

“ALL THROUGH PONGO!”

This week's enthralling tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

THE GEM 2d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.



No. 1,142.
Vol. XXXVII.

January 4th,
1930.

One of the many exciting incidents from this week's grand school yarn.

A SCHOOL TALE OF THRILLS?—HERE YOU ARE—

All Through Pongo!

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1.

A "Fowl" Affair!

"YOU fellows seen Pongo?" Wally Adolphus D'Arcy, of the Third Form at St. Jim's, asked the question anxiously.

Jack Blake & Co., of the Fourth, who were standing chatting by the gates, smiled.

Pongo was Wally's dog, and he was very much attached to his youthful master. None the less, he seemed to be always getting unattached! It was nothing new for Wally to be wandering round looking for his mischievous terrier.

"Lost him again?" chuckled Blake.

"Yes."

"Good! Then take my tip and let him remain lost!" advised Blake. "It'll save you a heap of trouble, kid!"

"Heaps!" grinned Herries. "Pongo's much safer lost than found. Now, if it was old Towser—"

"Blow Towser!" snorted Wally D'Arcy. "Look here, you fellows, it's serious. I'm sure I heard the little beggar barking round here somewhere. If old Taggy catches him—"

"Taggles—" began Blake.

"Old Taggy's got his knife in Pongo!" said Wally, with a sniff. "Fancy anyone having his knife in a harmless dog like Pongo!"

"Perhaps he objects to Pongo rooting up all his garden," said Digby solemnly. "Some people are so unreasonable—"

"It's nothing to rot about!" said Wally, with rather an anxious glance towards the porter's lodge. "If you fellows haven't seen him—"

"Not since I saw him chewing up a glove this morning."

"Oh, that was only one of Gussy's gloves!" sniffed Wally. "Gussy made a fuss about it! Fancy making a fuss over a silly old glove! A dog must have something to do, I suppose—Hallo, here's Gus now! Seen Pongo, Gus?"

And Wally gazed almost accusingly at his major as Arthur Augustus walked gracefully up.

"No, I have not seen Pongo—not since he snatched my glove and wuined it this mornin'!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I twust I shall nevah see the wotten dog again, Wally!"

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If ever there was a dog born to trouble, it is Wally D'Arcy's bundle of concentrated canine mischief—Pongo! And the worst of it is that he nearly always succeeds in passing the trouble on to others!

If Arthur Augustus really meant that, it proved him to be of an unduly trustful nature. For the very next moment he saw Pongo—or got a glimpse of him, at all events. Even as he spoke there sounded an angry yell from behind the lodge garden wall, and then something came streaking out through the yard gateway at terrific speed.

It resembled a whizzing ball of white wool somewhat, and it proved to be the missing Pongo.

Just in time Blake leaped out of the way, but Arthur Augustus was not so fortunate. Pongo seemed to get mixed up for a brief, whirling instant in the elegant legs of Arthur Augustus, and then he streaked on.

Arthur Augustus sat down hard in a muddy puddle.

As he sat there, and before he had had time even to wonder what had happened, something else came whirling out through the open gateway. It proved to be a broom, and it caught the seated Arthur Augustus a fearful crack on the side of his noble head.



Old Taggles, the school porter, followed the broom out, his crusty features red with wrath.

"Pongo!" howled Wally.

But, for once, Pongo was deaf to the voice of his master. He vanished like a streak of lightning.

Blake and Herries helped the gasping Arthur Augustus to his feet. He stood and hugged his head dazedly.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he gurgled. "Ow! Oh, bai Jove! Oh, cwikey! Oh, my Lead!"

"Never mind, it might have been Pongo's head!" said Wally, in great relief. "That broom would have caught him if you hadn't stopped it, Gus!"

"Ow! You feahful little idiot, I am vevy much hurt!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Look at my clobbah! Look at my toppah—attahly wuined!"

—THE FINEST STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S YET!

"Well, wasn't it worth that to save old Pongo a nasty knock?" argued Wally.

"That wretched dog is a wotten nuisance!" shrieked Gussy. "Taggy, you old wottah—"

"Which it were mcant for that four-legged pest, Master D'Arcy!" snorted Taggles, grabbing up his broom and glowering at Wally. "Lemme only catch 'old of 'im, that's all!"

"But what about my head, you feahful old idiot?" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"And what about my fowls?" shouted Taggles, who was in a towering rage himself. "It were that dratted dorg's



fault! I chucked that broom at that there pest of a dorg, and it weren't my fault as it 'it your 'ead!"

"What's Pongo been up to, Taggy?" grinned Blake. "Pinched your dinner?"

"No, he ain't, Master Blake!" said Taggles indignantly. "It's somethin' worse nor that! I ain't

standin' no more of it! Five of my fowls 'as that there dorg took this larst few days, and what I sez is this 'ere—I've 'ad enough of it!"

"Pongo hasn't touched your blessed fowls!" snorted Wally. "Pongo isn't a chicken thief, you old idiot!"

"And I tell you he is!" shouted Taggles angrily. "I've told you mor'n once as I'd got my suspicions of 'im, young Master D'Arcy! Five of my best birds gone, and all through that there dorg! Ain't I jest caught 'im this very minute arter 'em? Ain't I jest this minute chased that there dorg out and chucked me broom arter 'im? Caught 'im in the hact, I did!"

"You caught old Pongo at your thumping fowls?" yelled Wally.

"Yes, that I did! 'Earing a noise, like, I rushed hout and caught the bloomin' dorg routin' be'ind the hen-house; scratchin' a hole, he was-tryin' to get in, o' course! Caught 'im in the hact!"

"You—you silly old ass!" said Wally, spluttering. "He wasn't after your thumping fowls—he was after rats, of course! You've said yourself that there were rats round your yard, Taggy! He was rooting after rats!"

"And I tells you as he weren't!" bawled Taggles. "Think as I don't know? Rats couldn't 'ave torn down the wire like that there dorg's done afore. Ain't it bad enough for a man to 'ave young raskils to deal with without 'avin' his fowls stolen by their bloomin' dorgs?"

"Now, look here, Taggy—"

"I ain't lookin' nowhere!" bawled Taggles, in a rage. "I'm goin' to the 'Ead arter this, and I'm goin' to report this 'ere! What I sez is this 'ere—it's 'ard enough for a man to 'ave you cheeky, imperent young rips a-trespassin' on a man's garden, without 'avin' your bloomin' dorgs arter me fowls as well! I've 'ad more'n enough of it!"

With that Mr. Ephraim Taggles re-entered his yard, banging the gate after him with unnecessary violence. More than once had the old porter had trouble with Wally over Pongo, but this time he seemed to be really roused to action.

Wally gave a dismal whistle.

"Oh crumbs!" he groaned.

"Was he after the poultry, Wally?" asked Tom Merry, who had come up in time to hear the charge.

"Of course he wasn't!" said Wally warmly. "Old Pongo's too well-trained for that! We've heaps and heaps of poultry at home, and he never dreams of touching them—Gus will tell you that!"

"That is quite twue, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus, who was rubbing himself down as best he could with a handkerchief. "That feahful dog is a wretched nuisance! He has no wespsect for a fellow's clobber or anythin' else! But he would nevah touch poultwy—wathah not, bai Jove! Taggy is wight off the walls!"

"He was after rats!" said Wally. "But—Oh crumbs! It was only yesterday he chewed up Selby's best hat. It blew off in the quad, and Pongo was on it before I could stop him, you know. If Taggy reports him now—"

"It'll mean the giddy boot for Pongo!" said Blake. "Well, if he has to go there won't be many wet eyes at St. Jim's, Wally, old bean! Still—"

"If Taggy can prove it, Pongo will have to go, I bet!" said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Better look out, Wally—Hallo that sounds like the little beggar now!"

It certainly did. From beyond the lodge wall sounded the sudden barking and yapping of a dog—intermingled with the irate shouts of Ephraim Taggles!

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with a gasp. "Is is that wretched Pongo again!"

CHAPTER 2.

Not Pongo

IT was Pongo, right enough; they knew that canine voice only too well. Evidently the attraction of the rats—or fowls—had proved too great a temptation for him, despite the risk and his recent narrow escape. Pongo had merely scudded away at the front to sneak in again by the back garden.

At all events he was there.

The juniors and fags rushed to the gate in the wall. Wally opened it, and they glanced inside.

Taggles was just entering the back yard from the garden beyond. In his arms was a struggling, yapping terrier, and on his face was deep indignation and wrath.

"Well, that dog has a nerve, anyway!" chuckled Jack Blake, with some admiration. "But his number's up now, Wally! Taggy's got him!"

"The—the old rotter!" spluttered Wally. "Here, Taggy, let old Pongo go, you bounder!"

Taggles glared at the indignant fag.

"Let 'im go—hey?" he bawled. "Likely, ain't it? Caught in the very hact agen! Look at his mouth, my lad—look at it! If that ain't proof enough, what I wants to know is—what is proof?"

He held up the struggling Pongo. Round the terrier's mouth were stray feathers and dirt.

"Look at them feathers!" he hooted. "Now, 'as he bin arter my fowls, or 'asn't he?"

"He's been nosing after rats, of course, you old idiot!" yelled Wally angrily. "Let him go—"

"Oh, has 'e?" said Taggles, with heavy, bitter sarcasm. "Arter rats—hey? O' course, young Master D'Arcy—arter rats with features on 'em! Rats wi' two legs and wings—hey?"

"Hold on, Taggy!" said Tom Merry smiling. "Pongo might easily have got feathers on his chivvy when nosing after rats—"

"Rats be blowed!" snorted Taggles, with sudden heat. "I'm fed-up with 'earin' about rats! You young gents, get out of this 'ere yard—sharp!"

"Well, hand old Pongo over!" shouted Wally. "Look here—"

"Arter I bin to the 'Ead!" said Taggles doggedly. "I'm just goin' to tidy meself up a bit, and then this dratted dorg goes to the 'Ead with me! We'll see if these 'ere feathers is rat's or chicken's feathers. Ho, yes! Hout of this 'ere yard, sharp, or I'll report you!"

"Report, and be blowed!" yelled Wally. "Back up, you men! Let's—Oh crumbs!"

There was no opportunity of backing up Wally—at least, not a very favourable opportunity. For as Wally yelled, Taggles grabbed his trusty broom with his free hand and made a rush at the group of juniors.

"Bai Jove! Look out!"

"Oh my hat!"

Even Wally retreated hurriedly before that ferocious rush. Obviously old Taggles—a crusty, awkward old chap at the best of times—was not in a mood to be reasoned with now.

With frantic haste Wally and the juniors stampeded out of the yard before that threatening broom. He slammed the door in the wall and shot the bolts.

The hapless Pongo's yapping increased, but he was like an infant in Taggles' horny grasp. When Wally shinned up the wall and glared over it a few moments later he was just in time to see Taggles drop the struggling, yapping terrier into a big basket. Then the lid was dropped, secured with a peg of wood, and the basket carted into the scullery of the lodge.

"Well, the—the old rotter!" gasped Wally. "Collar old Pongo, would he? We'll see about that!"

"Here, hold on, Wally!" said Tom Merry, in alarm. "Better let the old chap alone now. Only be worse for you if you kick up a rumpus!"

"Yes, hold on!" chuckled Monty Lowther, who had joined Wally on the wall. "I've got a wheeze—"

"If it's to save Pongo—" began Wally.

"That and more, kid! You leave this to me, young fire-eater!"

"But—"

Wally paused. He knew Lowther's reputation as a practical joker. But this was no joking matter to Wally. All he wanted was Pongo's release.

"Leave it to me!" repeated Monty Lowther, with a soft chuckle. "I'll have Pongo out of that in two ticks, I fancy!"

Wally said no more to that. Lowther's eyes were fixed on the burly form of Taggles, just visible through the small scullery window. The old chap was removing his muddy thigh boots, which he had been wearing while swilling out the yard. Evidently he intended to change before visiting the august headmaster of St. Jim's.

Lowther's chance came soon enough. Having removed his boots, Taggles stumped off into the inner room to continue his "tidying up." Without a word Lowther slipped down into the yard, unbolted the door, and dragged it wide. Then he scudded to the scullery and slipped inside.

In the basket Pongo was making a terrific hubbub, and it was unlikely Taggles would hear Lowther. In an instant Monty had opened the basket, and, like a flash of lightning, Pongo was out and streaking through the gate to freedom.

Then Lowther slipped out into the yard and turned towards the garden.

"Come on, Monty, you idiot!" called Tom, holding the door wide.

Monty Lowther chuckled and went on. It was soon seen what he was after. Sunning itself on a post of the gateway leading to the garden was Cornelius, Dame Taggles' cat.

The junior approached Cornelius cautiously, and the cat eyed Monty unsuspectingly. He allowed the junior to stroke him, and the next instant he was a prisoner. And a few seconds later he had taken Pongo's place in the big basket—a victim of his own trusting nature!

There was a chorus of chuckles as Monty Lowther shoved his grinning chums out of the gate, closed it, and bolted it again. Then he swarmed over the wall and joined them.

Wally had vanished, hot on Pongo's track.

"Well, you—you ass!" gasped Tom Merry. "You've shoved old Cornelius into the basket, Monty?"

"Yes—in Pongo's place!" said Lowther breathlessly.

"What about Taggy's face when he opens the giddy basket before the Head? It'll be worth a guinea a box—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Luckily the old chap's deaf, so he won't hear Cornelius, and I bet he won't trouble to look!" smiled Lowther. "Hallo, here he is!"

The door in the wall opened, and Taggles appeared with the big basket under his arm. He had his coat on now, and he looked grim and determined.

"You clear hout of this, you young himps!" he grunted. "No good you 'angin' about 'ere now! This 'ere dorg's goin' afore the 'Ead this very minit!"

"Won't a bob tempt you to let Pongo go, Taggy?" asked Lowther.

"No; nor fifty bobs!" said Taggles grimly. "This 'ere dog's gone a bit too far this time. It's bad enough rootin' a man's cabbages an' things hup. But when it comes to takin' a man's fowls it's time summat was done! I'm standin' no more of it! It's no larfin' matter, young gents!"

But the juniors thought it was, and they roared as Taggles stumped away towards the School House steps. Just then Wally came scudding up. He stared as he saw Taggles with the basket.

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"Oh crumbs!" he gasped. "Is he taking the empty basket to the Beak?"

"Not at all!" said Lowther.

"But Pongo's safe in 'is giddy kennel now!" said Wally, staring.

"Good! Then thank me nicely for saving him, and then go and wash your neck, kid!"

"You silly owl!" hooted Wally. "Look here, is Taggy—"

Wally broke off, and scudded away, narrowly missing Lowther's boot as he went. Being a mighty man of the Shell, Lowther objected to being called an owl by a fag of the Third.

"You awful ass, Monty!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "The Head will be fearfully waxy—"

"With Taggles—yes!" chuckled Lowther. "Taggy will look an awful ass—"

"Taggy will swear Wally changed Pongo for Cornelius!" said Tom. "Wally ought to have been warned in case he's sent for."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, in some alarm.

And he looked round again for his minor. But Wally had vanished, and, being wet and uncomfortable, Arthur Augustus followed the rest indoors to change before dinner, frowning deeply. Lowther's little jape might easily have serious consequences—for Wally. But neither the swell of the Fourth nor any of the others had any inkling of how serious and far-reaching the consequences of that jape were to be!

CHAPTER 3.

Rough on Wally!

"MASTER D'ARCY!"

"Hallo, Toby?"

Wally D'Arcy groaned as Toby Marsh, the School House page, came up to him just as he was going in to dinner. He had been expecting the summons every moment, and had held himself in readiness.

"Which the 'eadmaster wants to see you, Master D'Arcy!" Toby informed him.

"Right-ho!" said Wally, with a sigh. "Might have waited until I'd had my grub, anyway!"

He turned to follow Toby. Just then Arthur Augustus came up.

"Wally, you young wascal—"

"Can't stop, you old rascal!" said Wally. "Got an appointment with the Beak—lunch with the old sport, I expect!"

"Bai Jove! One moment, Wally—"

"Rats!"

Wally scuttled after Toby. Arthur Augustus frowned, and hesitated. He was anxious to acquaint Wally with the contents of the basket—to forewarn him, as it were. After hesitating a moment, Arthur Augustus decided he must rush after Wally, despite Wally's cheeky reply.

But Arthur Augustus had left it too late—his hesitation was fatal. When he hurried into Masters' Corridor, he was just in time to see the scapegrace of the Third vanish into the Head's study.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

It was too late to warn Wally now, and Arthur Augustus returned to the dining-hall, shaking his head very seriously.

So Wally, as well as the Head and Taggles, got the surprise prepared for them by Lowther!

In the Head's study Taggles was standing, twirling his rusty and ancient top-hat in his gnarled fingers. At his feet was the big basket which Wally had seen him carry in as he came along the corridor.

"Which I've got the dorg in this 'ere basket now, sir!" Taggles was announcing in a voice almost cracking with indignation.

"You should not have brought it here, Taggles!" snapped the Head testily. "There was no necessity at all. In any case, the matter should have been taken before the Housemaster."

"Which I brought 'im to prove as he was arter my fowls!" said Taggles doggedly. "He's got feathers round 'is jaws even now as'll prove clear as clear as he was arter 'em, sir! This 'ere ain't jest an or'nary matter what I'd report to Mr. Railton. Takin' a man's fowls—"

"Very well, Taggles!" said the Head hastily. "Here is the owner of the dog now. If it can be proved that the animal is responsible for your poultry disappearing, something must be done, of course. D'Arcy minor!"

