was a bugle, comb-and-paper, tin-can, and penny trumpet sort of band—a regular jazz band, in fact, by the sound of it. Villagers crowded to the doors of their shops and houses.

The blaze came nearer, the lights from the dancing, flickering torches lighting up cheery, youthful, laughing faces. The din became terrific. Obviously the Grammarians were out to enjoy themselves.

"Ripping!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Good old Gordon Gay! We'll have some fun now, chaps!"

They were soon to have more "fun" than they expected! Nearer and nearer came the procession, and now they could distinguish that various groups of Grammarians were carrying guys aloft—quite a number of guys.

Tom Merry & Co. were surprised at the number.

"My hat! They've got a lot of guys, and no mistake!" chuckled Tom. "Five at least! Wonder who they—Why—what—M-mum-my hat!"

Tom Merry's jaw dropped and his eyes goggled in horror and amazement.

They could see the guys clearly now.

There were five, and each one was in dingy Etons, with a big, white sheet of cardboard fastened across its chest.

And on the cardboard of each a name was written in big, black letters.

The first guy bore a familiar name—a very familiar name indeed to Tom Merry. In printed capitals were the letters:

"GUY NO. 1.
THOMAS MERRY!"

And Guy No. 2 was Jack Blake; Guy No. 3, George Figgins; Guy No. 4, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; and Guy No. 5, Bernard Glyn!

The St. Jim's fellows blinked and blinked at the guys. From the forefront of the procession came a yell in Gordon's Gay's well-known voice:

"What price the St. Jim's guys?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of hilarious laughter from the Grammarians.

With feelings too deep for words, the flabbergasted St. Jim's fellows stood and gaped at the procession of guys, their grotesque masks showing clearly in the glimmering, flaring torches.

They understood now. Gordon Gay had not been kindly-disposed after all. His invitation had been part of a gigantic jape. He had got them there to see their guys—guys of their hapless selves!

Black rage seethed in the hearts of the St. Jim's juniors. Never had they been so spoofed. Never had they felt so dished and done.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, m-mum-my hat! It's—it's a do—it's a rotten show-up for us!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry got his breath back at last, and raised his voice in the St. Jim's war-cry:

"Back up, Saints! Down with 'em! Down with the rotten Grammarians!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Smash the rotters!"

"Pulverise 'em!"

"On the ball!"

There was a whirling rush of St. Jim's juniors. The procession rocked and swayed, and broke under the desperate charge.

Torches fell and were extinguished amid showers of sparks. Yells and cheers arose, and the din became terrific. The band ceased to play and began to scrap—they soon found they had to. Tom Merry & Co. were resolved to teach them a different tune!

The guys fell and were trampled underfoot; packets and boxes of fireworks were dropped as the fight waged fast and furious. The villagers looked on, many of them quite scared, others thoroughly enjoying the fun. Yells of defiance, howls of woe, cheers of encouragement filled the November air.

But the St. Jim's fellows gave no quarter and asked none. They did not need to ask any, in fact. For they soon realised that the battle was theirs.

Gordon Gay soon began to realise it also.

As a matter of fact, Gay, for once, had blundered. He had never anticipated the St. Jim's juniors turning up in such numbers, though he had invited them in their thousands, to use his own words. Since the telephone message to Tom Merry, he had had to make his plans quickly, and while the present force had remained behind to manufacture the guys, the rest had gone on to the field to make ready the bonfire and see it lighted.

Bitterly did Gordon Gay regret allowing the rest to go on ahead now. It was an error of judgment that was to cost the Grammarians dear.

The St. Jim's juniors were all over them.

Desperately did Gay and his lieutenants strive to stem the tide, but it was useless. One by one the Grammarians broke and fled, glad only to get away with their skins intact. Amid triumphant yells and cheers, the St. Jim's fellows followed up their advantage.

Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, Carboy, and the two Wootton brothers were the last to make a stand, but even they gave way at last. At a despairing cry from Gay, they suddenly broke and ran for it, followed by a swarm of victorious Saints half-way up the village street.

"We've licked 'em!" yelled Tom Merry breathlessly. "We've licked 'em to a frazzle! Three cheers for little us! Hip, hip—"

"Hurrah!"

The St. Jim's fellows cheered themselves hoarse. Then at the order from Tom Merry, they began to collect the plunder—caps and scarves, parcels and boxes of fireworks—not to mention what remained of the guys!

"My hat! What a scrap!" panted Tom Merry. "Now, you men, we've got to get home, sharp! Before long they'll be back with reinforcements. Sooner we get going the better—though goodness knows what we're going to do with the giddy fireworks! I vote we defy old Ratty, and have the giddy bonfire after all!"

"Good egg! We jolly well will!"

In their present excited state the juniors were game for anything.

They made tracks for St. Jim's in a laughing, cheering crowd.

"What a night!" chuckled Tom Merry breathlessly. "We're having some fun after all. If only we dare—Why, what the dickens is that?"

"What?"

"That glare in the sky there!" yelled Tom. "It's at St. Jim's. Somebody's lit our bonfire after all."

"And they're letting fireworks off, too!" gasped Blake.

"Look!"

As the juniors looked towards the ruddy glow that showed behind the dim outline of the school buildings in the distance, a rocket suddenly shot skywards, falling to earth with a shower of many-coloured sparks.

"It's those Third Form kids, I bet!" burst out Herries. "They've defied old Ratty, after all!"

"Come on!" cried Tom Merry. "What those kids dare do, we can, you fellows!"

"Yaas, wathah! Blow old Watty!"

"Hear, hear!"

But Tom Merry & Co. proved to be wrong for once. Wally and his fellow Third-Formers were not defying Ratty—though they certainly were capable of doing so!

The juniors tore across the playing-fields, carrying the captured guys and fireworks. As they came nearer to the bonfire they caught sight of swarms of fags rushing about, letting off fireworks, and yelling themselves hoarse with

"No firework display—no bonfire—no guy!" stormed the pseudo Colonel Bland, thumping his stick on the ground. "Good gad! I insist on your infamous order being cancelled immediately, Ratcliff!" "My—my dear colonel, if you insist—" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff. "I do insist, sir!" (See Chapter 9.)



excitement. Looking on, in a smiling, but somewhat lofty way, were quite a number of seniors.

Obviously the fags had not defied 'Ratty."

"What the dickens—" began Tom. "Here, Wally, you black-faced object, what's this mean? Has Ratty changed his giddy mind again?"

Wally D'Arcy, his face black and his hair singed, grinned at them cheerfully.

"Hallo, you fatheads back, then!" he chuckled. "No, dear old Ratty hasn't changed his mind; the Head's changed it for him."

"What? Is the Head back?"

"Came back half an hour ago!" grinned Curly Gibson. "Left the train at Abbotsford and motored over with Railton; that's why you saw nothing of 'em, I expect. Anyway, they cancelled Ratty's command—Head said it wasn't right to punish the whole school for the giddy crimes of a few, or something. Anyway, dear old Ratty's had his nose put out of joint fairly. Serve the old hunks right!"

"And Colonel Bland's turned the rotter down, too!" chortled Wally. "The dear old chap's not such a bad sort, after all. He thought better of his words to Ratty when he got over his wax, and phoned Ratty, I believe, telling him he'd considered the matter and did not desire to spoil the chaps' enjoyment. Told him to cancel the giddy ban again, mind you! Decent old bird, what?"

"Then the Head and Railton turned up, and that finished Ratty," went on the leader of the Third. "But you chaps are for it, I bet! I believe the Head's ordered you chaps who were in the box-room to be gated, and not to take part—"

"Here, never mind telling us that," interrupted Blake hastily. "We're not to know that, eh, you fellows? Shove off, you kids; we're enjoying our giddy selves, and asking further questions afterwards."

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. had the time of their lives. There were fireworks in plenty for all—with those belonging to Figgins & Co. and the fireworks captured from the Gram-marians. The captured guys were rigged up again, and the cardboard turned round and the names of Gordon Gay and his chums written thereon in place of the original names.

The bonfire flared up high into the November sky and lit up the excited, cheery faces of the St. Jim's juniors. The effigies of Gay & Co. were burned amid great excitement and enthusiasm, and the guys of Mr. Ratcliff met a similar fate to the accompaniment of three rousing cheers.

Mr. Ratcliff turned up just as Glyn's guy was being consumed by the devouring flames.

But he had no eyes for the guy—he was seeking Tom Merry & Co. The kill-joy Housemaster had been balked in his object of banning the bonfire, and he was seething with bitter rage. Still, the Head had punished the ring-leaders—Tom Merry & Co.—by condemning them to remain indoors while the celebrations were on. Unfortunately Tom Merry & Co. could not be found. But Mr. Ratcliff believed he knew where he could find them. And he did find them—though he never got the opportunity to order them indoors.

As if by magic, Tom Merry & Co. melted away into the darkness, and the next thing Mr. Ratcliff knew was that the very heavens were raining fireworks down upon him—or so it seemed. Rip-raps, jumping crackers, roman candles, and all sorts of fireworks flew, whizzed, banged, and hissed round the thin legs of Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

It was more than flesh and blood could stand. Yelling with fright, he turned and bolted for his life, his gown flying behind him in the breeze, crackers and rip-raps following on his trail and hastening his departing footsteps. He fairly flew and vanished into the night. Then Tom Merry & Co. cheerfully reappeared into the light of the bonfire, and the fun again grew fast and furious.

But all things come to an end at last, and the bonfire did on that memorable Fifth, and so did the fireworks. But Tom Merry & Co., though blackened and dirty, were cheery as they made their way indoors. They had trouble to face, but they had celebrated the Fifth in great style, and they had licked Gordon Gay & Co. to a frazzle, and they had baffled the tyrannical Mr. Ratcliff.

They were quite ready to face the music after that.

And they did. Fortunately, it was not so bad as they had feared. Possibly the Head knew Mr. Horace Ratcliff better than the juniors believed he did. At all events, having heard the facts, the Head decided to take a lenient view of the box-room incident, and the Terrible Three, Blake & Co., and Glyn & Co. got off with nothing worse than a stiff imposition and a lecture. And they were certainly "Pleased to remember the Fifth of November," if Mr. Ratcliff and Gordon Gay & Co. weren't!