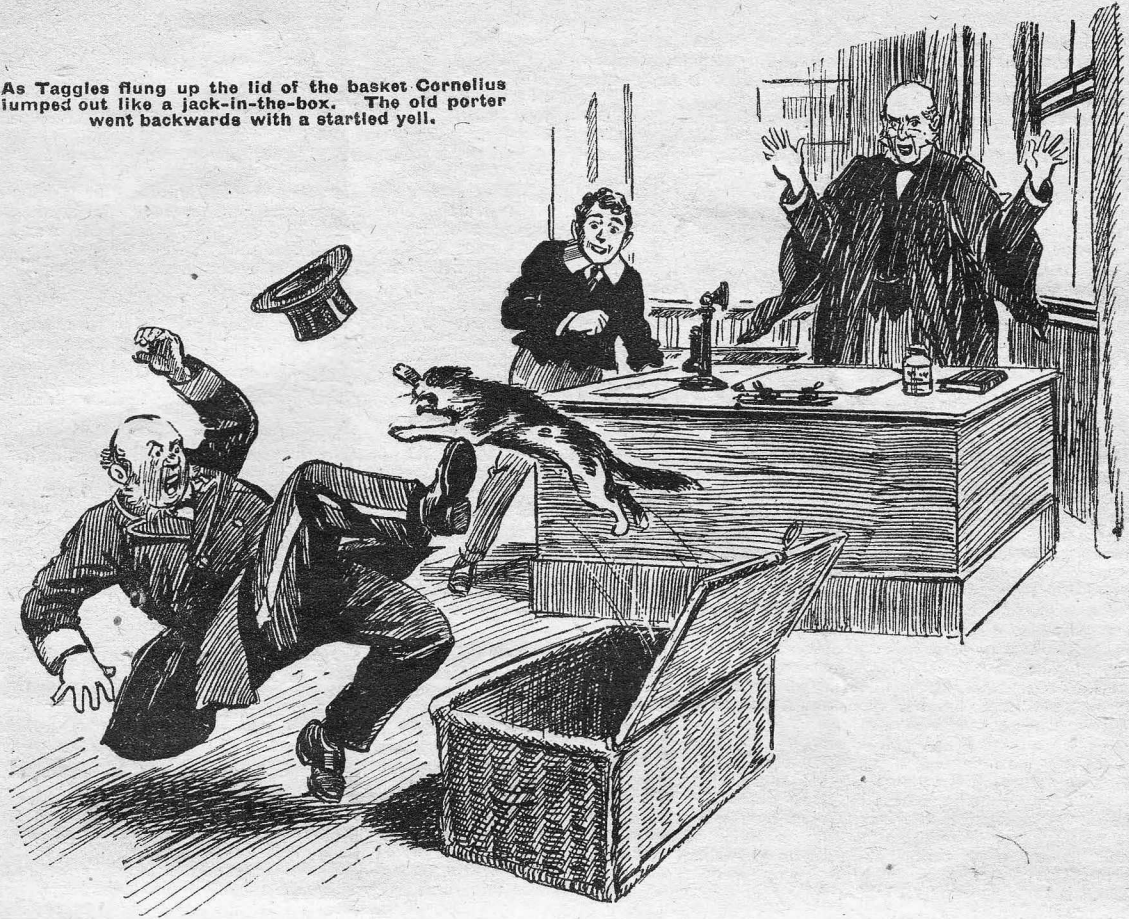
"Yes, sir!"

Taggles has complained to me again regarding your dog. This time the matter appears to be serious. He states that he has missed several of his fowls lately, and that this morning he caught the dog attempting to get at his poultry!" said the Head sternly.

"It's not the truth, sir!" said Wally.

"What—what?"

As Taggles flung up the lid of the basket Cornelius jumped out like a jack-in-the-box. The old porter went backwards with a startled yell.



"It's true that Taggles caught him near the hen-run, I admit, sir!" said Wally warmly. "But he was after rats! Pongo wouldn't touch fowls—he's used to them at home, and doesn't dream of harming them! Taggles knows there are rats round his yard!"

"But this 'ere dog weren't arter no rats, I tell you!" snorted Taggles. "What about 'is jaw bein' covered wi' feathers?"

"The fact that you caught the animal interfering with your poultry seems to me sufficient proof, Taggles!" said the Head majestically. "You may, however, produce the dog!"

"Werry good, sir!"

And Taggles did his best to produce the offending dog. Wally, despite his anxiety regarding Pongo, could not restrain a faint grin as the old porter started to struggle with the basket fastening. He was looking forward, in fact, to seeing Taggy's face when he did open the basket. But just then a sound came from the basket—a sound that caused the Head, as well as Wally, to start.

"Meow! Me-e-cow!"

Evidently the shaking of the basket had aroused Cornelius to renewed protests.

Taggles, being hard of hearing, did not hear the sound, however.

He withdrew the peg at last, and flung back the lid.

Out came Cornelius—with a rush. At the best of times Dame Taggles' cat was a somewhat crusty, ill-tempered animal. But he strongly objected to his imprisonment, and he was in a tearing rage now.

He leaped out like a jack-in-the-box, and Taggles, who was bending over the basket, went backwards with a startled yell.

"Meow-ow!"

Then, with a final, defiant "Meow," Cornelius sighted the open window, and made a beeline for it.

Unfortunately, the Head's desk was in the way.

Cornelius took two flying leaps, the first sending ink, gum, and papers flying. Then he leaped for the window-sill, this time sending a standard lamp flying with an appalling crash of breaking glass.

The next moment Cornelius had vanished over the sill, his tail whisking angrily.

"Good—good heavens!"

The Head jumped to his feet with ink, black and red,

streaming from his gown and trousers. Ink and gum tumbled over the scattered papers on the desk and dripped on the carpet.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wally.

It was all he could do to prevent himself yelling with laughter.

As it was he grinned, and the Head sighted the grin.

"Wretched boy!" he gasped. "How dare you! This is not a matter for hilarity! What—what— Taggles!"

The Head's voice ended on a thunderous note.

Taggles scrambled to his feet, his gnarled visage registering utter amazement and alarm. The Head glared at him while he grabbed a duster and started to mop the ink from his gown and clothes.

"Taggles!" he thundered.

"My heye!" gurgled Taggles. "Which it weren't that dratted dorg at all! It were old Cornelius! My heye!"

"Taggles! Bless my soul!" articulated Dr. Holmes, throwing aside the inky duster angrily. "What—what does this mean? If—if this is an impudent, outrageous joke, Taggles—"

"Which it ain't my doings if it is!" gasped Taggles, blinking dazedly at the empty basket. "I—I'll swear I put that there dratted dorg in this 'ere basket! It fair beats me! I goes and shoves a dorg in that there basket, and when I opens it it's a cat!"

"Absurd, Taggles! D'Arcy minor, how dare you grin in that impudent manner!" thundered the Head, crimson with wrath. "If you assure me that you placed the dog in that basket—"

"O' course I did, sir!" almost hooted Taggles. "I shoved that 'dratted dorg in and fastened 'im in! This 'ere is one of them young gents' jokes—young Master D'Arcy 'ere, I bet!"

"Did you leave the basket unattended after placing the dog in, Taggles?"

"My heye! That's 'ow it were done, sir!" stuttered Taggles, a light breaking in on him at last. "It were done when I went upstairs to change me coat!"

"Very good, Taggles!" The Head's voice was ominous as he eyed the luckless Wally with a steely eye. "Oh, very good! Obviously this impudent boy released his dog and placed the cat in the basket. Was D'Arcy minor aware that you intended to bring the dog to me?"

"Oh, yessir! Which I told him that!"

"Oh, indeed!" rapped the Head, his voice making Wally look quite solemn now. "Very good! So—so you intended me to be a victim of your outrageous joke, D'Arcy—me, your headmaster!"

"Oh crumbs! I—I mean, not at all, sir! Nothing of the kind!" gasped Wally D'Arcy, in great alarm, his face going pale. "I—I never even touched the basket, sir—nor the cat!"

"Were you under the impression that your dog was in that basket when you entered this study, D'Arcy?"

"Ahem!"

"Answer me, sir!"

"N-nunno, sir!"

"Then you knew the cat was there?" said the Head sternly.

"Oh, no, sir!" groaned Wally. "I—I thought the basket was empty!"

"Whoever released your dog was the person who placed the cat there!" said the Head. "That is obvious! If you deny having made the exchange, D'Arcy—"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Wally unhappily. "I—I didn't do it!"

"Do you know who did?"

Silence!

"Answer me, D'Arcy!"

Wally D'Arcy remained silent again. He understood the meaning of Lowther's grins now. Lowther had done it, of course! Yet he could not give the japer of the Shell away.

"I—I can't explain, sir. But I didn't do it!"

"Cannot explain! Utter nonsense!" thundered the Head. "It is perfectly obvious to me that you yourself made the exchange, D'Arcy. I myself noted an expression of anticipation on your face when Taggles was about to open the basket. Your impudent amusement at what followed alone convinces me that you, and you alone, played this abominable joke upon Taggles and myself!"

"I—I didn't, sir!" gasped Wally.

"I cannot believe that!" snapped the Head. "In any case, you had ample opportunity of acquainting me with the fact that the basket did not contain the dog, yet you did not do so. You wished to enjoy the result of the impudent joke—a joke upon me just as much as upon the school porter. For that you will be punished severely, D'Arcy!"

"Oh, sir!"

The Head took his cane from his desk. The next moment the unhappy fag was making its acquaintance in a manner as painful as it was close.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

Two on each hand was the punishment—the punishment for japing the headmaster of St. Jim's! Considering the split ink the state of the Head's clothes and desk, and the smashed lamp, it was really a light punishment—had Wally been guilty.

But he wasn't guilty—at least, not guilty of the crime, or of knowing the full extent of the jape. And Wally fairly seethed inwardly with indignation at the injustice of it.

Still, he couldn't help feeling some little relief at the comforting thought that the feathers had not been seen by the Head on Pongo's mouth. Wally knew Pongo had become thus adorned while rooting round the hen-run for rats. But the Head was more likely to take Taggles' view than his. Pongo was now safely chained up in his kennel, and the feathers and stuff had been removed from round his jaws. The only visual evidence against Pongo was gone.

The Head's next words filled him with renewed fear, however.

"As you claim that the dog was hunting rats, and as Taggles appears to have no satisfactory evidence to the contrary, I am prepared to give the dog the benefit of the doubt in this case!" he said. "But in future the animal must be kept securely chained and you yourself will be held responsible for him entirely, D'Arcy. If I have any further complaints, either from Taggles or from any other source, I shall be compelled to order him to be sent away from St. Jim's. You may go!"

The Head dismissed the fag with that grim warning, and Wally left the study dismally, his youthful mind filled with a burning indignation. As if a healthy, high-spirited dog like Pongo could help causing complaints to be made against him!

The prospect seemed hopeless to Wally—unless he kept Pongo tied up for ever, and even then it was pretty certain the wily animal would manage to break free somehow!

Wally groaned.

Just then Taggles came out after him, holding the basket in one hand and closing the door with the other.

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"You—you old rotter!" gasped Wally. "Just you wait, that's all!"

"Which I ain't goin' to 'ave my fowls took, Master D'Arcy!" said Taggles stolidly. "It were your own fault as you got a caning, that it were! Anyways, jest you look hout, Master D'Arcy! You keep that there dorg outer my way arter this!"

And with that dark threat the porter stumped away with his basket.

Wally hurried along to the dining-hall, fairly gasping with wrath. The licking had been a severe one, and the injustice of it made the fag grit his teeth. He was late for dinner, of course, and Mr. Selby glared at him.

"You are ten minutes late for dinner, D'Arcy!" he snapped.

"Yes, sir. I've been——"

"I have no desire to learn where you have been wasting your time!" rasped Mr. Selby. "Take fifty lines, and go to your place!"

"But, sir, I've been——"

"Go to your place this instant, D'Arcy! How dare you attempt to argue with me!"

"But I've only just come from——"

"Silence! Another word from you and I shall double your imposition, D'Arcy. Sit down, sir!"

"Oh crumbs!" mumbled Wally, and he sat down.

It was the last straw!

CHAPTER 4.

Pongo Again!

"BETTER not!" said Curly Gibson.

"Much better!" agreed Jameson.

"Asking for trouble!" commented Frank Levison. "Don't do it, Wally!"

"That blessed mongrel's got you into enough trouble!" grunted Reggie Manners. "And us, too!"

"If you call old Pongo a mongrel, young Manners——" began Wally heatedly.

"Well, he's up to mischief enough out of doors without bringing him indoors!" said Reggie Manners.

Wally D'Arcy frowned. He was looking worried as well as very irritable. Pongo was always a source of argument and trouble with Wally and his chums. They all liked Pongo well enough—he was certainly a friendly and likeable dog, and they were all more or less fond of Wally's precious pet. But, unfortunately, Pongo had a remarkable way of getting himself and his master into scrapes in which they themselves were entangled more often than not.

But his chums, and their views on Pongo, worried Wally not at all. He was worried regarding Pongo. In Wally's view Pongo was not safe in his kennel out of doors—not with old Taggles roaming abroad on vengeance bent. Taggles robbed of his fowls was like unto a lioness robbed of her cubs. Taggles was a very crusty, independent old fellow. At St. Jim's, having been there "longer nor anybody else," to use Taggy's own words, the old porter was an institution and a privileged person. The authorities overlooked Taggy's many and various faults. Knowing this, Taggles was wont to take advantage. Very often he took the law into his own hands—especially when dealing with cheeky fags!

Aware of this, Wally feared for Pongo's safety. Certainly Taggles was not a bad old chap, taking him all round—a sentiment Wally would have been the first to endorse in normal times. But in his present mood, mourning for his lost poultry and burning for vengeance on the practical joker who had made a fool of him before the Head, Taggles was capable of anything, in Wally's view.

All through dinner Wally pondered the probability of harm coming to Pongo at Taggles' horny hands. Now, dinner being over, he had arrived at his decision. Pongo must, at all costs and risks, be removed from the danger zone.

"There's that lumber-room at the end of the Third passage!" said Wally. "Pongo will be safe enough there until old Taggy's got over his paddy!"

"It's all rot!" said Frank Levison. "Taggy's a crusty old ass, but he wouldn't harm Pongo; he's not that sort, Wally!"

"I'm not risking it!" said Wally doggedly. "He's in a fine bate now—why, he'd thrash me to a frazzle, let alone Pongo! Besides, he's afraid of losing more fowls, and he might easily kidnap old Pongo and sell him, or get rid of him somehow!"

"Rats!"

"If you say 'rats' to me, young Manners——"

"Taggy wouldn't do a thing like that!" said Frank Levison quietly. "Be sensible, Wally. You know Pongo will get into trouble inside the House—and in any case you've been forbidden to bring him indoors only recently."

"Rot!" said Wally.
 "And he's bound to bark and give the game away!" said Jameson.
 "Bunkum!" said Wally stubbornly. "He won't make a sound if I tell him not to. Pongo's got more sense than you lot put together."
 "But supposing—"

"Rats! Pongo's coming indoors!" said Wally. "Just time to get him fixed up before lessons. My hat! Better leave it until just after time for lessons—everybody will be in class then, and I can smuggle him in easily!"
 "But you'll be late, and Selby—"

"Blow Selby!" said Wally independently. "Who cares for old Selby? What's lines or a licking when it comes to Pongo's safety? Talk sense, young Levison! Anyway, I'm off now! If Selby asks for me tell him to go and chop chips!"

Wally's chums, reckless as they were, were not likely to do that!

When the bell rang for classes Wally had not shown up, and they went into the Third Form-room looking rather apprehensive. Mr. Selby came in with quick, jerky steps and a red nose—two unfailing signs that he was in a bad temper! Having been late for dinner though through no fault of his own—Wally was likely to get it hot for being late for classes also.

Mr. Selby soon sighted the vacant place, and his nose glowed like a beacon light.

"Where is D'Arcy?" he snapped.

No answer.

Mr. Selby set his lips.

"D'Arcy was late for dinner!" he rasped. "He has now thought fit to be late for afternoon lessons. Very good—oh, very good!"

What was very good for Mr. Selby was, obviously, not going to be very good for Walter Adolphus D'Arcy.

"Wally's for it!" groaned Frank Levison.

"Hallo! Here he comes!" murmured Curly Gibson.
 "Oh, good!"

The door opened and Wally came in, a trifle flushed and breathless. Mr. Selby took up his cane from his desk. Obviously it was going to be a licking, and not lines. But Wally did not seem to mind. He had done what he had intended to do. Pongo was safe from harm, tied up in the lumber-room. Certainly he was only tied with string, but Wally had told him he was not to bite the string through, and Wally knew he would not disobey—at least, that was his fond belief. In any case, Wally had taken care to lock the door of the lumber-room.

Pongo being safe from harm, Wally was ready and willing to take a licking from Selby or anyone else!

"So you have condescended to join us at lessons, after all, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Selby, with bitter sarcasm.
 "Oh, yes, sir!"

"Better late than never, of course!" said Mr. Selby, swishing his cane, as if the sound were music in his ears.
 "But you were also late for dinner, D'Arcy."

"The Head sent for me," said Wally coolly. "I came to the dining-hall the moment I was free. As it wasn't my fault, I hope you'll cancel my lines now, sir!"

It was studied impertinence. Wally had no such hope.

"No, I shall not cancel your lines!" hooted Mr. Selby. "You will still do them as a punishment for studied impudence, D'Arcy. As I require proof, however, that you were detained by the headmaster, I insist upon knowing why Dr. Holmes sent for you."

"It—it was about Pongo, my dog, sir," said Wally unwillingly. "Taggles says Pongo has been after his fowls. I know he hasn't, but—"

"And I have not the slightest doubt that Taggles is right," said Mr. Selby bitterly. "Your wretched animal is a nuisance, and a danger to the community!"

"No, he isn't!" said Wally, his eyes gleaming.

"What—what?" Mr. Selby's eyes glittered. "How dare you speak to me like that, D'Arcy? Hold out your hand, sir!"

Wally held out his hand, rather regretting he had been so plain-spoken to the master of the Third. But it was too late for regrets now. The cane rose and fell, with a ferocious swish.

Swish!

The Form had been looking on with interest, and much sympathy for Wally. But suddenly the attention of those nearest the door had been attracted by a curious scratching sound on the panels outside. Curly Gibson heard it and fairly jumped with alarm. He fancied he knew what it meant.

But Mr. Selby did not hear it, nor did Wally. Both were too busily engaged just then.

Swish!

The cane came down again, more viciously than ever, and Wally could not restrain a yelp. The scratching outside the door was renewed with great vigour, and then came the sound of footsteps. The next instant the door-knob twisted and the door was opened a few inches.

But wide enough for Pongo!

Several of the fags caught a brief glimpse of the grinning face of Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth, through the opening, and then the door closed again quickly and the footsteps passed on.

But Pongo was inside now. It was obvious what had happened. Pongo had broken free and had made for the one place he expected to find his master. At a luckless moment Cutts had happened to be coming along the passage. Cutts was a humorous youth, his humour usually being of the unkind, unpleasant sort. Recognising

Pongo, he had opened the door and cleared off, leaving the rest to Pongo. It was Cutts' idea of a joke!

Unfortunately, it could not have happened at a worse moment, for just as Pongo trotted in cheerily, Mr. Selby brought his cane down for the third time. He brought it down harder than ever, and Wally yelped again.

That was enough for Pongo! Selby had never been a friend of his; in fact, Pongo looked upon the sour-featured master of the Third as his bitterest enemy, not even excepting Taggles!

The result was a foregone conclusion.

Pongo went for Mr. Selby, with a growl and a rush.

"Pongo!" yelled Wally.

But Wally was too late to prevent the catastrophe. Mr.

Next Week's Star Programme!

NEXT week's Grand Issue opens up with a bang. As soon as you open the first page of our "Gem" you will be sure to enjoy the long chain of thrilling incidents packed into the chapters of our extra-long story of TOM MERRY & CO., the CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S.

This week's story is certainly a winner, and in it are given a full share of amazing adventures. But next week's story is even better. I can safely say that you will never want to read a better story than:

"THE FUGITIVE SCHOOLBOY!"

By Martin Clifford.

next Wednesday.

Poor old Wally D'Arcy! He's well in the soup over this affair with Pongo and Mr. Selby. But so is Tom Merry, and one or two other prominent characters. Tom Merry tries to create a sensation in the school, but Wally beats him on the post, in a manner you will enjoy.

There is no doubt that our wise old whisky wonder, the "Oracle," keeps his corner of the "Gem" alive with interest and amusement. He is "all there" with his answers to queries, so be prepared for another burst of information from this quarter in next week's issue.

With his notebook and pencil well to the fore, and his ready wit, Mr. "Nosey" Parker, our special football representative, turns his energetic steps in the direction of the Hull City F.C. with the obvious intention of gleaming whatever information there is to be got from this particular section of the sporting world. That he is successful you will soon see when you read his report.

No one likes to bid good-bye to pals, and so we are reluctant to see the last of the cheery chums at Codrington. But this is to be, for our topping school serial, "THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!" by David Goodwin, has run its course. Next week's instalment is the conclusion of this very lively, full-of-action story. Now, this brings me to the mention of the serial to follow.

That I have got something good up my sleeve in the way of a new serial you can rest assured. Something thrilling, unusual, and breathlessly exciting is what you want, eh? Then your desires will be gratified when you read the full announcement concerning OUR NEW SERIAL in next week's number.

Whilst I am on the subject of Thrilling Stories, I must take this opportunity of telling all and sundry about the extra-long DETECTIVE-THRILLERS that are appearing every Tuesday in our companion paper, the POPULAR. These stories deal with the adventures of FERRERS LOCKE, the famous Baker Street detective, and his boy assistant, Jack Drake. I might add that these tales are the finest of their kind ever published.

YOUR EDITOR.

Selby shrieked as Pongo's sharp, white teeth met in his trousers, fortunately just missing his calf. There followed a sound of tearing cloth as Mr. Selby shrieked again and made a flying leap for his desk.

Pongo hung on gallantly, hanging on by a piece of striped trousering.

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Selby. "G-good heavens! Help! D'Arcy—that dog! Oh, help!"

The growling and snarling was certainly terrifying to a man like Mr. Selby. His nerve went, and he shrieked and shrieked. But he reached his desk, and scrambled up on to it with the aid of the chair. Then, flustered and flurried and terrified, he lashed down at Pongo with his cane.

The strip of cloth was the first to give way—luckily, perhaps, for Pongo and Mr. Selby. And Pongo fell back in a scrambling heap, the strip of striped cloth still in his jaws.

"Pongo, you rascal!" yelled Wally

He managed to get a grip on his squirming pet, and the grip held. Just then Dr. Holmes walked in.

"G-good gracious!"

The venerable Head of St. Jim's stared—as well he might!

Most of the fags were out of their seats. Between them, Wally and Frank Levison—who had left his seat in a desperate attempt to avert the calamity—were holding back Pongo, who did not seem at all satisfied yet. On top of the desk, still shouting for aid, was Mr. Selby. He stopped abruptly, however, on sighting the august and majestic figure of the Head.

"Good—good gracious!" repeated the Head. "Mr. Selby—sir! What does this commotion mean? Be good enough to get down. Your position, sir—"

Really, Dr. Holmes should not have needed to know what it meant. Pongo's desperate attempts to reach Mr. Selby should have been enough. Certainly Mr. Selby's position was a most undignified one for a master to be in, but he had not been able to consider that.

Mr. Selby, still trembling, began to point this out. He had not failed to note the icy disapproval in the Head's voice.

"I—I will very soon explain what this means, sir!" he choked, putting his desk between himself and Pongo. "That—that wretched dog—that dangerous brute, has just attacked me, Dr. Holmes! I was obliged to take refuge on my desk. No other course was open to me in the circumstances. As you—you see, the animal is ferocious—indeed, dangerous!"

Wally groaned in deep dismay. Too late did he bitterly regret not having listened to his chums' advice. Pongo had broken free, after all. How he had done so he could only guess. Possibly a maid had had occasion to visit the lumber-room, and had let the little terrier out. There would have been no stopping Pongo once he had bitten through the string and the way to freedom was open.

As a matter of fact, this was just what had happened, and here he was, and the mischief was done. From the mischievous and troublesome Pongo the Head's grim glance went to Wally's crimson features.

"This—this wretched animal belongs to you, D'Arcy, does it not?" he demanded ominously.

"Y-yes, sir!" groaned Wally.

"How did the dog come to be here, boy?" thundered the Head. "You have been expressively forbidden to allow the animal indoors at all. Again and again I have overlooked the dog's behaviour. Only this morning I had occasion to warn you on the subject!"

"I—I'm awfully sorry, sir!" said Wally dismally. "I—I fastened him in the lumber-room at the end of the passage, and even locked the door. But somebody must have let him out."

"Bless my soul! After my express orders that no dogs were to be allowed inside the House!" stuttered the Head. "You have defied me, your headmaster! Why did you bring him indoors, D'Arcy?"

"I—I was afraid Taggles might—might hurt him, sir!" faltered Wally. "I—I brought him in so that he'd be safe."

"What utter nonsense!" gasped the Head. "Mr. Selby, I trust the dog has not bitten you?"

"Only by a miracle have I—I escaped being bitten, sir!" gasped Mr. Selby, who was still trembling like a leaf. "Someone—some lawless miscreant, opened the door for the dog. It dashed in and attacked me without any provocation whatever. The animal is dangerous; it should be destroyed at once, Dr. Holmes. But for my quickness in reaching a place of safety I should have suffered severely. You—you see the state of my clothes, sir. An exceedingly narrow escape!"

"Pongo wouldn't have actually bitten you, sir!" said Wally, almost fiercely. "In any case, he had provocation. He went for you because you were caning me. Any dog that cared for his master would have done that."

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"Silence, D'Arcy!" said the Head sternly. "The fact that Mr. Selby was punishing you has little to do with the matter, in my view. You have disobeyed my express commands in bringing the dog indoors. Moreover, it is obvious that the animal is a danger and a nuisance about the school. You must get rid of it without delay, boy!"

"Oh, sir!"

There was a break in Wally's voice, and the Head's stern features relaxed a little. But he did not withdraw his order.

"I am sorry to be obliged to deprive you of your pet, my boy," he said; "but I cannot ignore these complaints. This outrageous happening has settled the matter. The dog is unmanageable and a danger. You must either send him home or sell him locally. I will give you until to-morrow evening to get rid of him."

"Oh, sir—" pleaded Wally; but the Head raised his hand.

"Enough! After this it is quite impossible for me to reconsider the matter, D'Arcy. Take the dog to the kennels at once, and I will instruct Kildare to arrange with you what is to be done with him. Mr. Selby, you had better—er—change your clothes without delay, and I will remain here until you return."

"Very good, sir!" gasped Mr. Selby; and his eyes glistened with triumph as he watched Wally carrying his struggling, yelping terrier out. But even the ill-natured master of the Third might have been a little ashamed of his glee had he only seen the tears in the eyes of Wally D'Arcy, as the unhappy fag carried his pet to the kennels—where Pongo was not likely to remain much longer. The Head's fiat had gone forth, and Wally knew that nothing could save his pet.

Wally was a long time away from the Third Form-room. Mr. Selby had returned, and the Head had gone when he did come back. Mr. Selby saw the traces of tears on the fag's white cheeks and the tremble of his lips, and what trace of kindness there was in his nature made him realise for the first time what the parting from his pet would mean to Wally.

At all events, he left Wally alone for the rest of that afternoon; which was just as well, perhaps, for Wally was in a state of mind when any reckless defiance and rebellious outburst would have brought him relief and comfort.

CHAPTER 5.

"Going—going—"

"WALLY, dear boy—" Arthur Augustus spoke sympathetically. Gussy was very fond of his minor, of course. But he did not usually show it in his speech and looks. Wally would have answered him most rudely and derisively had he done so, as Gussy well knew. But now Arthur Augustus was showing plainly the affection and sympathy he felt for his minor.

It was after dinner the next day—a half-holiday.

All the School House—and most of the school—had heard about Wally's pet, and the sentence of expulsion against Pongo. And everybody, almost without exception, was sympathetic towards Wally. Even Gerald Cutts—who had been partly the cause of it all—was heard to say that it was hard cheese on the kid, and that he was dashed sorry he'd let Pongo into the Form-room.

All agreed that Pongo was a corker—that he was a bit of a nuisance, and that he and his master had asked for the sack often enough. But now Pongo had got what he had asked for, and now Wally's white, dejected face showed what it meant to the fag, everybody was sympathetic.

Until bedtime the previous night Wally had fought hard for his pet—refusing to give in without a struggle to the Head's orders. He had begged Tom Merry to intercede, and Tom had done so—and been lined for his trouble. He had asked Kildare, and Kildare had kindly spoken to Mr. Railton, and Mr. Railton had agreed to speak to the Head.

But it had come to nothing. The Head's mind was made up, and his orders regarding Pongo were to stand. Indeed, after dismissing Wally from his study the previous noon, the Head had felt he should have given orders then for Pongo to go. Had there been no poultry missing, then he might have been inclined to believe that Pongo was after rats in Taggles' back-yard. But poultry had been missed, and Pongo had been found in most suspicious circumstances on the spot. That evidence should have been enough, without waiting for the dog to do more damage.

Now this had happened—the animal had attacked a master! And Dr. Holmes had made his mind up—the matter was settled. Pongo must go!

At bedtime Mr. Railton had spoken kindly to the fag, and told him of the Head's final decision. And Wally had chosen to have Pongo sold in Wayland—rather a surprising

choice of two evils for Wally to make, as all agreed. It made Tom Merry wonder, in fact, if Wally had some game on. Once before Pongo had been expelled, and Wally had not obeyed the order to send him home, but had secretly kept him in hiding near the school.

Had Tom Merry seen Wally now, however, he would certainly have wondered that. For Wally was looking quite cheery as Arthur Augustus, full of sympathy, came up to him.

"Wally, deah boy—" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Hallo, old bean!" said Wally.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus looked at him. "Bai Jove! You do not appear to be wowwyin' about Pongo so much now, Wally. I am vevy glad to see you are wesigned to the partin', deah kid!"

"What parting?" asked Wally, with an air of interest.

"The partin' f'wom Pongo, of course!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I undahstand that Kildare is takin' you and Pongo to Wayland to be sold, Wally!"

"No—only Pongo!" said Wally solemnly. "This is a civilised country, and it isn't legal to sell schoolboys—even a jewel of a chap like me. We're only selling Pongo."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, quite mystified. "I don't undahstand you—"

"Don't try!" advised Wally, with a chuckle. "You'll bust something if you do."

"Wats! Pway do not talk wot, Wally! I thought you would be vevy upset now it has come to the w'ench of partin', and I thought I would speak a few words of sympathy in season, you know. I have already told you how vevy sowwy I am that Pongo has to go—"

"It's all right—don't apologise, Gus!" said Wally. "If it pleases you to wag your chin I don't mind. But hold on! Can you lend me a quid or so?"

"What for, you young wascal?" demanded Arthur Augustus, staring.

"To buy Pongo back again, of course!" said Wally, lowering his voice. "I say, keep it dark, Gus. But I must have a bit of cash in case old Tooks wants more for Pongo than he gives me. He's bound to, I expect."

"Bai Jove!"

"See the wheeze?" grinned Wally. "The Head's ordered me either to sell Pongo locally or send him home. Well, I'm not going to send the little boulder away; I'm going to sell him. But the Head didn't forbid me to buy him back again. I'm going to buy him back to-night—if I can shake Kildare off. And I'm going to keep him in Pepper's barn, and pay old Pepper to feed him and look after him when I'm not there. See?"

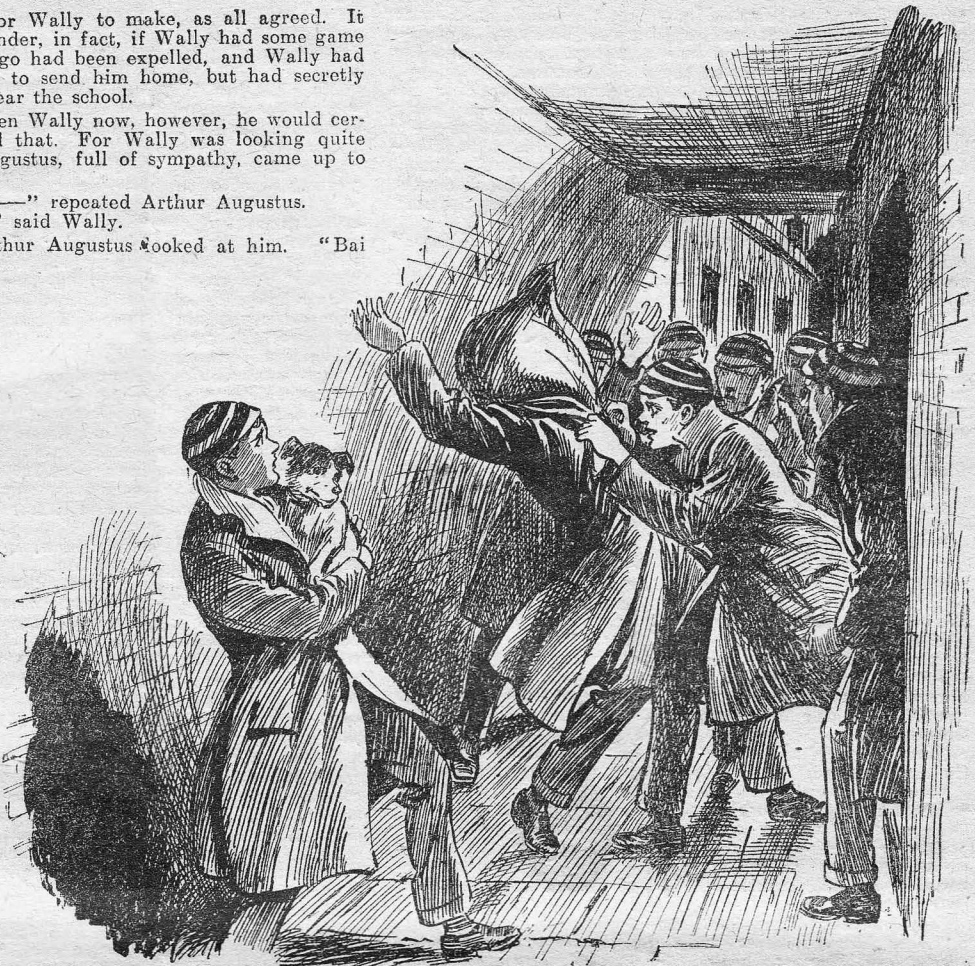
"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus did see. He understood now why the scapegrace of the Third was taking the parting so well from his beloved Pongo. Wally only meant it to be a brief parting—as brief as he could possibly make it.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You—you weckless young wascal! If the Head gets to know—"

"Blow the Head!" said Wally, his eyes gleaming now. "If he thinks I'm going to part from old Pongo he's jolly well mistaken, Gus. Pongo never took Taggles' beastly fowls—I know that. It's rotten injustice, and I'm not standing it. If Pongo goes I go. But keep the wheeze dark, Gus," he added anxiously. "I didn't mean to tell anyone, as a matter of fact. Still, I know you won't split, and you won't be asked about it."

"You feahful young idiot—"



There was a sudden rush of figures in the gloomy passage, and the next moment a sack was whirled over Kildare's head and dragged downwards!

"Now, don't start that!" said Wally. "It's all right—easy as winking and safe as houses. I can take Pongo for walks just the same, only I'll have to keep to back lanes and fields, of course. I've thought it all out—old Pepper will do anything for money. I can get that from you, old chap. I suppose you ought to know all about it as you're supplying the cash to pay Pepper. But I haven't told a soul—not even my pals. Then if it does come out they can say they knew nothing about it. See?"

"You weckless young wascal!"

"Oh, ring off that, Gus! Are you going to hand over some cash or not? Dash it all, if you can't be practical, what's your sympathy worth, eh?" demanded Wally. "How would you like to be robbed of all your best toppers, or forced to be parted for ever from your monocle?"

"Weally, Wally—" Arthur Augustus paused. In Wally's voice was a note of keen anxiety, despite his airy manner. Obviously, Wally was relying on his help. It was his last desperate attempt to retain possession of his beloved terrier.

Arthur Augustus saw that only the hope of his wonderful wheeze being successful was buoying his minor up to put a cheery face on things.

"Weally, Wally—vevy well, deah boy!" he went on, with sudden decision. "It is a vevy wisky twick, and I'm afraid you will be found out soonah or latah. But if a couple of pounds will do—"

"To be going on with!" said Wally, nodding. "Hand it over, old sport!"

Arthur Augustus handed over two one-pound notes, which Wally pocketed promptly. Then Gussy prepared to speak a few words in season—brotherly advice and warning this time. But Wally did not wait to hear them.

"Thanks, Gus!" he said. "I'll come again when I want some more. Mind you keep it dark. You know what a fellow for gassing you are! Hallo, there's Kildare now! Cheerio!"

And Wally hurried away to where Kildare was beckoning.

to him from the School House steps. Evidently Kildare was ready to start out for Wayland with Wally and Pongo—not a job Kildare relished by any means. Prefect and fag vanished in the direction of the school kennels.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, shaking his head in doubt and apprehension. "I feah the young wapsallion will get himself into a wotten mess before—"

Arthur Augustus paused as four fags came up to him—Curly Gibson, Frank Levison, Jameson, Reggie Manners.

"Seen your minor anywhere, Gus?" demanded Jameson. "Has he started for Wayland yet, d'you know, Gus?" asked Gibson.

"He has just gone wound to the kennels with Kildare," said Arthur Augustus, frowning at the fags. "But I wefuse to be called 'Gus' by fags of the Third, you young wascals! I have a vevy good mind—"

"Arthur Augustus Adolphus Plantaganet D'Arcy, then!" said Jameson cheerfully. "Is that right, old top? If it isn't— Oh crumbs!"

Jameson leaped away, just missing the irate Gussy's shoe as he went. The fags made their way to the gates, all looking somewhat excited and mysterious, while Reggie Manners carried a parcel in his hands.

"They'll be starting in a minute or two, then!" said Stanley Gibson, with satisfaction. "Good! Sooner we get off ahead of them the better! You chaps know what the game is?"

"Yes, rather!"

"What-ho!"

"We collar Kildare just as he goes into that dark entry leading to Took's shop!" said Curly crisply. "We've got to be slippy, of course. If he spots one of us the game's up. We've got to drag that sack over his napper before he gets a chance to spot us. The rest's easy. One of us drags a sack over Wally's head, too, and the rest get hold of Pongo. He won't harm us—he knows us too well. Then we take him along to Pepper's barn. Old Pepper will keep him there if we pay him—or Wally pays him. It's a great wheeze!"