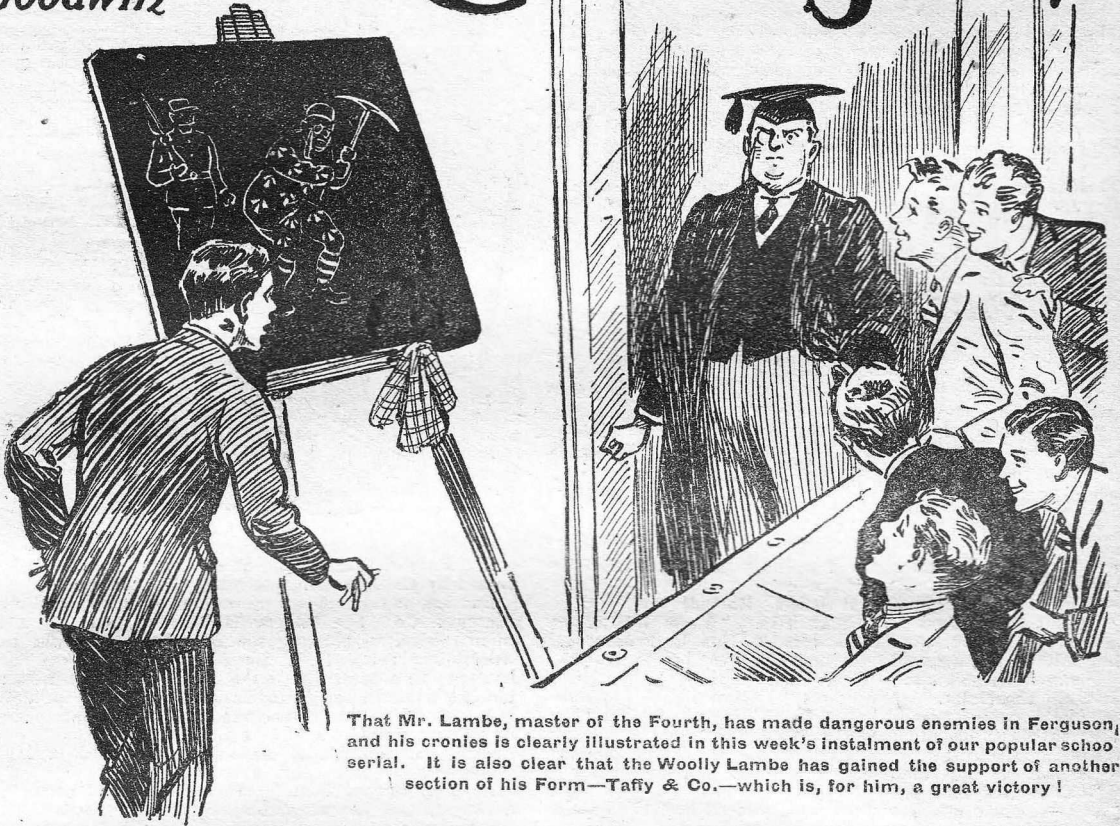
THE END.

(Meet Tom Merry & Co. in next week's magnificent yarn of St. Jim's, entitled: "THE TYRANT!" It contains a most unusual plot and will rank as one of Martin Clifford's greatest stories. Order your copy early and make sure of it!)

New Readers Can Start This Story To-day!

The Worst Form at Codrington!

By
David
Goodwin



That Mr. Lambe, master of the Fourth, has made dangerous enemies in Ferguson, and his cronies is clearly illustrated in this week's instalment of our popular school serial. It is also clear that the Woolly Lambe has gained the support of another section of his Form—Taffy & Co.—which is, for him, a great victory!

Ferguson is Not Satisfied!

CANON WYNDHAM undid the bag with nervous fingers, and emptied out a number of the coins—rare old gold pieces, from the time of the Cæsars downwards. He gave a gasp of thankfulness.

"I—I cannot say how deeply I'm indebted to you, Mr. Lambe!" he said fervently. "You have actually caught this rascal in the very act, then. Poor wretch!" he added, with a touch of pity, as his eyes fell on the man's sullen, hunted-looking face; for there was a soft spot in the Head's heart for anybody who was thoroughly "down." "I wonder what drove him to such a life? He—he does not look dangerous."

"I—er—did not exactly give him the chance to be dangerous," said the Woolly Lambe pleasantly; and reaching into the man's baggy side-pocket, he took out a heavy, blued revolver.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, flushing, feeling he had been too hasty with his sympathy. "A pernicious scoundrel, indeed! I was wrong. This night's work might have cost a life, if the rascal had fallen into less capable hands. Mr. Lambe, my best congratulations on your skill and courage. The school should be proud of you, sir!"

Mr. Perkes gave a little sarcastic cough, and Ferguson and his companions looked glum. Taffy's contingent alone looked thoroughly delighted, and Birne, in dumb-show, was affecting to pat the Remove master on the back—being well behind the rest—and winked joyously at Dereker.

"We had better dispose of the man at once," said the

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Head. "He shall be given into custody without any delay. How did you come to capture him, by the way? Did you hear him break into the house?"

"I suspected something wrong," said Mr. Lambe quietly, "and decided to investigate it. Finding the strong-room was being looted, in short, I caught the prisoner in the act of committing a felony, and made sure of him on my own account. It was not difficult," added Mr. Lambe, with a sleepy glance at the mathematics master, and Ferguson's trio; "but so many cooks nearly spoiled the broth."

Mr. Perkes and Ferguson looked foolish, and rather sulky to boot.

"I'd have nabbed him myself if it hadn't been for that ass Bertram," growled Ferguson under his breath, "always getting in the way!"