"But we ought to have told Wally!" said Manners minor, shaking his head. "If he knows what's on he can help—"

"Ass! We don't want his help! And we don't want him to know anything about it until it's all over!" snorted Curly Gibson. "We want him to be able to swear that he knows nothing about it—that he had no hand in it whatever. If we tell him and the beaks suspect he won't be able to deny knowledge of the game. He wouldn't tell a fib, and would be done for!"

"Oh! I—I see!"

"Wally knows nothing, and mustn't know until it's blown over!" said Stanley Gibson grimly. "Kildare may think he's been attacked by dog-thieves, for Pongo's worth a bit! On the other hand, he may suspect Wally himself, and if Wally can't deny anything he's as good as bowled out—and so are we!"

"Well, that's so! You're right, Curly!" admitted Reggie.

"Still, what beats me is why Wally's keeping his pecker up so well!" said Curly, shaking his head thoughtfully. "I heard the poor chap fairly blubbing in bed last night. Now he seems cheerful enough, goodness knows!"

"Putting a brave face on it!" said Frank Levison. "He'd hate anyone to think he's soft—poor old chap!"

"That's it, I suppose!" said Curly, nodding. "Anyway, let's get off! We'll just catch the first train to Wayland if we run! Put it on!"

And Wally's faithful comrades "put it on," eager to get their wild wheeze into operation. Like their leader, Wally, they had no intention of being parted from Pongo if they could help it—or, at least, they had no intention of allowing Wally to be parted from him. And they were ready to take any risk to prevent it, blissfully unaware of the fact that they had hit upon the very same wheeze as their leader!

CHAPTER 6.

Gone!

"HERE you are, kid!"

Eric Kildare spoke kindly, sympathetically. Though he had been obliged to spend his half-holiday escorting Wally D'Arcy and Pongo to Wayland, and though the expedition had been far from his liking, the captain of St. Jim's could feel for Wally D'Arcy. He knew how the fag loved his pet terrier, and he knew what a bitter blow the order of expulsion had been to Wally. It was not the fag's fault that Kildare had been obliged to give his "half" up, and Kildare was not the fellow to wreak his wrath and disgust on the fag.

He was kindness itself all the way to Wayland.

Yet he was not a little curious regarding Wally, and several times he glanced rather queerly at his young companion. Wally was a keen-witted youth, and he knew better than to arouse any suspicion by appearing not to

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care about the coming parting. He hugged Pongo all the way, and he showed no signs of being at all cheerful—indeed, he adopted, for Kildare's benefit, a dismal, doleful air.

None the less, Kildare could not fail to see his suppressed excitement and to note that Wally's hugging of his pet seemed a bit overdone and not as sincere as it might have been.

It almost seemed as if the fag did not realise that the parting was to be final—irrevocable. Kildare felt sorrier still for Wally, realising that he would feel it later, if not so much now.

"Here we are, kid!" he said, as they arrived at the long, narrow entry leading up to the dog-fancier's little dingy shop. "You were a young fool to decide to sell the dog! He's a fine little chap, if a bit of a handful. If you'd sent him home you could have had him all to yourself in the holidays! Young ass!"

Wally said nothing. He only hugged Pongo the tighter. Pongo was whining rather dismally. He seemed to know that something was on—something unpleasant in connection with himself. He kept looking up into the face of his master as if wondering what the expedition was all about. He knew he had disgraced himself that morning, and possibly the sharp little terrier felt fears of disaster.

They started up the dark, narrow passage.

Kildare was leading, with Wally behind him, carrying Pongo.

There was a sudden movement in the gloom, and then Kildare got the shock of his life.

Quite suddenly, without warning save for that quick rustle, there was a rush of figures from an entry leading on to the passage. Kildare half-turned—too late to see anything. Next moment darkness fell upon him as a dusty sack was whirled over his head and dragged downwards.

He was too startled, too dumfounded to think of struggling for a brief, whirling instant. By that time the sack was wrenched down over his elbows, pinning his arms to his side.

"Good gad! What—what—"

He coughed and gasped and sneezed as dust got into his eyes and mouth, and then he began to struggle—furiously and angrily. No voice reached him, but hands held the sack down despite his frantic struggles. Faintly he heard a muffled yelling from Wally D'Arcy, and a yelping from Pongo, and then quite suddenly the hands released him.

He struggled with the sack furiously, and then he managed to wrench it off his head.

Gasping for breath, he blinked dazedly about him. Close by was Wally, just tearing off another sack from his head. No other soul was in sight. The passage and entry were deserted. A faint patter of departing footsteps reached them.

"Gug-good gad!" choked Kildare. "What—what—"

"Pongo!" panted Wally, glaring about him wildly. "They've taken old Pongo!"

There was such wild alarm in Wally's voice that a sudden suspicion that had come to Kildare vanished as soon as it came. It had flashed in upon the St. Jim's skipper that possibly this was a trick—a trick arranged by Wally himself to prevent the Head's orders being carried out. But the alarm in Wally's voice was genuine—there was no doubting that.

Kildare ran to the end of the passage and looked up and down. Then he ran along to the shop and looked inside. It was empty, and not a soul was in sight in any direction. On Wednesday afternoons Wayland was usually deserted, and this was a quiet, unfrequented part of the old town.

"Well, this beats the band, kid!" said Kildare grimly, picking up his cap and replacing it on his dusty, dishevelled hair. "It was the dog they were after, of course—or it looks like it!"

"And they've taken him—taken old Pongo!" groaned Wally in deep despair. "It's awful, Kildare—old Pongo gone! It's some blackguardly dog-thief!"

"Well, you would have parted with him in another few minutes, kid!" said Kildare, eyeing the fag sharply. "You didn't seem to be troubling overmuch before, anyway! It's thundering queer! If I thought—" He paused, and then went on abruptly: "Look here, kid, I'll not beat about the bush. Do you know anything about this queer business? Is this a trick? Have you got your pals to rescue Pongo?"

Wally D'Arcy jumped.

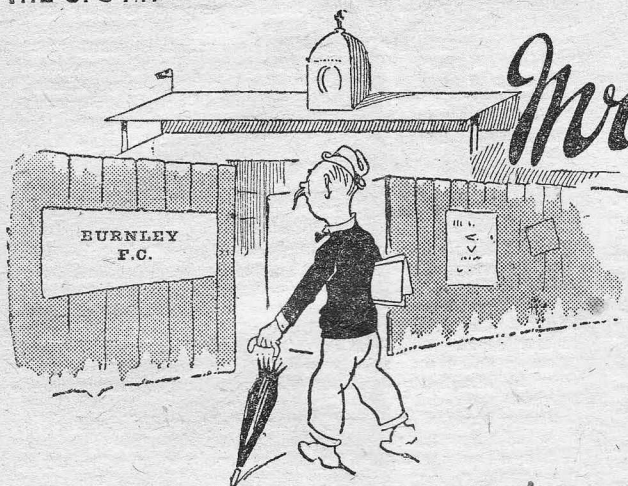
"Great pip! Of course not, Kildare!" he stuttered indignantly. "I know absolutely nothing about it. It beats me hollow just as it does you! It must have been some rotten dog-thieves. Anyway, I know no more than you do about it!"

"You didn't see who it was?"

"No; I didn't get the chance. I just spotted a bit of white—a collar or something. Then that beastly sack was dragged over my head, and Pongo was dragged from me, and my arms were held fast."

(Continued on page 12.)

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A FOOTBALL CLUB!



Mr. Parker POPS IN

TO SEE BURNLEY.

"They deserve better treatment from Dame Fortune!" This remark, coming from our football representative, Mr. "Nosey" Parker, after his visit to Turf Moor, reveals the serious situation at Burnley, where misfortunes and bad luck are overshadowing this famous club!

Down on their Luck!

IF you have a black cat of which you are no longer in need, or if you have several black kittens wanting a home, I will send you some labels, and you can get rid of them quickly. The labels will be addressed to the Secretary of the Burnley Football Club, Turf Moor. But there must be no doubt about the cats which you send to Burnley being black, and there must not be any doubt, either, that they have the full capacity for bringing good luck!

But, seriously speaking, the Burnley club just at this time are badly in need of a whole army of good-luck bringers, because I have a feeling that quite a lot of people connected with the organisation feel that they are down on their luck. This won't do. Burnley have proud traditions to maintain. I remember that they have won the English Cup. I recall, too, that since the War they once went through a spell of thirty or so First Division League matches without once being defeated.

But there you are—Turf Moor is not exactly the place to attend just now, for a delightful care-free holiday. Indeed, I got the idea that any fellow who goes there in mid-week, is looked upon with suspicion—that he may be the broker's man!

Both of 'Em!

THE trouble is, that Burnley are not getting enough good folk to attend their matches. Apropos of this, Joe Devine, a great little forward, with a sense of humour, told me a story. He said that in a recent match, he played very well. His play aroused quite a lot of enthusiasm, and, to quote Joe's words: "I was so pleased with the reception of my play, that at the end of the game, I went round the field and shook hands with both the spectators."

Of course, it isn't really as bad as that! But things are not good, and it was announced recently that in order to keep the wolf from the door—or the club out of the bankruptcy court, whichever you like—it might be necessary to sell some of the best players the side possesses. That, according to Mr. Windle, the chairman of the club, was the drastic action to which, at the moment, there did not seem to be any alternative.

So, you see, it is possible that by the time these lines appear on the white page of the GEM, some of the fellows I saw on the Burnley ground may be there no longer. That would be a pity, because in spite of the depression around Turf Moor, largely due to the fact that the workshops near the town have had such a bad time, these

Burnley lads were quite bright, not to say sparkling at times.

The Bruin Boys!

BUT the bad luck which has attended the club recently has become almost a joke. They got Sam Wadsworth from Huddersfield—he of the flowing locks, you remember—in the hope that he would strengthen their defence. And no sooner had Sam returned to this place so near his native town, than he got hurt. And the so-i-same thing has happened to many Burnley players.

Having removed—finally—the suspicion that I might be the broker's man, I got down to brass tacks, and ferreted some facts out of these Burnley boys. I think they ought to be called the Bruin Boys, for they certainly get up to all sorts of mischief. One of the fun-makers in chief was dear Brutus—I beg pardon, Jack Bruton. He used to be the ringleader, but alas, such is the fate of Burnley, that Burton was the first man with whom they parted to keep the wolf from the door!

There were many regrets at parting with Bruton, and when I mentioned his name in the dressing-room I had a suspicion that one of the other players had to do a little swallow with his Adam's apple as the tit-bit. Just then, however, the players livened up again, because Bruton looked in to see how they were getting on. You see he has not been transferred very far—only across the way, as it were, to Blackburn.

Brunton has played for England, as you know, and one of his worries was that he could not tempt some more of the Bruin Boys to play golf with him.

Cricket is the pastime with which Brunton passes his spare summer time, and he told me that, as a boy batsman, he had stood up against Dick Tyldesley, the fellow who has taken such a lot of wickets for Lancashire in recent years. Tyldesley and Brunton were born in the same village.

Footballers' Hobbies!

BUT if golf is not "catching" in the Burnley camp, there is one hobby which has certainly caught on. At least three of the players—Waterfield, Wallace, and McCluggage, are dead-keen on homing-pigeons. They tried to explain to me—all of them at once!—how it was that when a pigeon of theirs was taken in a basket to a place hundreds of miles away and then released, it would fly straight back home. I told them the explanation was simple: that anybody would fly back home with such kindly hands waiting to give them food; but they thought I was

leg-pulling, so they wouldn't tell me any more about their pigeons!

McCluggage has other hobbies, too, besides keeping pigeons and missing penalty kicks! He is fired with ambition to get on the local Town Council of Burnley. He "put up" at the last election, but did not get enough votes. For that, I think, he had only himself to blame, because his "literature" hadn't got the right note. This is the sort of thing that would have caught the electors:

"Vote for McCluggage, and the English Cup will come to Burnley!"

Double Champions!

HARRY STORER is another of the players with whom Burnley have had bad luck. They got him from Derby, and, like Wadsworth, he has been out of the team for long spells, owing to injury. You may remember that Harry is one of those fellows who have come very near to playing for England at both football and cricket. He has played for England at Soccer, and he regularly opens the innings for Derbyshire in County Championship matches. Storer started his football career as a forward, and when the manager of Grimsby first announced his intention of turning him into a half-back, that manager was told that he must be mad to think of such a thing.

Goalkeeper Sommerville is another of the players who have made a switch to good purpose. He started his football career as a full-back, but then went even farther back, to take his place between the goalposts.

Making History!

THE Pages of football are many, and at Burnley they have one of them named Louis. He plays at outside-left for choice, and at centre-forward when the club is hard up. I remember this fellow writing a very brilliant page in football history. Moved from the wing to centre-forward, he scored six goals in one match on the Birmingham ground.

Louis lives at Liverpool, and I have an idea that one of these days he will go off across the Atlantic again. Travel appeals to him, and before he was a footballer, he served as a steward on a liner. But I couldn't accept George Beel's suggestion that if Burnley were a sick team, they always appealed to Louis Page. Surely it were better to say that he might prevent the club having a really stormy passage!

This Page fellow is a real sport: baseball, lawn tennis, swimming, cricket—they all come alike to him, and he certainly has no spare time to run round to look after Waterfield's pigeons.

Danish Pessimism!

IF what I have written about Burnley should sound a bit pessimistic, let me now remove that impression. The club may be having a rough time, but they will come back, because the lads are heart and soul for the club. They have been playing this season a youthful half-back line in Brown, Bowsher, and Steel, and for all these lads it can be said that the only thing they lack is experience.

After the players I looked in to see the secretary, charming Mr. Pickles. When I mentioned the bank balance, however, I was obviously on the wrong tack, for he flung a ledger at me, and out I went.

"NOSEY."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,142.

All Through Pongo!

(Continued from page 10.)

"Well, it's no end queer, kid," said Kildare, looking relieved. "I'm jolly glad to know you had no hand in it—for your own sake. Anyway, let's get back home now. We'll see what the Head thinks about it!"

"But we're going to hunt round first," said Wally angrily. "I'm not letting old Pongo go like this. I'm not giving in so easily, and you can do as you like about it!"

There was bitter distress in the fag's voice as well as anger, and if Kildare had still retained any suspicion it fled now.

"Not much good doing anything now," he said gruffly. "Whoever did it will be well away now, kid. Still, we'll hunt round for a bit!"

And they did hunt round, while Kildare also questioned the dog-fancier. But Mr. Tooks had heard and seen nothing, and all he could do was to express his amazement at the outrage—if outrage it was. And at last even the distressed Wally had to give it up. Nobody had appeared to have noticed anything amiss, or to have seen any suspicious characters about. And at last Kildare, having some shopping to do, Wally parted from him and took train back to St. Jim's alone.

"Safe enough now, chaps!" panted Jameson.

"Thank goodness!"

Jameson & Co. were fagged out, and glad enough to take a rest. With Jameson carrying the struggling, unwilling Pongo, the daring fags had run until they could run no longer. And by that time they were well on the outskirts of Wayland.

All had gone off according to programme—without a hitch. Now it was over the reckless young scamps could realise how daring had been their raid on Kildare—if they had not done so before. If Kildare had caught but a glimpse of one of them the fat would have been in the fire with a vengeance. But Jameson & Co. felt they had acted too swiftly—they were assured of that, in fact. All had gone well—their daring raid had been a great success.

Certainly Pongo had objected strongly to being kidnapped in such a rough, unexpected manner, even though he had known at once that he was among friends. He had not liked being taken from Wally, especially in such startling circumstances. If ever a dog had been bewildered, Pongo had that afternoon. Still, he had been abducted by friends, and he had not dreamed of offering more than a mild remonstrance by struggling to get free and by yelping.

But his struggles and yelps had not availed him. Here he was, safe with his master's chums, though it was clear he could not understand it.

"Quiet, Pongo—quiet, old boy!" said Curly Gibson, patting him as he wriggled in Jameson's grasp. "You'll soon be safe, old chap. Now for a long tramp home, you fellows. We daren't risk going back by train with Pongo!"

"No fear!"

After a brief rest the fags started out on the Wayland road. It was already four o'clock, and it would be dusk, if not dark, before they landed at old Pepper's cottage, which was quite close to St. Jim's. Though all had gone well, the fags could not help feeling a trifle apprehensive. Moreover, they knew Wally would be worrying terribly about Pongo.

"We ought to have told Wally," said Reggie Manners doggedly. "The poor chap will be in a fine old stew about this."

"Bound to be," said Frank Levison soberly. "And let's hope old Kildare hasn't spotted anything. Here, let me carry him for a bit, Jameson!"

"Right-ho!"

Jameson was only too glad to be relieved of Pongo's weight for a bit. Moreover, Pongo was still doing his best to break free. And then the thing happened—though how, both Jameson and Levison scarcely knew.

But as Jameson was handing Pongo over, that wriggling, slippery animal seemed to do a sort of somersault in Jameson's arms.

"Look out—grab him quick!"

But Jameson's yell came too late. Pongo was quicker than any of them. He was on the ground in a flash, and the next moment he was streaking off.

He vanished along the dusky roadway, making for Wayland again—obviously in search of Wally, his beloved master.

"Oh, great pip!"

The startled fags blinked after him in utter dismay.

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Pongo was gone, and the fleetest among them could never catch him up. All their trouble, so far as they could see, had been wasted. Pongo would find Wally sure enough—and Wally would still be with Kildare. The great wheeze had been a great success—up to a point. But Pongo himself had now ruined everything. And after gazing dismally for some time towards Wayland, as if they half-expected Pongo might return, the fags gave it up as a bad job and trudged on wearily and dismally back to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Whose Hand?

REUBEN PIGGOTT trudged along Rylcombe Lane towards St. Jim's, with shoulders hunched and hands deep in his overcoat pockets. There was a moody scowl on his face that was often in evidence there. Piggott was an ill-favoured youngster, and he had no chum in the Third—or out of it. A fellow who preferred shady pursuits and slacking to sports and games, and who carried tales to Mr. Selby, was not likely to be popular with his fellows.

Being unpopular, Piggott was lonely, and did not enjoy life. His general mood was one of disgruntled gloom. While other more healthy fellows enjoyed themselves in the open air, Piggott was wont to spend his leisure indoors slacking and lounging. This afternoon he had spent almost wholly in lounging in Rylcombe, sulky and disconsolate.

Now, in the dusk of the January evening, he was trudging homewards.

He had come within sight of the school when quite suddenly he stopped as he caught sight of something near the gates of the school.

It was a little white terrier, and he was hanging round the gates in a curiously hesitant and stealthy manner.