"You have dressed yourself with uncommon care—at three in the morning—out of regard for the burglar's feelings, I presume," said Mr. Perkes sourly.

The Head frowned, but Mr. Lambe only adjusted his eyeglass and stared through it at the mathematics master with the look the Remove knew well. But the prisoner, who had relapsed into gloomy silence, suddenly broke out furiously.

"You was in it, too!" he shouted hoarsely, glaring at his captor. "You was, you knows it! Bloomin' humbug! You'll give me over to the rozzers, will yer! You're worse than me, you are!"

The Woolly Lambe smiled across at Canon Wyndham, who laughed; but the laugh changed to a frown at the man's villainy and his accusation.

"Is there nothing the scoundrel will stop at?" he said.

"You are making yourself ridiculous, my man! Hold your tongue! The police—"

"Police! He can talk o' police, he can!" roared the burglar, nodding his head ferociously towards Mr. Lambe. "Yes, I'll split on yer! Wasn't you after the stuff, same as me? Yes, gents, 'e was in it! 'E was in the very room watchin' me! He nabbed me, an' he had hold o' me twenty minutes afore he even brought me out to yer at all! I could tell yer—"

"Silence, fellow!" said the Head angrily. "Mr. Lambe, we had better get rid of him. These silly accusations are wasting everybody's time!"

"Sounds more like the truth!" growled Ferguson, aside. "We're getting at it—"

"You captured him some time ago?" asked the Head, tying up the bag of coins tightly.

"About twenty minutes since, as he says," replied the cheerful Remove master. "I took him into the end room where the telephone to the station is, and detained him there. His honoured title by the way, is Gipsy Joe, and I introduce him to you as such. He is not a gipsy, but a rather clever cracksman, and his set of house-breaking tools, which he was obliged to leave in the strong-room, you will find are quite the best of their kind."

"Ah, you've got the gift o' the gab, right enough!" snarled the burglar savagely. "You can do the swell patter. You're a gentleman lag, that's what you are!"

"He's about hit the mark there!" sneered a muttered voice.

"Who said that?" exclaimed the Head, turning sharply round and flushing angrily. "Who made that abominable remark? Answer me!"

There was no reply, however, and when Canon Wyndham, whose indignation was intense, asked them separately, everybody denied saying it.

There would have been very short shrift for Ferguson of the Remove if he'd confessed to the Head that he was the culprit.

"We have somebody present here who is as thorough a cad as the burglar!" said the angry Head, his tones quivering with wrath. "Mr. Lambe, I beg your pardon! Let us relieve you of this man at once!"

"I telephoned to the station from the end room, and a police escort will arrive on their bicycles in a minute or two," said the Woolly Lambe, whose calm was perfectly unruffled. "There they are," he added, as a peal was heard at the front bell. "We may as well save them the trouble of coming in. I think the less fuss the better."

"You others stay here!" said the Head, accompanying Mr. Lambe out of the room as he led his captive away, Mr. Perkes bringing up the rear. "I shall return in a moment, and shall need an explanation."

"Exit Gipsy Joe," observed Mr. Lambe amiably, handing the captive over. "I'll leave him in your charge, sergeant. I think you'll find he's an old friend."

"He'll find plenty at Dartmoor," said the sergeant. "Thanky, sir; I'll see he gets his old quarters. Took him in the act did you?"

A glance of understanding seemed to pass between the policeman and the Remove master. A pair of handcuffs clicked smartly on the prisoner's wrists, and the sound woke him to a fresh outburst of fury.

"Take 'im, too!" he shouted to the police, pointing to Mr. Lambe with his manacled hands. "'E was in it as much as me! Take 'im—"

"Lock the rascal up!" said the scandalised Head. "Away with him!"

The burglar was hustled off down the carriage-drive, complaining loudly and shouting threats. As soon as he was taken outside the gates the Head shut the front door, and the audience on the landing fed back to the class-room feeling very chilly for the cold wind from outside had whistled round their bare legs.

"Rotten swindle!" growled Ferguson. "The Head's an ass! Why, I believe those two policemen themselves were in league with Lambe, an' daren't arrest him! That burglar was right; Lambe's a lag himself and—"

The Head's entrance put an abrupt stop to Ferguson's revilings. Canon Wyndham, who had not let go of the bag of coins ever since they were given back to him, looked at the six boys keenly. Bertram had vanished.

"Before you go back to bed," said the Head, "I want

to know how you all came to be roaming about the corridors at three in the morning?"

There was rather an awkward pause. The Head turned to Taffy, and repeated his question sharply.

"We—er—we weren't, sir, exactly," said Wynne. "There was a row—I mean, we heard a noise in the corridor—at least, I did—and came out to look, and, finding there had been a burglary—"

"What caused the alarm to go off, long after Mr. Lambe must have caught the man?" said the Head sharply.

"That was us, sir. I—er—mean, this was we," Taffy replied, in some confusion. "We hooked it—er—we ran to the strong-room, sir, finding the door was open and the cabinet burgled. And then Birne fell over a wire, and the bells all went off. So, as the burglar had gone, we thought he'd probably leave the house by the window over the old gymnasium—"

"Why did you think that?"

"Well, it—it's the handiest window, sir," said Taffy, still more confused and wishing the Head would not ask so many questions.

"It is a long way from the strong-room. I don't know why you should call it handy. What then?"

"As we were going there, sir, we saw somebody with no boots on and a bundle under his arm, bunking—er—running towards the window, so we got hold of him, sir, thinking it was the burglar. But most unfortunately it was Mr. Perkes, and we—"

"Very well, that will do for the present," said the Head sternly, biting his lip and wishing he were alone and could laugh. "Ferguson, what is your explanation?"

The burly Remove drew himself up to his full height. Now was his chance to shine as a detective. The Woolly Lambe's goose was cooked so far as Ferguson was concerned.

"We heard the burglar, too, sir, and went out determined to capture the scoundrel at all hazards. Our intention was to save the famous collection which is the pride of Codrington, sir," said Ferguson virtuously, who had been getting his speech ready for some time. "By an unlucky mischance, Bertram got in the way, or we should have caught the burglar. I woke up about three, sir, and heard a noise. It did not take me long to guess what was wrong. And I woke Kent-Williams, and said to him, 'Kent-Williams, somebody's after the headmaster's coins! We must capture the fellow at all hazards!' Taking Kent-Williams and Kempe with me, I—"

"Thank you, Ferguson! That'll do—that'll do," said the Head dryly. "Go back to your dormitories, all of you. I appreciate your efforts to—er—guard my collection; but the next time you had better stay in bed, by which a great deal of confusion and unnecessary trouble will be saved. Wynne, you and Dereker and Birne will have to apologise to Mr. Perkes in the morning for the unfortunate mistake you made. I fear catching burglars is not your forte, for you could not make a greater mess of it if it were Latin prose."

The six heroes looked decidedly "sick."

"However, while Mr. Lambe is with us we need evidently not fear house-breakers. Now get back to bed, and try not to be more ridiculous than is necessary."

The two rival gangs departed, and Taffy and his two partners felt rather crestfallen till they reached the dormitory. By that time, however, they had recovered their spirits, and saw there was a broad silver lining to the cloud. Things had really gone excellently on the whole.

"Can't make head or tail of it all. It sounds as if the burglar had spoilt Lambe's game by breakin' in to-night," said Birne, "and so Lambe pinched him."

"I don't believe that," said Taffy stoutly. "I'm not goin' to believe Lambe was after anything shady at all. Anyway, he's done just what he ought to do, and did it jolly well. It's rather lucky we didn't have to tackle him—he's a tough nut."

"We should be dressin' our giddy wounds by this time, I fancy, if it had been Lambe," said Dereker. "But on the whole, though we ourselves haven't exactly shone, the proceedings have been scrumptious. There's been a whole packet of excitement, certainly nothing slow, an' we've flattened the Perke-bird into a pancake. The half-minute when I sat on his head seemed a whole lifetime of joy."

"Got to apologise to the sweep to-morrow," said Birne thoughtfully.

"Well worth it at the price. We'll frame an apology."

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

Convinced that Mr. Wollaston Lambe, their new Form-master, is an escaped convict, Taffy Wynne & Co., and Ferguson & Co., rival factions in the Remove, the most unruly Form at Codrington, determine to bring pressure to bear to rid the school of the new master's presence. Their efforts prove of little avail, however, for the Woolly Lambe not only shows that he is capable of taking care of himself and his Form, but proves a hero and sportsman by saving Wynne's life at the risk of his own. Aroused from their slumbers that same night, Taffy and his chums discover the room containing the Head's famous collection of antique gold coins has been rifled. In the excitement which follows, Birne accidentally sets the burglar alarm ringing, while Taffy, in the darkness, captures Mr. Perkes, the mat's master, in mistake for the burglar. Arriving on the scene the next moment, the Head is questioning the juniors when the door suddenly swings open, and Mr. Lambe appears upon the threshold, gripping a remarkable-looking prisoner in one vice-like hand and a green baize bag in the other. "I think you'll find your gold coins in there," he says, placing the bag on a form in front of Canon Wyndham, "except one or two, which are split about the strong-room floor."

(Now read on.)

that'll make his whiskers curl like the honeysuckle. Good-night, you chaps! Let's get some beauty-sleep."

The morning dawned fresh and fair, but Taffy & Co., as was natural, felt a little slack. They were dressing, when suddenly Saunderson, who was bending over his box getting out a clean collar, turned round.

"I say," he cried, "have you chaps seen any of my whiskers?"

"There's a lot too much cheek knocking about this morning," said Taffy ominously. "I don't know what's the matter with everybody. If I take my coat off and start distributing thick ears, some of you'll know it. Go an' pull legs somewhere else, Saundy."

"I'm not; confound it all! I'm perfectly serious!" cried Saunderson. "I want to know where my whiskers are—all that false hair and wigs and things that came with the hired clothes. Somebody's bagged the lot, and I can't find them anywhere! Do tell me if you've seen them?"

"No, none of us have—since yesterday."

"I believe that beast Ferguson's got them, or one of his pals!" cried Saunderson fiercely. "But they'll swear they haven't."

"Of course, they'll swear anything," said Dereker. "Sorry for you, Saundy. We'll put you on the track if we see a clue. But you've only to drop your governor a postcard, and he'll send a few wads of banknotes to pay for the lot, you know."

The aggrieved Saunderson went away fuming, and the four friends walked out towards the gate.

Ferguson Assists the Law!

"THINGS aren't looking up for our side," grumbled Ferguson, "and that's a fact!"

It was three days after the events just chronicled that Ferguson and his pair of cronies were sitting on the fence of the meadow just beyond the School House grounds, where they had assembled to consider the situation. All three took a very pessimistic view of things.