Piggott's eyes glittered. He recognised the dog at once. It was Pongo, and he looked dusty and tired. The little terrier was tired—he had raced back to Wayland, and he had hunted all over the town for his master—to no purpose. Now, tired out and dispirited, Pongo had hastened back to St. Jim's across meadows and by short cuts he knew so well.

It was Wally he was looking for, of course. Yet the intelligent dog did not dare to enter the gates. It seemed that he knew he was not wanted there—except by his master; some strange sense seemed to tell him that he had been banished from St. Jim's, and that capture awaited him there.

So he hung about the gates, eager to enter, yet not daring to do so.

He sighted the fag in the lane and came bounding towards him, his tail wagging furiously, eager hope in his bright eyes. But his tail dropped dismally, and he halted as he recognised Reuben Piggott.

"Good dog!" called Piggott. "Here, Pongo!"

Pongo growled and hung his head. He did not like Reuben Piggott, recognising an old enemy.

Piggott set his lips; he guessed what had happened. Pongo had broken loose from Kildare and had raced back to St. Jim's. Piggott had grinned delightedly on hearing the news that Pongo was banished. Anything "up against" Wally D'Arcy pleased the ill-natured cad of the Third. It occurred to Piggott that possibly Wally and his chums had worked the trick—had spoofed Kildare and brought about Pongo's release. Indeed, Piggott felt quite certain they had.

Well, Pongo would not remain free for long—if he could help it. Piggott was a coward. Yet he knew that Pongo's bark was worse than his bite. Pongo might tear a fellow's bags—as he had done Mr. Selby's—but he would never bite.

If only he could capture the brute, what a score against Wally and the other fags he hated! Moreover, it would bring him favour from Mr. Selby, who had such good reason to hate Pongo.

"Good dog!" said Piggott, moving cautiously towards the terrier. "Here, Pongo—good dog!"

Grrrrrrrr!

Evidently Pongo was not having any. He backed away from Piggott, showing his teeth and growling in a far from reassuring manner.

Piggott stuck it for some minutes, coaxing and speaking honeyed words to the terrier. But Pongo only growled the more, and looked ready to attack him. Piggott began to back away hurriedly, fearing lest his belief in Pongo's harmlessness was sadly misplaced.

"The—the beastly brute!" he grunted between clenched teeth. "Never mind, I'll hang about the gates until someone comes along who will collar him. I'll watch he gets collared, all right!"

So Reuben Piggott turned his back and trudged to the gates, where he hung about, his eyes fixed on the luckless outcast. For Pongo did not trot back after him to the

gates. His small bright eyes were fixed on a figure that had just turned the corner in the lane. It was a master, however, and Pongo turned about, his tail dropping dismally again.

He slunk into the ditch across the lane, ambling backwards and forwards there disconsolately. Pongo was evidently not taking any risks with Reuben Piggott hanging about the gates.

Mr. Henry Selby—for it was he—came along the lane with his jerky, irritable step. He sighted the prowling Pongo at once, and he halted.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured, peering at Pongo in the dusky gloom. "It is that wretched dog again! This—is this is too much! Has Kildare dared to disobey his headmaster?"

Mr. Selby felt a sudden gust of fury. The thought that he was to be robbed of his triumph, after all—that Pongo might escape from the sentence meted out to him, filled the master with bitter rage. He forgot his fear of Pongo, and crossed towards him with one hand outstretched.

"Come here!" he snapped. "You little brute, come here!"

Pongo retreated a step, growling deeply in his throat. Mr. Selby followed him up, ready to grab at his collar if the chance came.

"Come here!" he went on, changing his rasping tone and trying to coax the dog now. "Good dog, here— Good heavens!"

Pongo obeyed him this time—with a fierce growl and a rush.

He had already recognised his hated foe—and his master's foe. Pongo seemed to know well enough that Mr. Selby was chiefly responsible for his dismal plight now. He flew at Mr. Selby, and that sour-featured master leaped back with a startled yell—realising his danger well enough now.

The next moment Pongo was snapping round his thin legs, and Mr. Selby shrieked and flew. But scarcely had he run half a dozen yards when Pongo's teeth met in his nether garments, and held on. Turning in fright, Mr. Selby slashed down at the little terrier with his heavy umbrella frantically.

There was a sound of ripping, and, finding himself free again, Mr. Selby gave one wild leap across the ditch and leaped upwards, making a desperate grab at the top of the fence.

He caught it, and dragged himself up—how he never knew. Growling viciously, Pongo leaped up at him again and again, while the master, terrified now and bitterly regretting his recklessness, lashed out with his umbrella, holding it by the ferrule.

"Go away!" shrieked Mr. Selby, striking in a frenzy of fear. "Good heavens, I believe the dog is mad! Go away— Ah!"

There was a dull thud as the handle of his heavy, old-fashioned umbrella struck home somewhere—Mr. Selby did not know or care where. But it did strike, with all Mr. Selby's frantic force behind it, and just as Pongo reached the limit of his wild leap upwards.

Pongo fell backwards, curiously limp and without a sound, and rolled over and lay still.

"G-good heavens!" panted Mr. Selby.

All rage and fear suddenly left him. He blinked down at the still form of the dog, sudden fear in his heart. He waited a moment of two more, and then, as Pongo did not stir, he slithered down from his perch, feeling sick and giddy.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "I—I did not intend to harm the wretched dog. And—and it was in self-defence! I could do nothing else!"

He drew out his handkerchief and, scarcely knowing he did it, wiped away a smear of red from the handle of his umbrella, shuddering as he did so. Then he pocketed the handkerchief hurriedly and glanced around. He saw nobody in the dusky lane—he certainly did not see the figure of Reuben Piggott skulking by the gates. And, with a last frightened glance at the still form in the grass, Mr. Selby hurried away with his quick, jerky step.

He passed through the gates, not seeing Piggott skulking in the shadows, and hurried over to the lighted School House.

After all, it had been the dog's own fault. It was unfortunate, but he had acted in self-defence, and nobody could blame him. In any case, nobody knew—or so Mr. Henry Selby fondly imagined! They would think some tramp, attacked by the wretched dog, had done it.

As he vanished, Piggott left his hiding-place and ran along the road to the white, still figure in the grass.

One glance at Pongo was enough for Piggott, and, with a curious, frightened expression on his face, he hurried back and made his way into the School House. Whether he felt sorry or not at the happening Piggott did not know, but he knew better than to be found near the dog.

Nor did he intend to tell anyone what he had seen. But he wondered whether Mr. Selby intended to say anything.

Scarcely had Piggott vanished through the gates when a junior came along the lane. It was Talbot of the Shell, and he was passing the spot where Pongo lay when a sound reached him, and he halted, and then hurried across to the grassy bank in some alarm.

The next moment, with a muttered exclamation, he was on his knees beside Pongo and gently raising his head. He was still crouching over him when several figures rounded the bend. They proved to be the Terrible Three and Blake & Co., and they hurried up as Talbot called to them.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's Pongo!"

"Poor old chap!" breathed Herries. "Who's done this?"

"I found him lying here," explained Talbot. "He's had a pretty rotten knock from something—or somebody!"

"Bai Jove! How feahfully wotten!"

"Wally will go mad when he sees this!" said Blake quietly. "We'd better take him in!"

"I'll take him!" said Herries. "I'll take him to our study—he's not dead, but very near it."

"Perhaps it was a cab, dear boy!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "The poor little chap must have been wun down—"

"No car did this!" snapped Herries, feeling Pongo's head tenderly. "It was a blow from a stick, or something— Ah! Quiet, Pongo, old boy!"

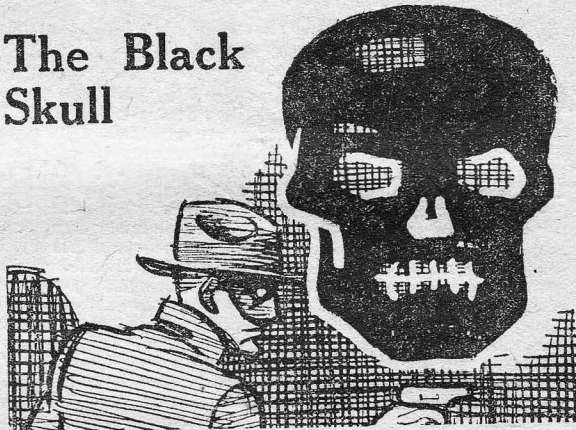
The dog's body trembled faintly, and he opened his eyes, whimpered, and then closed them again.

"Here's Wally now, if I'm not mistaken!" said Tom Merry grimly.

A group of youngsters had trotted into view. They were Wally and his chums—Curly Gibson, Manners minor, Jameson, Levison minor, and Hobbs.

(Continued on next page.)

The Black Skull



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Just outside the station Wally had overtaken them, and from them he had soon learned of their brief success—and failure.

The news that Pongo had not been stolen had filled him with relief, but he was still rather uneasy as he hurried along the lane with his chums, anxious to know if Pongo had dashed home to St. Jim's and been caught again.

He soon learned what had happened to Pongo. His face suddenly white and drawn, he stooped over his pet. "We'll soon bring him round again, Wally!" said Herries reassuringly. "I'll take him to the study and look after him!"

"Leave him to me!" said Wally, almost fiercely. "Someone—someone shall pay for this!"

The juniors did not reply. Wally took the limp form from Herries' arms and carried it across the quad and into the School House. Mr. Railton happened to be crossing the lighted hall, and he came over to the group.

It was Talbot who explained how Pongo had been found. "May we take him to our study, sir?" asked Herries.

"We'll soon bring him round there! Please, let us—"

"Very well, Herries!" said Mr. Railton, with a compassionate glance at Wally's face. "For the present you may take charge of him. No doubt he was run down by a car—"

"No car did this!" burst out Wally passionately. "It was a foul blow from a stick that did this. And I know who did it!" he added fiercely, his eyes blazing at the master. "It was Taggles—that brute Taggles! He swore to be revenged on Pongo—he vowed it to me just after we'd left the Head! That was why I brought Pongo indoors. It was Taggles. But—but he shall pay for this! I'll—"

"D'Arcy—foolish boy! Control yourself! How dare you make such an accusation?" said the Housemaster quietly.

Wally did not reply. He gulped and stumbled away with Pongo in his arms, his eyes suddenly blinded with tears. Nor did Mr. Railton attempt to call him back.

CHAPTER 8.

The Secret Room!

GEORGE HERRIES and Wally D'Arcy gave no thought to tea that evening. They had their hands full with Pongo—though Tom Merry & Co. and all Wally D'Arcy's chums were only too willing to help. They realised, however, that Pongo could not have been in better hands, and they left Herries and Wally to their good work.

It was to the Fourth-Former that Pongo owed his life, as Wally was the first to admit. Herries loved dogs, and had it been his own precious Towser, he could not have laboured more skilfully or lovingly. George Herries was a burly, rather dense junior, but he had a heart of gold, and Wally's heart was brim-full of thankfulness towards him as, slowly but surely, Pongo was brought back to life and consciousness.

Wally's eyes lit up with joy as Pongo's eyes opened at last, and from the gleam in them Wally knew the terrier had recognised him. Before the fire in Study No. 6 Wally and Herries kept watch and ward over the little patient. Wally would have remained when prep time came, but Blake and the rest managed to persuade him to go. And he went, knowing Pongo was in safer and more experienced hands than his own.

When he returned after prep he could have whooped with joy as he sighted the amazing change in Pongo. He lay, still weak enough, on a cushion before the fire, but he lifted his head as Wally came in, while his tail moved feebly and his eyes brightened.

"Right as rain!" said Herries cheerfully. "Nothing to worry about now, Wally. It was a nasty knock, but he'll pull through now, old top! He'll be trotting about tomorrow, I'll bet, and in a few days he'll be as right as rain!"

Wally nodded without speaking, and stooped over Pongo. Tom Merry came into the study with Lowther and Manners, and they were also amazed at the change in the patient.

"A near thing, though!" said Herries. "Whoever biffed him—if anyone did—did his best to make a job of it."

"It—it must have been a car, Wally!" said Tom Merry, though without conviction. "At all events, we must suppose it was. It's difficult to believe anyone could do a thing like that!"

Wally raised his head, his eyes blazing. "Don't talk to me about cars, Tom Merry!" he said thickly. "You know as well as I do who did it! Taggles did it, the brute! And—and he's going to pay for it!"

They eyed the fag uneasily.

"Easy on, Wally!" said Tom Merry quietly. "I don't believe that! Taggles is a crusty old fellow, and at times a bit of a rotten-reporting chaps, and all that sort of

thing. But he's too jolly decent at bottom to do anything of this kind. His talk of dealing with Pongo was just gas—look what he's always vowing to do to us when we play tricks on him!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus, polishing his eyeglass in great distress. "Weally, Wally, do drop that idea! Taggy is weally a vewy decent old fellow!"

"Some beastly tramp did it!" said Blake. "I'd want jolly good proof before I'd believe Taggy did it, anyway!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Drop that idea, Wally," said Tom Merry quietly. "Taggles knew Pongo had been sacked. Why should he have done it?"

"What's to be done with Pongo now, anyway?" demanded Herries. "He's not fit to be moved far—and I jolly well wouldn't let him go if I had anything to do with it. Still, perhaps the beak will allow him to stay on—after this!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Fraid not!" he said. "I've just been speaking to Railton—he stopped and asked again about Pongo. I believe Railton would allow him to remain, but the Head's unyielding, though he's sorry enough about Pongo's accident. Pongo will have to go the moment he's fit!"

Wally stood up, his eyes flashing.



"Pongo isn't going!" he said. "If he does, I go, too! But he isn't!"

"Then what—"

"Never mind what!" said Wally doggedly. "Pongo isn't going!"

With that, the fag gave Pongo a final hug, and hurried away, his eyes sparkling now.

"Well?" demanded Jameson, as Wally reached the fagery. "How is the old chap?"

"Better—lots better!" said Wally. "We'll shift him to-night, you fellows! You've got that screwdriver and the rest of the things ready?"

"Yes—all serene!"

"Then come on! Sooner we get things fixed up the better!"

With his chums at his heels, Wally led the way by winding corridors to the old part of the School House—unused, unfurnished, and thick with dust. It was out of bounds, but that did not trouble the fags. Reaching a small, narrow staircase, they tiptoed up the bare stairs until they reached a landing. There was a deep alcove, lined from floor to wall with black, age-old panelling.

"The light, Curly!"

A white beam of light from Curly Gibson's pocket-torch played on the black oak of the panels, coming to rest on the head of one of the big screws, still bright and new, showing round the edges of the panel here and there.

"The Head talked of bricking the secret doorway up!" said Reggie Manners, with a grin. "Good job he didn't! Soon have those screws out!"

They set to work with a will. It was the fags themselves who had discovered the secret of that panel—and of the

further secrets it led to. The passage beyond led to a secret room that had been used, doubtless enough, as a meeting-place in olden days. When the fags had formed their secret society some time ago, they had used it for their meetings—until the society had been disbanded, and the Head had ordered the panels to be screwed up.



There was a muttered exclamation from Reginald Talbot as he caught sight of Pongo's still form. Kneeling down, he raised the dog's head gently.

here often enough—with the oil-lamp it'll be ripping, and we can bring grub here, and have tea, what?"

"Just as we did before!" grinned Jameson. "It was ripping fun! We'll shift those screws from the panel leading into Selby's room when we get a chance! Then we'll make him sit up a bit, like we did before!"

"Too risky now!" said Wally, shaking his head. "He'll remember the panel and spot the game. Still, we'll see how things go. Now, I'm off to fetch Pongo!"

"Better leave that till later, I think!" said Frank Levison. "Pongo's all right at St. Jim's for a bit!"

"I'm taking no risks!" said Wally doggedly.

"Well, leave it until after lights out!"

"Safer now than then!" said Wally. "Herries and the rest will be in the Common-room most likely. In any case, I've permission from Railton to keep him here until he's better, and if I'm spotted carrying him it'll be supposed I'm taking him to our show. You chaps wait here!"

Wally took the torch, for candles were lighted now, and the fags busied themselves cleaning up the place during Wally's absence. He was not away very long, and when he returned he carried Pongo, still looking a pale ghost of his former self. Yet he knew where he was, having been there often enough before with his master.

"All serene," said Wally, laying Pongo on a blanket and making him snug. "He'll be warm enough here. I'll just tie him to a leg of the giddy table to be on the safe side. Herries and the rest were out, as I expected, and I bet they'll have a shock when they return and find old Pongo gone. Nobody spotted me at all, so everything's all right."

"Good egg!"

A few minutes later, having made things shipshape for Pongo, the daring fags took their leave of him, and made their way back to the Third Form quarter, for it was close on bedtime now. So far all was well.

CHAPTER 9.

Caught!

"ANYONE awake?"

Wally D'Arcy asked the question in a whisper. St. Jim's was silent and still. In the Third Form dormitory the fags were sleeping soundly, except in the case of Wally D'Arcy. And Wally could not sleep; he only wished that he could.

For hours and hours, so it seemed to him, he tossed and turned, thinking of Pongo and this last tragic blow. His heart was filled with bitter rage against the coward who had struck his pet senseless with that brutal blow.

Herries had assured him that Pongo was all right now—well on the mend. And certainly when Wally had left him he had seemed snug enough, and his tail had wagged a feeble farewell, showing that his strength was returning. None the less, Wally was worried. Apprehensive fears tugged at his heart as he lay sleepless in the dark dormitory.

Was Pongo all right still, or had he had a relapse? Did his helpless pet, in the darkness of that gloomy vault, need him? How Wally wished that he had stayed longer with him, and risked being late.

As the long minutes passed, a strange, passionate desire to see if all was well with the little terrier began to take possession of the fag. He told himself again and again that all was well—must be well. He would only disturb his pet—rouse him from much-needed slumber. Besides, the risk of being caught out of bed was great, and capture would mean the ruining of his scheme to keep Pongo at St. Jim's.

But it was of no avail. He simply had to go, to satisfy himself and calm his fears. Then perhaps he would be able to sleep.

The striking of the clock just then settled the matter. As the dull, solemn notes rolled out into the night, Wally was amazed as he counted them. It had seemed hours that he had lain there; yet the hour was but eleven—eleven o'clock.

Wally had sat up in bed then, and asked that question:

"Anyone awake?"

There came no reply, and Wally slipped from bed and quickly donned some clothes over his sleeping attire. He was soon ready, with a torch in his pocket, and quietly left the dormitory.

All was dark and silent outside. It was a moonlit night, calm and still. Not a sound broke the stillness as Wally made his way, shivering despite his clothes, to the deserted wing of the School House. Boards creaked, and once a rat scuttled away in the gloom beyond the radius of his light.

He reached the sliding panel at last, and, leaving it open behind him, trod carefully along the passage and down the steps, his light casting grotesque, dancing shadows on walls and ceiling. When at the bottom of the steps, he gave a low whistle to warn Pongo of his coming—if Pongo could hear it.

There came a low bark in answer, feeble, but almost as chirpy as of old. Wally's heart leaped as he heard it. "Thank Heaven!" he breathed.

Pongo was all right, snug and safe as he had left him. His eyes were somewhat drowsy, showing that he had been asleep.

"Did I wake the poor old chap?" muttered Wally, fondling the little terrier, while Pongo licked his hand. "Well, you can go to sleep again now, old chap. I only came to see if you were all right, old sport."

He examined the wound on the terrier's head; and, satisfying himself that all was well, made Pongo more comfortable still, and then left him, his face bright enough now.

But his face was not bright for long. He reached the inhabited part of the school safely enough, and it was when he was making his way past the Shell dormitory that a voice called out to him and a light flashed.

"Who is that? Stop! Ah! D'Arcy minor, is it not?" It was Mr. Railton. The Housemaster was fully dressed, save that he had changed his shoes for slippers. The fag had overlooked the danger of a master or prefect being up still. Evidently the Housemaster had been working late in his study.

His light flashed in the fag's startled face. "D'Arcy? I thought so!" said the Housemaster sternly. "What are you doing out of bed?"

Wally did not answer—he could not. He was stunned by this unexpected and utterly dismaying happening. To leave the dormitory for no lawful reason was a serious matter, he knew. And he could not give a reason, lawful or otherwise.

"I am waiting, D'Arcy!" rapped out Mr. Railton grimly. "Why are you out of your dormitory, and where have you been? Your clothes are dusty and dirty, and you are fully dressed."

Still the fag remained silent. He could have said quite truthfully that he had left his dormitory to see if Pongo was all right. But Mr. Railton would have asked further questions. As yet, nobody seemed to realise that Pongo had disappeared again. Herries and his chums were under the impression that Wally had taken him into the Third Form-room, and Herries had told Wally at bedtime that he was a young ass to do so. But Wally had not disclosed the true state of affairs. He could have trusted the Fourth-Formers, but he felt the fewer who knew the truth the better. Wally did not wish the Housemaster to ask where Pongo was yet.

"You refuse to answer my questions, D'Arcy?" said Mr. Railton at last.

Silence!
"Do you hear me? You will go to bed now, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton grimly. "I can only suppose that you have been on some unlawful expedition, and I shall question you further in the morning. Go!"

"Yes, sir."
And Wally went to his dormitory. But, despite the position he was in, and the certain punishment to come, his heart felt lighter, and he did not regret having gone to see his pet. Pongo was all right, and that was all he cared about.

CHAPTER 10.

What Tom Merry Saw!

"RUMMY!"
Tom Merry murmured the word as he peered out of the Shell dormitory. Mr. Railton had vanished from sight barely a couple of seconds ago, but Tom Merry did not know that. Like Wally, Tom Merry had been unable to sleep that night, and it was while he lay, restless and sleepless, that he heard the sound of voices in the passage without.

At first he had just tried to distinguish the voices, without feeling very curious. It was very late yet, he knew, and he supposed a couple of masters, who had sat up late talking, were just finishing the chat before parting to go to their rooms. Yet as he lay there it occurred to him that the Shell passage was a strange place for them to finish their chat out at that hour.

At last, curiosity getting the better of him, Tom Merry slipped out of bed to the door and blinked sleepily out.

All was dark now, however. The voices had ceased. Wally had gone, and so had Mr. Railton.

"Rummy!" murmured Tom again. "I wish I'd jumped up sooner. Something may be wrong, for all I know."

He hesitated, and then moved along the passage and scanned the passage beyond. Still no light or movement, and he hurried along to the head of the stairs and stared down into the darkness. All was quiet and still, and he was just about to retrace his steps when he halted, happening to glance out of the landing window, which had neither curtains nor blind.

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"My hat!"

What he saw brought from him an exclamation of startled amazement. The moon showed faintly through a hazy mist. White frost showed on roofs and leafless trees. Outside it was freezing hard. Across the quadrangle the New House showed clear and distinct. To the right one could clearly see the porter's lodge and the gates, covered in white frost.

It was the porter's lodge that caught Tom Merry's eye—or, rather, the high school wall to the extreme right of it. For even as he gazed out he glimpsed a figure astride the wall. It showed for a few brief seconds and then vanished, and he knew the owner had dropped into Taggles' back-yard.

Who was it? What did it mean? A burglar would never choose to enter the school precincts in that manner. Tom felt instinctively that it was no burglar. Yet the figure's movements had been stealthy and watchful. And as he stared out, trying hard to see into the garden of the lodge, a sudden suspicion came to Tom's mind.

He remembered Taggles' complaints. Like Wally and his chums, Tom believed that Taggles' lost fowl had been stolen by someone outside the school—a local sneak-thief. It was possible, of course, that a fox had been at work, but that theory did not seem likely, or fit in with Taggles' statements.

Tom Merry had had little doubt that the first theory was the correct one, and now even that fled as he glimpsed that sneaking, stealthy figure drop down from the wall.

"Well, my only hat!" he breathed.
What should he do? He remembered what trouble the thefts had caused—that the innocent were suffering for them. Pongo had been charged and banished from the school, and Wally had got into trouble.

Tom Merry set his teeth.
He saw a way to help the hapless fag and his beloved terrier. The thought of a chance to prove Pongo innocent and bring the guilty to book filled him with eager excitement, and he made his mind up swiftly.

There was no time to call his chums—to get aid. He must act at once, and on his own responsibility. He rushed back to the dorm, and scrambled into some clothes.

The next moment Tom was hurrying to the lower box-room. He reached it, dragged up the sash of the window, and stepped out on to the leads. They were like ice—slippery with the frost. But he scrambled down to the quadrangle recklessly.

Then he raced away over the frozen ground, the keen wind biting through his clothes. He had almost reached the lodge when he heard a cry—a cry that ended abruptly—or so it seemed to him—in a groan.

He halted, his heart thumping. But no other sound followed it as he listened, and, believing he had been mistaken, he was just creeping forward again when suddenly he sighted the prowling figure, just disappearing over the school wall behind the lodge yard.

"Blow!" said Tom.
He hesitated, and then he raced for the gates. To climb them was a stiff proposition even in daylight, but Tom did not hesitate—it seemed the easiest and quickest way to the lane. He was soon over, heedless of the frost on the cold iron. Then, with tingling, burning fingers, he started off with a rush in pursuit of a vaguely-seen form in the lane beyond.

Soon he could make out the figure plainly—the figure of a thin, shortish youth—certainly not that of a man. The clatter of his nailed boots on the hard, frozen ground echoed clearly on the still night air.

Tom went after him, certain of catching his quarry sooner or later. He hoped he would catch him with the plunder—the certain proof he wanted to clear Pongo. But as he gained on his quarry Tom saw that he carried nothing in his hands. But Tom remembered that poachers carried big pockets in which to slip their gains.

"I'll have him!" he said to himself grimly.
He put on a spurt that brought him to within a dozen yards of the fugitive. Suddenly, however, the youth—if youth he was—swerved aside and scrambled through a thin hedge at the side of the lane. Then he plunged across a ploughed field beyond.

Here Tom found the going harder; his light house-shoes were a drawback on the hard, lumpy ground, and he felt the stones through the soles painfully. But he stuck it doggedly, and was hard on the heels of the night prowler when the end of the field was reached, and the youth plunged through another hedge into a meadow beyond covered with hoar frost. At the far end of the meadow showed the river—a stretch of dull, glimmering whiteness, with no ripple on its surface.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tom, his eyes fixed on the figure ahead. "Is the fool going to risk it and cross?"

It certainly looked like it, and Tom felt a sudden, overwhelming alarm. Only that afternoon he and his chums had tested the Rhyl, and found the ice was far from safe

And though it was freezing hard enough now, it was not likely to be safe for another twenty-four hours at least.

"The fool!" panted Tom. He shouted a warning to the youth ahead, but the fellow ignored it. He did not turn aside, and in a few seconds he had reached the towing-path, his heavy boots crunching on the cinders.

Even then Tom had the hope that he would turn along the towing-path. But it was a vain hope. The youth appeared to be captured. More than once he had looked back, and Tom had wondered why, knowing that he only had a schoolboy to deal with, why did he not stop to fight it out?

Then the reason came to Tom—the fellow feared to be recognised. Yet now he would have to turn about—or attempt to cross the treacherous ice of the river!

The youth stopped on the brink of the river and glanced back. Then, even as Tom yelled out frantically, he stepped on the ice and began to tread carefully across it, obviously certain that his pursuer would not dare to follow.

But he was wrong there. "Stop!" shouted Tom. "Stop, you fool! It isn't safe yet—stop!"

The youth waved his hand in derision, and kept on. Tom set his teeth and followed. It was foolish, he knew. Yet that derisive wave of the hand was enough to drive any thoughts of danger from his mind.

But before many steps had been taken Tom knew the folly of it. The ice heaved and cracked, the cracks ringing out sharply on the keen, frosty air.

But it was as dangerous to turn back as to go ahead—so Tom went ahead. And what he feared happened the next moment with a suddenness that was startling though he had feared it.

It was not the youth who was in danger—it was Tom himself. The cracking sounds grew louder—the whole expanse of ice around him seemed to be breaking and heaving. Then, quite abruptly, Tom knew they could never both cross in time.

"Look out!" he yelled. "Faster, you fool—it's going!" It went the very next second. For a brief, terrifying moment Tom strove to keep his balance on the rocking, treacherous ice, and then he was through. Splash!

Amid a smother of splintering ice he crashed through into the black, gushing water. An icy, deadly shock went right through him, robbing him of his breath.

The next instant he was struggling for life in the black surge of water and ice. Something had struck his head as he went under—a jagged piece of ice—and he was half-stunned, and his struggles seemed to avail him little.

In that terrible moment, with the thunderous roar of the icy water in his ears, Tom Merry felt the clutch of death at his heart.

He came up at last, felt the keen wind on his face, caught a glimpse of moonlit sky. He was gasping for breath, fighting desperately against something that seemed to clutch him and drag him down. It seemed to the drowning junior that he was in the grip of a giant octopus that was dragging him downwards.

And then his ears became aware of a voice. It reached his dazed senses as in a dream.

"Old on, kid! Stick it out! I got you!" The words were gasped almost in his ears, and then he realised that friendly hands were gripping him—strong hands that fought and dragged him where he knew not.

Dinning into his ears was the crashing of breaking ice and the rush and surge of water, and then his feet touched something solid, and he stumbled forward blindly.

The feel of solid ground beneath his feet sent a rush of blood to his heart, and he stumbled on with renewed strength, that fierce grip still on him. Almost before he knew it, he was stumbling forward blindly on hands and knees, and then he felt himself hauled out of reach of the black, icy water.

He lay on the bank of the icebound river, water streaming from him, breathing in great gulps of the keen, pure night air. His heart was thumping madly, almost suffocating him. His brain reeled, and he felt sick and terribly weary.

But gradually his brain cleared, and he became aware of another form close by him. It was his rescuer. He, too, lay gasping and panting amid ice and water, and then, as Tom realised fully what had happened, he strove to get to his feet.

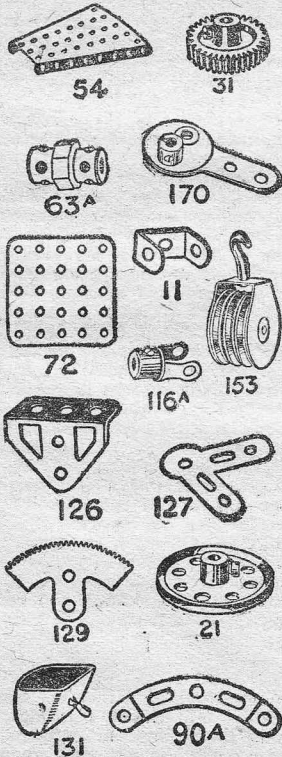
The youth was before him, however. He jumped up, averting his face as he did so.

"You all right now?" he panted huskily. "You was a blamed fool to foller me like that, kid! You'd better hop it back to skool sharp. I ain't goin' to be collared by a kid, blame you!"

With that he turned away.

(Continued on next page.)

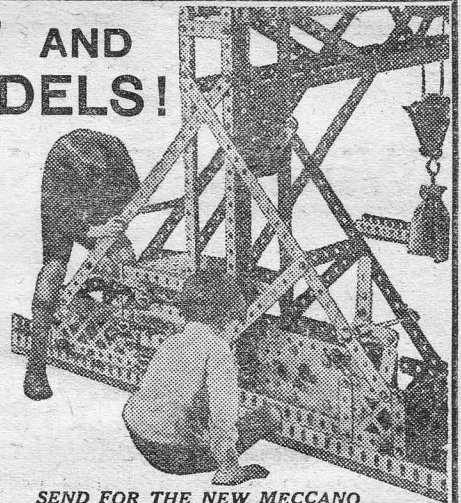
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"Stop!" panted Tom Merry. "I know who you are—stop! Joe Tuttle—stop! I only want to thank you—I won't give you away!"

He started after the youth, who was running now along the bank. But a wave of giddiness swept over the junior, and he stopped and leaned against a tree-trunk.

Joe Tuttle vanished into the hazy gloom along the towing-path.

Tom Merry's rescuer was gone. And when the giddiness had past Tom Merry hurried after him as fast as he could. He knew he could never hope to catch the fellow up, but he was shivering violently, and he knew it was dangerous to linger. He reached the bridge over the Rhyl, and, crossing it, turned and trotted back to St. Jim's, amazement and wonder in his heart.

He knew the fellow well enough now—the prowler and sneak-thief who had obviously been after Taggles' poultry. It was Joe Tuttle, a youth well known in Rylcombe—a ne'er-do-well, friendless, an Ishmael, with every respectable man's hand against him.

Yet Tom Merry knew him for more than that now. He had saved his life at the risk of his own—the life of the fellow who was pursuing him—an enemy! Reckless, good-for-nothing he might be; yet he was a hero for all that. A deep feeling of gratitude came over the junior as he realised that, but for Joe Tuttle's unselfish gallantry, he could never have saved himself, half-stunned and injured as he was.

Tom Merry's quick trot back to St. Jim's did him good. The exertion made him warm, and shook off the effect of his icy plunge. Quickly and silently he gained the quadrangle, crossed it, and climbed through the box-room window into the School House again.

He had squeezed as much of the water from his clothes as possible, and he was anxious to get rid of his drenched attire, and to hide it lest questions were asked. In the nearest bath-room he gave himself a vigorous rub down and donned pyjamas, and then he hurried back to the dormitory. Here he got out fresh clothes for the morrow in readiness. He did not want any questions to be asked—he was determined that none should be asked. Of what he had seen at Taggles' lodge he was resolved not to say a word. Joe Tuttle had earned his liberty, and, if he had only known it, made a staunch friend.

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CHAPTER 11.

Where is Pongo?!

"FROST!" yawned Monty Lowther, glancing at the dormitory window. "Still freezing, you fellows."

"Oh, good!"

It was good news. Frost meant skating, and the rest of the Shell greeted Monty's announcement with great satisfaction. They tumbled out of bed and started dressing with sudden eagerness. It was cold, but when cold was accompanied by either frost or snow it was welcome to the young gentlemen of St. Jim's.

"Tumble up, Tommy!" bawled Monty in Tom Merry's ear; and as encouragement he grabbed the bedclothes and whirled them off the bed.

Tom Merry sat up and rubbed his eyes drowsily.

"Anyone would think you'd had no sleep for a week!" said Lowther, eyeing his chum in some wonder. "Had a bad night, old top?"

It was rather unusual for Tom to be the last out of bed in the morning. Moreover, he did not look anything like his usual bright self.

"I'm all right!" he said, with a yawn and a faint grin. "I—I was awake for a long time last night, Monty. I say," he added in sudden alarm, as he glanced at his watch, "it's late!"

"Rising-bell went late!" said Talbot. "Old Taggy's overslept himself a bit for once!"

"Which I'll report 'im!" said Lowther, in imitation of Taggles' growling tones. "Wot I sez is this 'ere—he oughtn't to go oversleepin' of 'imself; which it's agen rules, and I'll report 'im!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare looked into the dormitory just then.

"Get a move on—and don't waste time cackling!" he called. "You ought to have been dressed—"

"Rising-bell was late!" said Racke. "Isn't our fault, Kildare."

"So it was!" agreed Kildare. "Taggles is ill—I've had to ring it myself. But you've had time to get dressed for all that! Buck up! Anyone not out in five minutes gets a licking!"

Coming from the good-natured Kildare, such a dark threat only made the juniors chuckle. But they soon dressed for all that.

"Wonder how old Pongo is?" said Manners. "Let's cut along and see before brekker!"

"Right-ho!"

On the stairs they overtook Blake & Co., who joined them, Herries especially being anxious about Pongo.

"It's queer!" Herries commented. "I cut along from the Common-room last night to ask about Pongo just before bedtime. The dog wasn't in the faggery, neither were Wally and his pals."

"Must be in that lumber-room where Wally hid him before!" said Blake, looking puzzled. "The kid ought to have left him with us."

"I think so!" said Herries, grunting. "He might have mentioned it to me, anyway, instead of sneaking him away like that."

"Got some game on, I bet!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I hope not, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "The young wapscaillon has been in twouble enough lately. And I'm wathah worried about that attack on Kildare yesterday, deah boys. Mr. Wailton, fwom all accounts, is satisfied that it was a gang of dog-thieves aftah Pongo. Wally has given his word to Kildare that he knows nothin' about it, and Wailton seems satisfied, as I say. But—but it was wathah queeah!"

"Jolly queer! We thought the same," said Tom Merry, nodding. "But I thought it best to say nothing. If you ask me, I fancy some of those young scamps in the Third could tell Kildare who the attackers were!"

"You mean they did it without Wally knowing—"

began Blake, staring.

"Just that! Wally could then say he had no hand in it," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, it was a jolly serious thing for them to do if they did it, and the least we say about our views the better for the daring young idiots. Anyway, it all came to nothing—Pongo's here again."

"Is he?" murmured Manners. "I wonder!"

Tom Merry stopped short and stared at him.

"My only hat!" he breathed. "I see what you mean, Manners! You're wondering if the kids smuggled him out of school last night."

"You've hit it!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Just the reckless thing Wally would do, if he felt Pongo was well enough to be shifted," said Blake, nodding. "I told him Raitton said there was no hope of Pongo staying—that he had to go the moment he was well enough. The daring young rascal's determined he shan't go, or he's no intention of parting with Pongo for good, at all events."

"We'll soon know," said Tom. "If Pongo isn't in the lumber-room then there's scarcely anywhere else he can be! Come on!"

They went along to the lumber-room at the end of the Third Form passage. A glance inside was enough; Pongo was not there. The chums then went to the Third Form-room.

There was a little crowd of fags there, for the bell for chapel had not gone yet. They were crowding round the fire for warmth. But Pongo was not there, nor was Wally D'Arcy.