"The worst of it is," said Ferguson, "that scoundrel Lambe has come so well out of the burglary case."

Opening a newspaper, he read the report of the police-court proceedings against Gipsy Joe, his companions listening attentively.

"There," he said, "what d'you think of that? Doesn't that take the giddy biscuit? This gaol-bird Lambe, who thinks he's tamin' the Remove, gets complimented in court an' comes out with flyin' colours, when he was worse than the poor beggar he caught an' gave evidence against!"

"It's absolutely sickening!" exclaimed Kent-Williams. "Gipsy Joe, who, the papers say, the old fool of a magistrate sternly rebuked, was perfectly right. He ought to have been listened to."

"It's pretty rotten, but I'll tell you what," said Kempe hopefully, "it's all bound to come out at the Assizes. There'll be big lawyers on the job, then, and Lambe'll get—"

"I vote we write a letter to the burglar's counsel, tellin' him what we know," exclaimed Ferguson, "and to the judge as well. Let's— Who's that mouching along the hedge?"

The boys, who were fairly well hidden by some elder-bushes near the fence they sat on, saw a man whom they had not set eyes on before standing at the corner of the hedge, evidently not wishing to be perceived, and watching the School House. He stood motionless for a long time, and the partners had a good look at him, for he was not far away.

"Can't be another of Lambe's beastly pals," murmured Kempe, "surely?"

"No, no," said Ferguson, in an excited whisper, after a keen stare at the man. "This is a very different affair. I'll bet my shirt I know what he is. He's a plain-clothes officer."

"How d'you know?" said Kent-Williams incredulously.

"Look at the cut of him," said Ferguson; "look at his hat an' his serge clothes. Above all, look at his boots. Nothing like the boots for spottin' those chaps by. My father was deputy-commissioner of the police for years, an' I know what I'm talking about."

"Fergy's right," said Kempe. "He's got the cut of one, sure enough."

"He's no local man, either," said Ferguson, in suppressed excitement. "He's some London detective, sent down on purpose. They're wakin' up to this case at last; they see there's something wrong. That chap's sent down to find out."

"Let's tell him all we know, an' put him right," said Kent-Williams eagerly.

"And about Wynne shieldin' Mr. Lambe, too," added Kempe. "We'll upset the giddy apple-cart!"

"No time like the present," said Ferguson, jumping down from the fence. "Come on, both of you!"

They approached as stealthily as Sioux Indians—so they imagined—coming up behind the stranger; but he turned round some time before they reached him, and looked at them inquiringly. He was an athletic-looking man of about thirty, with a keen, clean-shaven face.

The boys and the stranger looked at each other in silence for some moments, and the ubiquitous three felt rather uncomfortable, not knowing how to begin. There was a slight amused smile on the stranger's face.

"Well," he said, "what do you want?"

Ferguson cleared his throat.

"We know who you are," he said mysteriously. "We can give you a tip or two, if you'd like to listen."

"Know who I am!" exclaimed the stranger. "Why, what are you talking a—"

"That's all right," cut in Kent-Williams, with a wink. "You're from Scotland Yard. We know."

A slight frown of annoyance passed over the stranger's brow, and he tapped the ground impatiently with his foot.

"Keep it dark—eh?" said Ferguson. "We won't say anything."

"Mum's the word!" added Kempe knowingly.

"What's the meaning of all this nonsense?" said the man in blue serge sharply. "Who are you?"

"We belong to Codrington," said Ferguson. "We're the best-known chaps in a Form called the Remove, the master of which is the man you're after."

The stranger stared at him in blank astonishment.

"We know more about this than most," continued Ferguson, with a nod. "You're down here about this chap Lambe, whom the burglar accused of being after the swag himself when the Head's coins were stolen. Lambe said he turned out on purpose to catch the burglar. That may go down with the local magistrate, but it won't go down with Scotland Yard—eh? They're quite right. It's a good job they've sent you down."

"You seem a very clever and observant young gentleman," said the stranger dryly, staring at him.

"We keep our eyes open, we three chaps, that's all," said Ferguson modestly. "Most of these chaps are such asses that they'd never see anything was wrong. Worse than that, there are others, who're tryin' to hush the thing up an' side with the criminal," he concluded virtuously.

"Dear me! You don't say so?" said the stranger, lighting a cigar.

The trio looked on approvingly. All detectives smoked cigars, especially when they were working out a problem or were hot on the scent.

"It's a fact," said Ferguson. "My father was once commissioner of police, and I know the ropes. We've known from the first that this man Lambe was a criminal. There are three fellows in the school, too—especially one called Wynne, he's a regular wrong 'un—who are more or less in league with Lambe. If it hadn't been for them he'd have been in prison long before now."

A slight smile curled the stranger's lips for a moment, and then he looked very stern and serious.

"Really," he said, "this is very important. You positively mean it? And you are anxious to tell me all about it, aren't you?"

"We think it's time the criminal was brought to justice," said Kent-Williams. "It's a bit sickening, you see, for chaps like us, in a famous school like this, to have a Form master over us who ought to be picking oakum at Portland Prison."

"If you'll come an' sit down under the haystack yonder where it's dry," said Ferguson, "we'll tell you all we know, and we think it'll put the chap in your hands."