"Where's young Wally?" asked Tom Merry.

"Find out!" said Curly Gibson.

"What! You cheeky young ass!" said Tom warmly. "Can't you answer a civil question? Where's Wally D'Arcy, Levison minor?"

Frank Levison hesitated. He knew his leader had gone to see to Pongo's breakfast in the secret room; but he was not likely to tell Tom Merry & Co. that, much less before a crowd of his fellow fags.

"Find out!" he said at last.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry, in exasperation. "You know where D'Arcy minor is, Watson?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Watson. "He's downstairs somewhere!"

Tom Merry frowned. It was clear that Wally's chums, at least, knew where their leader was, but did not intend to tell. That meant he was somewhere where he ought not to be. Otherwise they would have told willingly enough.

"Well, if you won't say where Wally is, young Levison," said Tom, addressing himself to Frank, "perhaps you'll say where Pongo is?"

"Find out!" said Frank Levison, colouring uneasily.

"He's all right, though, if that's what you want to know!"

"That's all we want to know!" said Tom. "But Wally might have told Herries, at least, that he was going to sneak Pongo away without a word. Still, if the dog's all right that's enough for us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums went out. In the passage they met Mr. Selby, but that sour-tempered gentleman did not glance at them. He entered the Form-room.

"Is D'Arcy minor here?" he asked.

The fags stared at him. Mr. Selby's voice was strained; it was nothing like his usual, rasping, irritable bark. The master of the Third looked worried, anxious, in fact.

"D'Arcy is out somewhere," said Jameson.

"How-how is his dog—that wretched terrier?" demanded Mr. Selby, almost feverishly.

"He—he's getting better, sir," said Curly Gibson, hoping devoutly that the master would not ask where he was. "I think he's quite out of danger now, sir."

Mr. Selby nodded, and went out without replying. The fags stared at each other.

"Well, my hat!" said Hobbs. "Fancy the old rotter being anxious about Pongo! I thought he was going to look mad on hearing Pongo was better. Instead he looked quite relieved."

"He's improving!" grinned Reggie Manners. "Fancy the beast even asking about Pongo!"

It quite caused a little sensation in the faggery. Kindness of heart on Mr. Selby's part was something quite unexpected and new. Only Rouben Piggott did not seem

impressed or surprised. He jammed his hands in his pockets and lounged out after Mr. Selby, a curious grin on his ill-favoured face.

Outside he almost bumped into Mr. Selby, who had turned back for some reason.

"Out of my way, Piggott!" snapped Mr. Selby. "How dare you lounge about in that slovenly manner? Take your hands from your pockets, and do not look at me in that impudent manner, boy!"

Piggott grinned. But he did not take his hands out of his pockets. Mr. Selby, who had been about to move on, stopped again.



Wally D'Arcy was passing the Shell dormitory when a light flashed on. "Who is that? Stop!" It was the voice of Mr. Ralston.

"Piggott, do you hear me?" he gasped. "Obey me at once, and remove your hands from your pockets, sir!"

"Why should I?" said Piggott impudently.

Piggott himself stepped back a little then, as if afraid that he had, after all, awakened the wrong passenger, so to speak. But he did not step back quickly enough to avoid the resounding box on the ear that Mr. Selby, in sudden rage and astonishment, dealt him.

Smack!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Piggott. His eyes glittered as he clasped his burning ear.

"You rotter!" he panted.

"What—what? Piggott, you rebellious young rascal——"

"You rotter!" hissed the fag. "You're not hitting a dog now—you're not hitting Pongo!"

"Good heavens!"

Mr. Selby suddenly went white as a sheet. His hand dropped and he stared in sudden fear at the young rascal.

"What—what do you mean, boy?" he breathed.

Piggott grinned—there was no mistaking the look of sudden fear, of terrified apprehension, on the face of Mr. Henry Selby now.

"Only thinking about that affair last night, sir!" he said airily. "Some of the fellows think Pongo was hit by a car, and some that he was biffed by a stick—some tramp, you know. But I believe it was neither a car nor a stick. In my belief it was done with an umbrella, sir! Don't you think so?"

Mr. Selby stood motionless.

He stared in terror at the young rascal.

So Piggott knew—Piggott had seen that luckless blow! Mr. Selby had a faint recollection now of having seen someone near the gates as he came along from Rylcombe. Why had he not made sure, why had he not looked carefully about him?

Mr. Selby felt suddenly sick and giddy.

Why had he not gone straight indoors and reported what had happened? How he wished now that he had! Few could have blamed him for it! After all it had been done in self-defence—he had struck that wild blow merely to drive the wretched dog away, with no intention of harming the animal seriously. There was no crime in that—a blow in self-defence!

But it was too late now! By his deception, his fear of explaining, he had placed himself in a dreadful position. He remembered with a sudden chill how he had discussed the accident to Pongo with Mr. Railton—how he had given it as his opinion that a car had struck the dog. In the masters' Common-room he had also joined in the general discussion on the subject, and had repeated his belief there that Pongo had been run down by a car. He had pooh-poohed the theory that the dog had been injured by a tramp. Indeed, in his anxiety to prove that a car had done it, he had been most eloquent on the subject.

After that, how could he let it be known that he had done it—to prove his cowardice, his deception, and his lies! What would his colleagues think of him? What would Mr Railton and the Head think of him?

Mr. Selby shivered

He stared in terror at the fag, and Piggott stared back at him with an insolent grin round his weak mouth.

"I—I do not understand you, Piggott!" he stammered at last. "It is immaterial to me how the wretched animal came by his injury, although it was obviously done by a car. I would—would advise you, boy, to be careful what statements you make in regard to the matter; otherwise you may get into serious trouble."

There was a threat underlying Mr. Selby's words. Piggott saw that easily enough. But he only grinned.

"I shan't mention my opinion, of course, sir!" he said coolly. "By the way, sir, you gave me a hundred lines to do last night. I haven't had time to do them. Do you still require them, sir?"

Mr. Selby looked at him.

"You—you need not do the lines—they are cancelled, Piggott!" he said in a strained voice.

With that he walked away, almost blindly—his head bowed.

Reuben Piggott grinned after him. It had "come off," as he had expected. From the very fact that Mr. Selby had kept silent about what he had done, Piggott knew he feared the truth coming to light. And Reuben Piggott grinned, and lounged on with his hands in his pockets. Mr. Selby's ill-temper had no terrors for him now!

CHAPTER 12.

Staggering News!

"THERE is somethin' w'ong, deah doys!"

Arthur Augustus gave that as his opinion as he came upon his chums in the Fourth passage.

It was after breakfast, and Blake, Herries, and Digby had come in with the Terrible Three. Arthur Augustus had been to look for Wally. Wally had been present at breakfast, but now he seemed to have disappeared again.

Arthur Augustus was very puzzled and worried. He had just met Darrell in the passage, and Darrell had asked him, in rather a grim tone, where his minor was. Mr. Selby had also asked him the same question. Nor was he the only one—several people had made a similar inquiry that morning.

Naturally Arthur Augustus was a bit alarmed. Moreover, people in authority—masters and prefects—were looking rather grave and disturbed.

What did it mean—if it did mean anything?

Tom Merry had also noticed it, and it had added to his own worries. As a matter of fact, Tom had quite enough to worry him that morning. He had said nothing whatever to his chums or anyone else about the happenings of the night. He was aware that Lowther and Manners kept eyeing him askance. It was clear that they had noticed a difference in his manner and face since the previous evening. Tom was still feeling the effects of that terrible struggle for life in the icy river. He ached all over and felt the beginnings of a cold already upon him. His chums had noticed that he was looking seedy, and they had commented upon it. But he had not satisfied his curiosity.

But his physical discomforts were as nothing to the uneasiness and disquietude of his mind.

He felt himself in an awkward position now—a position he did not like at all. To his open and straightforward nature the thought of keeping silent in regard to the happenings of the night was not a pleasant one. It was not fair, to say the least of it, to remain silent—not fair or just to D'Arcy minor and his dog. Pongo and his master were suffering for it. It had led to trouble for

them, and the banishment of Pongo. But for that, Pongo would never have been in the House to attack Mr. Selby, and the present state of affairs would never have been brought about. Moreover, it was Taggles' complaint chiefly that had influenced the Head in his decision, Tom was certain of that.

And he alone knew that Pongo was innocent. He alone knew who was the guilty party. He had but to go to the authorities and say what he had discovered and Pongo would be cleared.

But he could not! Joe Tuttle was a rascal. But he had saved his life, and how could he give the fellow away? Taggles was not likely to have mercy on him if the Head was. And P. c. Crump would be only too glad to take charge of the village ne'er-do-well. Such easy captures did not often come the village constable's way.

Yet apart from this, Tom could not help feeling that something else was in the wind—something more serious was wrong.

But even as Arthur Augustus came up with that statement, a theory struck Tom Merry.

"Something is jolly well wrong, Gussy!" he breathed. "My hat! I wonder if something's come out about the attack on Kildare yesterday?"

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

"They're asking for Wally!" said Tom grimly. "It looks as if something's come out. I hope to goodness Wally did have no hand in it—I hope he didn't arrange it all, and that it's come out!"

"Looks to me like it!" said Herries, shaking his head. "Hallo! Here's Railton! Look at his solemn chivvy!"

Mr. Railton came up to them and stopped.

"Do you know where your brother is, D'Arcy?" he demanded.

"No, sir! I weally do not know!"

"The boy was at breakfast!" said the Housemaster. "Yet he seems to have vanished again. If you see him send him at once to me—or, rainer kindly tell him the headmaster wishes to see him!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Vevy good, sir!"

The Housemaster walked away, his face grave.

"Everybody seems to be after that young scapegrace!" said Manners. "It's queer! I don't like the look of it!"

"Hallo! Here's Kildare now! I bet he's after Wally, too!" said Lowther.

Lowther was right. Kildare was after Wally, and he was looking wrathful.

"Where's your minor, D'Arcy?" he demanded.

"Goodness knows, deah boy! Ewevybody seems to be askin' that!"

"You've not seen him since breakfast?"

"No—wathah not, Kildare!"

"It's queer where the kid's got to!" snapped Kildare.

"What's he been up to now, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

The captain's face set. The juniors waited—though they felt they knew why Wally was wanted now. But the next moment they realised they were wrong.

"You haven't heard?" said Kildare, staring.

"Heard what? No," said Tom.

"Taggles has been hurt!" said Kildare grimly. "He was hit on the head with a stick last night—a nasty knock! He heard a noise between eleven and twelve last night, and got up—thought it was somebody after his fowls. He spotted somebody on the wall, and went for him. But the chap—Taggy says it was a boy—struck down at him, nearly stunning him."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Luckily, Mrs. Taggles had got up, too, and she helped the old man indoors," said Kildare. "Otherwise, it might have been more serious, considering the sort of night it was."

"And the chap got away?"

"Yes—he escaped!" said Kildare meaningly. "But he hasn't escaped for good, I fancy!"

"Well, my hat!"

"Poor old Taggy!"

Tom Merry did not speak—he could not. All the colour had drained away from his face, leaving him white as death. But his chums did not notice him—they were too startled at the news.

"But what's Wally wanted for?" said Manners, catching his breath suddenly. "What's it got to do with that kid, Kildare?"

Kildare hesitated, and then he looked at Arthur Augustus.

"D'Arcy minor is wanted by the Head," he returned slowly, "to answer that question. By the look of things it has a lot to do with him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"With Wally?" almost yelled Blake. "But why?"

"Because he swore, in Railton's hearing, to get square

with the old chap, for one thing!" said Kildare. "And, for another, the young fool was caught by Raitlon himself out of bed—out of his dorm, and fully dressed, just about the time it happened. That's why!"

"Oh!"
"Oh, my only hat!"
The juniors' faces paled a little. This was something far more serious than the trick played on Kildare—if trick it was. Kildare was just turning away when a fag came scuttling along the passage.

It was Wally himself. He was breathless and dusty—having, as a matter of fact, just come from the secret room, his second visit there that morning. All eyes turned upon him.

"Hold on, D'Arcy!" snapped Kildare.
Wally stopped, not a little alarmed by the looks on the faces of the juniors and senior.

"Want me, Kildare?" he asked, trying to speak carelessly.

"Yes; you're coming with me to the Head! I've been hunting all over the House for you! Where the thump have you been?"

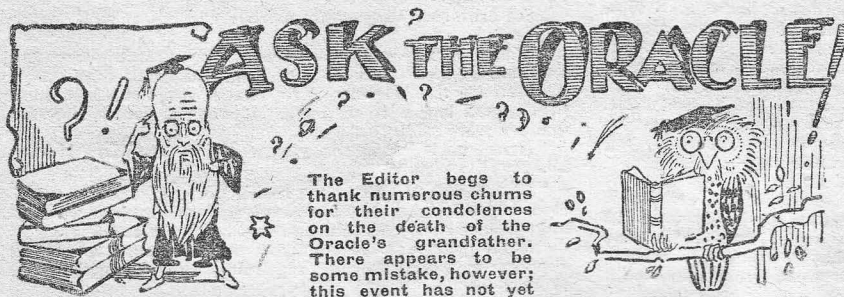
"Only for a little stroll, Kildare!" said Wally.
Kildare's words had alarmed him. Naturally he jumped to the instant conclusion that his loyal chums had been found out—that they had been bowled out over the attack on Kildare and himself that afternoon. He little dreamed of the truth.

"Well, come along!" said Kildare.
"What's the Head want me for?" stammered Wally.
"You'll find that out soon enough, kid!" said the captain, eyeing the fag very curiously indeed. "Come!"

Wally followed him. He gave the dumbfounded Shell and Fourth fellows a dismayed grimace as he went. Apparently he did not think it so very serious. He even went so far as to mock Kildare's long, dignified stride as he followed him, solely for their entertainment, apparently.

The juniors looked at each other. The news, followed so soon by that startling declaration that Wally was wanted in connection with the outrage, filled them with sudden dismay.

(Continued on next page.)



taken place, and is not expected until the day of a certain Cup-Tie replay in London!

Q.—What is chewing-gum made of?

A.—The basis is chicle, a gum obtained from the Zapote Chico tree of South America. Sugar and various flavourings are added. Far from being harmful, I should say the chewing habit is good in strict moderation. It is rumoured it is a bit overdone by our cousins of the United States of America.

Q.—What is a salle?

A.—This is French for "room," Geoffrey Seddon. Travelling in France you will often see the words *salle a manger* (dining-room) or *salle d'attente* (waiting-room). Congrats on your splendid work in securing so many new readers for the good old GEM!

Q.—How can a fellow make invisible ink?

A.—Here is the secret, "Red Hand," f Liverpool, but don't tell anyone else: Just squeeze out some onion juice and write with that. Better still, buy a little chloride and nitrate of cobalt at the chemist's, and mix together an equal solution of each. The paper on which you write will remain blank until it is heated. Then the words will appear in letters of blue.

Q.—Who was the Death Crier?

A.—The man who went about France in the days before newspapers announcing the death of well-known persons.



A Death Crier of France in the days before newspapers came along.

Q.—What is an essidium?

A.—Never mind if you have "sent in questions before," Edgar Wray, of Taunton, —bung in a few more! I shall be only too pleased to answer them just so long as the old dome-piece holds out! Regarding the essidium: This is a light war-chariot of the kind used by the ancient Britons and Gauls. As you will perceive, I borrowed a picture of one from my grandfather to reproduce for your especial benefit.

Q.—What is the great airship R 101 made of?

A.—Chiefly of the intestines of cows, Frank Worthing, of Bognor. But let me be more explicit. This huge airship,

is larger than the liner, Mauretania, she only weighs 90 tons herself against the 32,000 tons of the sea-going ship. She can cruise with a full complement of 52 passengers at over 60 miles an hour, and has a range of 2,000 miles! Some air-ship!

Q.—Who wrote "The Mystery of the Mist"?

A.—Dunn, Charlie B.—I haven't the foggiest!

Q.—What stamp does a letter to the South Sea Islands require?

A.—A 1½d. stamp, J. C. K.

Q.—What is the uvula?

A.—Get in front of your looking-glass, Tom Reeves, of Boston, open your mouth, and peep down your giddy gullet. Hanging from the roof of your mouth is a thing that looks like an animated red stalactite—that's the little fellow! Make your bow to him: Tom Reeves meet Master Uvula. What is it for? This query is rather more difficult. Doctors don't know, but my old friend, Professor Pogsnoddy, of the Pestology Institute, has elucidated in a series of remarkably erudite papers the theory that it may be to keep the tonsils apart, much in the same way that a giraffe's neck is used to keep its head from its body.

Q.—What is a knar?

A.—A lump, or knot, covered in bark on the trunk or root of a tree. Concerning your second question, Isaac McKay, I don't know where anyone can get a cherry-wood walking-stick in exchange for 500 old bus tickets. I wish I did!

Q.—What can be done for buzzing in the head?

A.—"Anxious," of Bootle, complains that often in the evening he suffers from intermittent buzzings in the head, punctuated by strange sounds as of distant music and piercing notes like a file suddenly drawn across metal. What, he asks, is he to do about it? I suggest, my chum, that instant relief may be obtained by switching off the wireless!

The ancient Britons went to war in an essidium, a light chariot, as depicted



732 feet long and 140 feet high, has 15 gas-bags made of goldbeater's skin, as it is called—actually taken from the intestines of no less than 3,000,000 cows. The framework is of durahum, the cabins of balsa wood (the lightest known) and wicker. The gas-bags have been constructed to hold 5,000,000 cubic feet of hydrogen gas, and the vessel has a lifting power of 150 tons. Although R 101

CHAPTER 13.

Gussy Does His Best!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS stared after Kildare with his mouth open, and looking like a stranded fish.

"Wot!" he mumbled. "Utah wot!"
 "Good heavens!" breathed Tom Merry.

It was all he could say at the moment.

And he had not dreamed of this! That faint cry he had fancied hearing the night before—it had been no fancy, then! He remembered it well enough now. It was Taggles crying out when the blow had struck. Joe Tuttle had done it, the fellow who had saved his life ten minutes or less afterwards. No wonder he had raced away—no wonder he had made such a desperate effort to escape!

What was he to do about it? The whole affair presented a more serious aspect now. It was attempted robbery with violence now—in Joe Tuttle's case! Capture for the ne'er-do-well meant imprisonment; that much was quite certain!

But it was serious enough for Wally, in all conscience! Everybody knew of the bitter feeling between Wally and Taggles. Mr. Railton himself had heard from the foolish fag's own lips that he would get his own back on the old porter. The motive was there, and a strong one! Wally believed that Taggles had struck down his dog. Now Taggles himself had been struck down the very next night—and by a boy, according to Taggles himself. The evidence was there. Wally had been out of his dormitory, fully dressed, at the time. And he had refused to give Mr. Railton any account of why he was out of bed at that hour.