"I mustn't miss a chance like this," said the detective. "No, no. Let us go, by all means." He glanced at his watch. "I have plenty of time to spare."

"It won't take long," said Ferguson, leading the way to the haystack.

They seated themselves on the dry hay where the stack had been cut into. Ferguson assumed a look of great solemnity and importance, and the detective, after a glance at him, took out a large notebook with a flourish. Ferguson gave an impressive cough, and began.

"The very first day of the term," he said, "before we even knew Lambe was our new Remove master, we discovered he was a wrong 'un. We were coming up behind the river wall at Codrington, waiting for our brake, which wasn't at the station to meet us, when we saw the man Lambe."

"When was this?" interrupted the detective.

"Er—the fifteenth of September," said Ferguson.

"about four in the afternoon. Well, we saw the man Lambe—"

"We didn't know who he was then," broke in Kempe.

"Shut up, can't you!" retorted Ferguson angrily. "Am I telling this, or are you? We saw a man, well dressed, with an eyeglass, hanging by a cord—"

"Hanging by a cord and dressed in an eyeglass," repeated the stranger, jotting the words down.

"No, no! The eyeglass was hanging, not the man!" said Ferguson irritably, thinking the man was very dense for a detective. "We saw him crouching under a bush by the riverside, as if he didn't want to be seen, and we wondered why."

"He wasn't looking for anything, I suppose?" said the detective, scribbling away.

"No, somebody was looking for him," replied Ferguson grimly, "and if they'd found him then it'd have been all up. Two policemen came along—a plain-clothes man and a constable—evidently looking for him. He shrank right back into the bush and stayed there quite quiet. They missed him, and went straight on in a hurry, and as soon as they were out of sight he doubled back and hooked it. What are you laughing at?"

"I wasn't laughing," said the detective "Go ahead! This is most important!"

"The man Lambe got clear away, and presently the police, finding they were on the wrong track—"

"How did they find that out?"

"I don't know. You ought to be able to tell that yourself," said Ferguson irritably. "Because they found he wasn't in front, I suppose. They came back, and the first chap they saw was this fellow Wynne, one of the biggest rascals in Codrington, and some of his pals. The police asked Wynne if he'd seen the man, and which way he'd gone."

Ferguson paused impressively.

"If you'll believe me, Wynne deliberately put them right off the scent, and said the man had gone across the bridge, when he'd really gone in the opposite direction. The police followed Wynne's advice, an' of course, never saw the scoundrel again."

"Which scoundrel—Wynne or Lambe?"

"You may call 'em both scoundrels," said Ferguson venomously; "but I mean Lambe. And what was our surprise and horror—"

"And virtuous indignation," put in Kent-Williams.

"To find, when school began next morning, that this runaway gaol-bird was our new Form master!"

"How's that for high?" said Kent-Williams viciously. "An' what do you think of what Wynne did? Isn't it punishable?"

"Most certainly," said the detective gravely, writing away in his notebook. "What we call accessory after the fact. And misleading the police as well. Most serious offence. A man got four months' hard for it last week at Bow Street. I brought him to justice, along with the man who'd done the crime."

"Well, we've told you enough to show you Lambe's a scoundrel," said Ferguson, "though I expect you, being from Scotland Yard, know what it is he's been up to by now. But nobody but us know why he wasn't caught that day."

"And I suppose you didn't know that's the same man who's master of our Remove?" said Kempe. "Did you?"

"No," said the detective, making another note.

"We were expecting him to be arrested every day," said Ferguson, "but that's just it. The local police are bribed by him, or else he's got a pull over them, and they daren't risk being given away. They don't dare arrest him, anyhow, though they're always hanging about here."

The detective's eyes flushed angrily at Ferguson for a moment, and he appeared about to say something, but shut his lips instead.

"And the rascal Lambe has got heaps of beastly confederates about the place," said Kent-Williams. "There's one big chap in baggy breeches. He went climbing up the ivy into Lambe's room one night, an' Ferguson and I nearly caught him. The worst of it is, this chap Lambe's such a clever rogue. He fools the Head, and fool's everybody; but he doesn't fool us."

"No, I should think nobody could do that," said the detective blandly.

"It's true he was about the house before the burglary was committed," said Ferguson, "for we heard him go



Ferguson found himself seized by the collar and whirled off his feet by the detective. Then the man pulled out a large clasp-knife, and opened it, single-handed. "Help! Rescue!" bawled Ferguson. (See page 28.)

Kent-Williams
scribbles

past our dormitory. He nabbed the other burglar for fear suspicion should fall on him, of course, and now he's a giddy hero!" concluded the big Removite in disgust. "Well, we're jolly glad to see you down here, sir, because now the local police won't be able to hush things up any longer."

"Quite so," said the stranger, looking oddly at Ferguson. "Quite so."

"What was it really that the police were after Lambe for, that first time that we saw him hiding, sir?" asked Kent-Williams eagerly.

The detective stared at him and lit another cigar. "So you don't know that," he said, "although you know so much?"

"No. What was it?"

"I can't tell you yet—the time isn't ripe," said the stranger. "But you'll know by-and-by."

"It'll be something pretty queer, I reckon," said Ferguson suggestively.

"Yes," replied the detective, with a curious smile. "I think I could safely bet it will surprise you when you do hear it. But I'm immensely obliged for what you've told me. It sets everything straight."

"Yes, I thought it would," said Ferguson. "It's an ugly business, isn't it, for the school to be mixed up in? But we've done our duty. I suppose everything's ripe now, and you're down here to do the job?"

"You've just about hit it," said the detective slowly.

"It'll make a deuce of a sensation," said Ferguson, rubbing his hands gleefully. "You won't forget the help we've given, will you? We— By Jove, there comes Lambe now! He's going back to the School House. Now's your time!"

The Remove master, returning from a journey, rather splashed and muddy, was inside the grounds making for the main entrance of the School House. The three crime-hunters jumped up eagerly.

"Shall I fetch a cab or anything for you to take him away in, sir?" asked Kent-Williams eagerly.

"No, thanks, I'll—er—I'll manage him myself," said the detective, rising. "You three clever youngsters stay here, and don't move from this haystack for at least half an hour. Understand?"

"He's tremendously strong," said Kempe. "You'd better look out for yourself if he makes any resistance. We'll help you if there's any need for it."

"Let him alone," said Ferguson. "He knows how to tackle criminals, you ass! I say, sir—"

But the detective, without stopping to listen, had already gone in after Mr. Lambe. He walked to the railings, vaulted easily over them, and reached the carriage-drive, walking rapidly and quietly.

Ferguson's Reward!

UNABLE to contain themselves for excitement, the three chums, disregarding instructions, left the haystack and hurried to the railings to get a good view.

Mr. Lambe was just entering the porch when the stranger came up with him, walking noiselessly. The man tapped him on the arm, and the Remove master turned, looked at him, and gave a visible start. The detective beckoned him inside the porch, the two passed through the double doors, and were then out of sight.

"He's got him!" exclaimed Ferguson, dancing with delight. "Exit the Woolly Lambe! The Black Maria and a stone cell at last. Serve the beggar right!"

"What a sell if he's smuggled out by the back door?" suggested Kempe.

This disastrous idea cast a sudden gloom over the assembly, when Ferguson broke into it with a sudden exclamation, and stared up at Mr. Lambe's study window, which was open. They could see the detective near it, his back towards them, and he was sitting down.

An outburst of hearty laughter reached them from the open window, which was at no great distance. They recognised it at once as the Woolly Lambe's. He did not often laugh outright, but they knew his note.

"By gum!" said Kent-Williams. "I wonder what the deuce he's got to laugh at, after being arrested?"

Not only was Mr. Lambe's laughter heard more than once, but the detective was evidently chiming in. They appeared to be enjoying a joke together.

The three chums looked at each other in utter consternation. Then Ferguson scowled savagely, and smote the railing with his fist.

"By gum! Is there to be no end to it?" he cried. "I can see what it is! That beast Lambe has squared him, just as he did the local police!"

"Squared a detective from Scotland Yard!" ejaculated Kempe. "Impossible!"

"He's sold us!" cried Kent-Williams. "Here he is, coming back alone!"

The detective was returning, sure enough, and he was striding away along the footpath leading to Fordbury at a leisurely pace, whistling as he went. The direction took him right towards the boys. He was alone.

"He's been bought!" gasped Ferguson. "I told you so!"

The big Removeite's face flushed crimson, and his uncontrollable temper burst all its bounds. He positively raged with wrath, and, clenching his fists, strode towards the stranger.

"I'll tell him what I think of him!" he said between his teeth.

"Here, come away!" said Kempe, rather alarmed. "Let him alone, Fergy; don't let's have a row!"

But Ferguson had gone right up to the detective; and he, seeing who it was, smiled a dry and sarcastic smile, which enraged the Removeite still more.

"You—you blackguard!" cried Ferguson hoarsely, hardly able to get the words out. "You've been bought, have you?"

"I beg your pardon!" said the detective, stopping and staring at him.

"You haven't arrested him, after all. You were laughing and talking with him!" roared Ferguson, letting himself go with a rush. "He's bribed you, has he, like the rest of the rotten police! But you don't make a fool of me like this. I'll show you up. You're as bad as he is, you low, bribe-taking—"

The detective had been listening perfectly quietly. Then he made a sudden dart, and Ferguson found himself seized by the collar and whirled off his feet, while the man pulled out a large clasp-knife, and opened it, single-handed, with his other hand.

"Help! Rescue!" bawled Ferguson.

The other two, horror-struck, made a half-hearted dash to rescue their leader, but were repulsed by a single sweep of the stranger's arm—Kempe staggering back, and Kent-Williams sitting down heavily on the turf.

The detective, in whose grip Ferguson was quite helpless, took the matter with amazing calmness, and pulling his captive to the hedge-bank, laid him down and kept him there with one foot on the Removeite's neck, while he rapidly cut from the hedge, with his knife, a stout hazel-stick.

"Help!" bellowed Ferguson.

In a twinkling the stick was cut and the knife put away. Then, taking a good grip of Ferguson and lifting him up, the stranger gave him such a wetting with the hazel-wand as that gay conspirator had not had for many a day.

The stick whacked and smacked, and Ferguson struggled and roared. He smote wildly with both fists, but did no damage whatever, and the detective handled him beautifully. Finally, the hazel-stick broke across Ferguson's shoulder, and, throwing the pieces away, the stranger released him.

(There's such a thing as being too clever, isn't there chums, as Ferguson has learned to his cost? But the burly Removeite is still determined to expose the Woolly Lambe! Look out, then, for another gripping instalment of this powerful serial next week.)

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