Tom Merry groaned. He could not help feeling that he himself would have been more inclined to believe the fag guilty, had he not known what he knew now.

What was he to do? What could he do?

He had to choose between the fellow who had saved him from death and Wally, the fellow who was innocent. In his own mind Tom knew that he could only make one choice—that right was right, and that he could never allow the innocent fag to suffer, when a word from him would save him.

Tom's mind was in a whirl. He scarcely heard what his chums were saying. But suddenly Lowther turned to him.

"What do you think of it, Tom? It scarcely seems possible, and yet— Why, what's the matter? You look like a ghost!"

Tom licked his lips.

"Nothing—nothing much!" he stammered thickly. "It—it's all right! I—I— There's the bell for lessons, chaps!"

The bell for morning school rang just then. Never had it sounded more welcome to Tom. He knew his chums were eyeing him curiously, and he was thankful for the interruption to prevent them questioning him. He wanted to be alone—to think things out; to decide what was to be done, though he knew what his decision must be! None the less, he wanted time to think. He would not move until he knew the worst.

He went to his study for his books, and Lowther and Manners followed. Blake, Herries, and Digby started for their study also. But Arthur Augustus turned to go in the opposite direction.

"Here, where are you off to, Gussy?" demanded Blake

"What about books?"

"I do not wequiah my books yet, Blake!"

"But—but—why, where are you off to?"

"To the Head, deah boy!"

"The Head? But what for, fathhead?" demanded Blake

in alarm.

"I stwongly object to bein' called a fathhead, Jack Blake!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "Howevah, I am goin' to the Head to put this mattah wight! It is uttaly widic to suppose that Wally has done this fealful thing! The Head must be pottay to dwcam of such a thing! It is wathah an insult to the family, and I stwongly object to Dr. Holmes entertainin' such a wotten suspish."

"You—you're going to the Head to tell him that?"

"Certainly, deah boy!"

"But you'll be scalped!" yelled Blake.

"I shall wufuse to be scalped, Blake! The Head is quite off his wockah, and off the wails! I shall point this out to him vevy quickly!"

"But, look here, you fearful ass—"

"Wats!"

"Here, hold on! Stop! Come back!" roared Blake.

And he rushed after Arthur Augustus and grabbed him. The swell of the Fourth knew nothing of the matter, and Blake was sure his intervention would only make the Head waxier, and earn him a licking.

But Arthur Augustus was in a determined mood. The charge against his minor had filled him with wrath as well as utter dismay. Not for one moment did he believe there was any truth in it, or entertain such a possibility.

And he was the fellow to put the matter right. He would

point out quite tactfully, yet firmly, that the Head was up the wrong tree—that it was quite impossible for Wally to be guilty of such a thing. It was only right and proper for him to stand by his minor in such a crisis.

Having made up his mind to that, nothing would move Gussy from his resolve, not even Blake.

"Welease me, Blake!" he exclaimed. "Bai Jove! You cheekay wottah—"

"Not much!" said Blake. "You're not going on such a mad game!"

"Will you welease me?" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! If you do not welease me this instant, Blake—"

Instead, Blake tightened his grasp on his chum and started to haul him back. Arthur Augustus thumped him in the chest and wrenched himself free. But Blake was after him again in a moment. In an instant they were waltzing about the passage, locked in fond embrace. Blake meant to save Gussy from himself, whether his noble chum liked it or not.

They were still waltzing when Mr. Lathom happened along.

He adjusted his spectacles and glared at them.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "Blake—D'Arcy, how dare you! What is the matter?"

"Oh crumbs! Only—a little argument, sir!" panted Blake.

"There is no weason to keep the mattah fwom Mr. Lathom, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wish to see Dr. Holmes, sir. Blake, for some weason or othah, was twyin' to stop me. It was my fault, of course, that we were strugglin' togethah!"

"Dear me! Why do you wish to see Dr. Holmes, D'Arcy?"

"It is in wegard to my minah, sir. Dr. Holmes has seen fit to bwing a wathah sewious charge against him, and I wished to go before the Head in ordah to put the mattah wight!"

"Good gracious! If you have any evidence to offer in support of your brother regarding this Taggles affair, D'Arcy—"

"Most certainly I have, Mr. Lathom!"

"Then you must see the headmaster without delay, my boy," said Mr. Lathom. "The affair is most distressing; and I, for one, shall be very glad indeed if you can bring to light anything that will exonerate the boy. Come with me at once!"

"Vevy good, sir!"

And, without another glance at his chums, Arthur Augustus went with little Mr. Lathom, who was quite fluttered. The kindly little gentleman was upset at the news regarding Wally, and he was only too anxious that the boy should be cleared of the charge against him.

Reaching the Head's door, Mr. Lathom knocked and went in. A moment or two later he opened the door again and beckoned to Arthur Augustus to enter.

The swell of the Fourth marched in and stood alongside Wally. The Head was just seating himself in his chair, and it was evident he had only just arrived. Mr. Railton was there, standing by the desk, his face grave. He eyed Arthur Augustus sharply and in some amoyance.

Gussy stood there serene and undisturbed.

"You know why your brother is here, D'Arcy major?" demanded the Head.

"Oh, yaas, sir!"

"Mr. Lathom informs me that you have evidence to bring before me in this matter of Taggles," said the Head quietly.

"Oh, yaas, sir!"

"If you have any knowledge of this distressing matter, my boy—"

"Wathah not, sir!"

"You—you haven't, boy?"

"Not at all, sir. I know nothin' about it whatevah!"

The Head sat up straight.

"Bless my soul! Mr. Lathom, you stated—"

"The boy wished to see you, sir; he assured me that he had evidence to give in support of his brother!" gasped Mr. Lathom, blinking rapidly at the calm and collected Arthur Augustus.

"That is quite twue, sir," said Gussy, nodding his noble head.

"But if you know nothing about the matter, how can you have evidence to give?" said the Head, with some anger. "What reasons—"

"The best weasons in the world, sir," said Arthur Augustus, calmly and innocently. "Wally, is my bwothah, and nobody knows him bettah than I do. This wotten charge has been made against him, I undahstand, and I considah myself the best person to wufute it. My evidence is that my minah could nevah have done it, sir!"

"Bless my soul! But—but if you know nothing about it, boy—"

"I don't, sir—wathah not! But I know Wally didn't do it; he couldn't!"

"But—but—" The Head was stuttering now. "If you have any proof, boy—"

"None whatever, sir! No proof is required, so far as I am concerned. The matter is quite clear! Somebody may have struck poor old Taggles—I do not know. But it wasn't Wally. He is too decent a youngster to do a thing like that. It is really wretched an insult to the family to suppose that he could have done it!" said Gussy, his voice rising with some indignation. "However, the moment I heard such a rotten charge had been made I wished to you, sir, to make it clear that it could not have been Wally!"

"Bless my soul!"

There was a silence. Wally D'Arcy was grinning openly. It was just like Gussy. Mr. Lathom was pink. The Head seemed to be trying to get his breath. He looked at Mr. Railton, and then he looked at Gussy.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped at last, a thunderous frown growing on his brow. "Am—am I to understand that you have come here just to give me your personal opinion in the matter, and nothing else, D'Arcy? You have come here to waste my time, and that of the other masters here, just to state your belief in your brother's innocence!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus saw that the Head was not convinced that Wally was innocent, despite his noble assurance on the point. "Bai Jove! Weally, sir, as I know nothin' about it, that is all I can do, isn't it?"

The Head pointed to the door.

"Go!" he stuttered. "Go at once, you foolish, absurd boy!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Go!" thundered the Head. "Leave this room instantly, D'Arcy! Otherwise, I shall cane you severely!"

"But I strongly object to this treatment, sir!" said Gussy stoutly. "Weally, sir, I wish to make it quite clear that Wally— Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus paused as the Head rose from his desk and picked up his cane. Wally was already making frantic signals to him.

But it was too late. The Head had stated that he would cane him severely if he did not leave the room instantly, and the Head was a man of his word. He caned Gussy severely, ignoring that youth's amazed protests.

"There!" gasped the Head, when he had given four stinging cuts. "Now go to your Form-room at once, sir! That that is all, Mr Lathom!"

And Arthur Augustus went—sadder, if not wiser. Mr. Lathom followed him out, his cheeks pink with wrath. The Head's cold dismissal did not please him. If Arthur Augustus had not been licked by the Head, he would certainly have been licked by Mr. Lathom—and just as severely, perhaps.

CHAPTER 14.

A Shock for Wally!

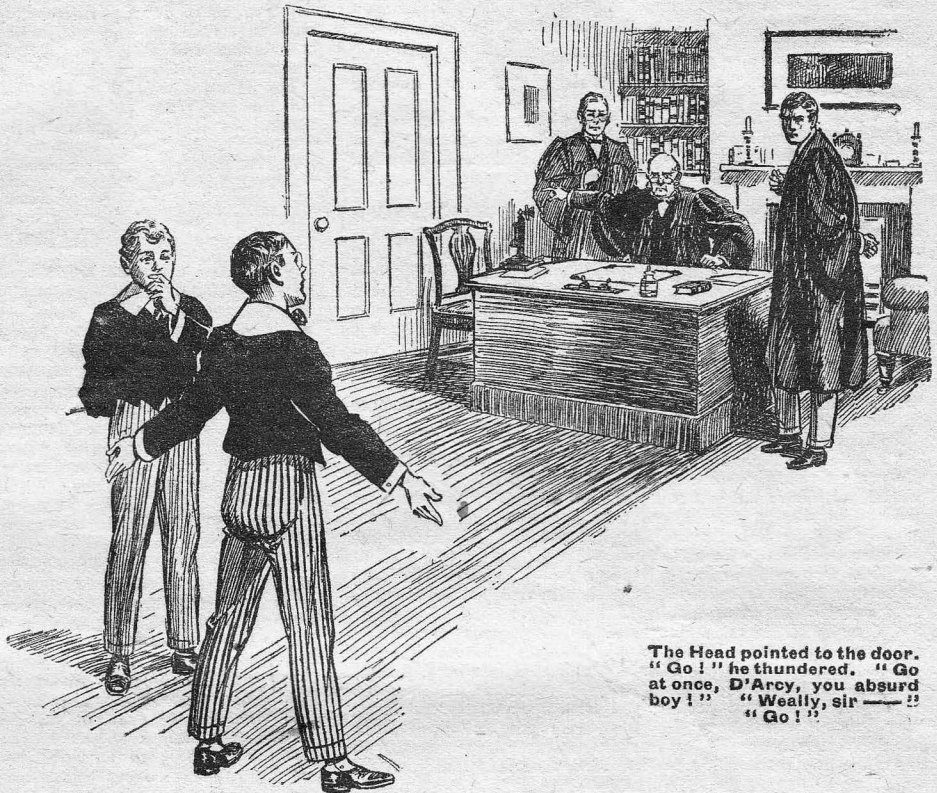
THERE was silence in the Head's study after Mr. Lathom and Arthur Augustus had gone. But Wally's grin had faded now. It was clear that Arthur Augustus' intervention—well-meaning as it was—had done more harm than good; it had exasperated Dr. Holmes.

But Wally, of course, was utterly bewildered by it. He knew nothing whatever regarding what had happened to Taggles in the night. He had supposed that the truth was

known concerning that queer attack on himself and Kildare. His chums' wonderful scheme had come to light—either that, or else the truth was suspected, and the Head wished to question him about it.

Wally had gone to the study not a bit troubled about it as regards himself. But he was worried on his chums' behalf. They had acted for the best—to save Pongo from being taken from him. They also, curiously enough, had thought of the idea of keeping Pongo in secret at Pepper's barn.

But now he realised that something else, something far more grave, and which concerned himself, was in the wind.



The Head pointed to the door. "Go!" he thundered. "Go at once, D'Arcy, you absurd boy!" "Weally, sir—!!" "Go!"

Evidently Arthur Augustus knew what it was, and had come to do his well-meaning best to save him.

From what? What was the matter now? Wally felt very curious indeed, and not a little apprehensive.

He soon knew!

"D'Arcy minor," said the Head at last, in his deep, impressive tones, "you know why I have sent for you?"

Wally hesitated a moment. He only wished he did know—before he answered.

"I—I— Nunno, sir!" he stammered. "I don't really know what you want me for!"

"Then I will explain," said the Head, with a glance at Mr. Railton. "Last night, Taggles, the school porter, heard a suspicious noise in his yard. He got up, believing it was someone interfering with his poultry. He saw someone in the act of climbing the wall, and he rushed to capture him. As he reached and grasped the person's foot, he was struck a wicked blow on the head with a stick, and the scoundrel escaped!"

Wally stared blankly at the Head. He was sorry to hear the news. But how did it concern him?

"It was a heavy blow!" resumed the Head, eyeing the fag steadily. "Taggles was half-stunned, and fell to the ground. But for Mrs. Taggles he might have lain out in the cold all night; the consequences of that might have been very serious indeed."

The Head paused again.

"Taggles states," he went on again in impressive tones, "that it was certainly not a man who struck him; it was either a youth or a boy. Though moonlight, it was not possible for him to see his assailant clearly."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Wally.

A dim inkling of what this meant was dawning upon the fag's mind now. Slowly the crimson mounted to his cheeks, and a strange fear took possession of him.

"I have sent for you, D'Arcy minor," went on the Head sternly, "because I wish to know if you know anything

about this attack upon the school porter. If you do, I strongly recommend, for your own sake, my boy, that you speak the truth to me here and now!"

It was out now; the fag knew at last what he had been sent for, what it all meant. Taggles had been attacked in the night—had been struck by a stick. And he was under suspicion of knowing something of the outrage.

The crimson went suddenly from his face, leaving it deadly pale.

"You—you ask me that, sir!" he panted. "You—you think I'm capable of striking an old man like that? It's a lie, sir!"

"D'Arcy, how dare you!"

"I don't care!" said Wally passionately. "I know nothing about it! Never even knew Taggles was hurt until you mentioned it now. I—I thought you'd sent for me about—about something else."

"Then you deny any knowledge of the outrage, D'Arcy?"

"Of course, sir!" stammered Wally. "I know nothing about it!"

"The outrage took place between eleven and twelve last night," said the Head, in grim, emotionless tones. "You were caught out of your dormitory, fully dressed, between eleven and twelve last night, D'Arcy."

"Oh!"

Wally had forgotten that; indeed, it had completely left his mind for the last hour. He had remembered it at once on waking, and it had worried him more than a little, naturally. But, strangely enough, it was the previous afternoon's affair that flashed into his mind when he had heard the Head wanted him. Wally could only think of Pongo and matters relating to Pongo that morning. It was such a serious matter in itself that he was amazed that it had escaped his mind even for an hour.

As he remembered it now fear came into his heart, and anger left him. Certainly the Head had reason to ask him in the circumstances.

But he said nothing, and the Head went on:

"That alone is a very serious matter, boy. But it assumes a very grave aspect in view of what happened to Taggles. Unfortunately, that is not all. Last night, D'Arcy minor, your dog was struck down, and I understand that you expressed your belief that Taggles, the school porter, was responsible for the blow."

"Yes, sir; and—and I believe so now!" said Wally passionately. "He vowed to deal with him because he thought Pongo had been after his fowls."

"Very well, boy. I will not go into your accusation concerning the dog's injury now. The fact remains that you had a motive in injuring Taggles, and that in Mr. Railton's hearing last evening you expressed your intention to be revenged upon him. Now you will understand, perhaps, why I have sent for you—it is to give you an opportunity of defending yourself against Taggles' charge that you were the boy responsible for the blow that laid him low last night."

"Taggles believes I did it?" stammered Wally.

"Yes. He is convinced that you were his assailant, D'Arcy minor. It is for you to prove that you did not—if you can, my boy. Why were you out of your dormitory between eleven and twelve last night? You refused to state your reason to Mr. Railton. I demand to know the truth from you now!"

The hapless fag trembled.

The Head's brow grew ominous as he waited while the clock solemnly ticked the seconds away. Still the fag did not speak, and the Head exchanged a grave glance with Mr. Railton, and spoke:

"You refuse to answer my question, then, D'Arcy?"

"I—I can't, sir!"

"You understand what construction will be placed on your silence—that you cannot answer because the charge is true?"

"I didn't touch Taggles, sir!" stammered Wally, his voice husky now. "I swear I never touched him!"

"Yet you will not say why you were out of bed last night! If you had a good reason for doing that—a most extraordinary and inconceivable thing to do on a cold winter's night, to my mind—then why do you not tell me, my boy? That point is the main evidence against you, even considering that you had a motive, and that you had vowed to be revenged upon Taggles."

Silence.

"D'Arcy minor, be sensible!" said Mr. Railton quietly, speaking at last. "By your silence you are making things very black against you."

"I—I know!" gasped Wally. "But I didn't do it, for all that."

"Then why do you not explain?" said the Head, with rising anger. "I am quite ready to believe that you did not intend to injure Taggles. Indeed, I cannot conceive a boy doing that. I am ready to believe that you went there to play some lawless trick at the lodge out of revenge, and

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that you struck blindly in the darkness in your frantic desire not to be caught."

No answer.

"You still deny it, boy?"

"Yes, sir; I do."

"Then I am afraid I cannot believe you in view of the evidence!" said the Head, after a long pause. "You have had ample opportunity to defend yourself, and you cannot do so—or will not do so. I am obliged to come to the only possible conclusion in the circumstances—that you are guilty."

"Oh, sir!" stammered Wally, trembling.

"Enough!" concluded Dr. Holmes, in a grave voice.

"You will be taken to the punishment-room to await my decision as to your punishment. I will discuss the matter with Mr. Railton, and will take into consideration the circumstances and your age. But I can hold out no hope that the punishment will be any but a severe one."

The Head motioned to Mr. Railton, and the Housemaster led the fag from the study and away to the punishment-room. As if in a dream Wally D'Arcy accompanied the master, scarcely realising even yet that expulsion was looming over him, that he was condemned for a crime he had never committed.

CHAPTER 15.

Tom Merry's Decision!

IT was not until morning school was over that the fellows heard the news, and it caused a sensation throughout St. Jim's. Having regard to the evidence, few doubted Wally D'Arcy's guilt. Like the authorities, they were ready enough to believe that Wally had acted on the impulse of the moment—that he had been caught by Taggles, up to some revengeful game, and that he had struck in frantic fear of being captured.

But Wally was popular with all, and the news caused general dismay. Both seniors and juniors could feel sympathy for the fag, distressed and embittered by the injury to his pet. Believing Taggles had done it, they could understand Wally's bitter rage and desire to get even with the old chap.

It was a rotten affair altogether. They hoped the unhappy fag was not booked for the sack, at all events.

Tom Merry heard the news with utter dismay and consternation.

He alone, of all the school, knew the truth—he alone could save Wally. And somehow he had to save him—there was no question about that for the junior skipper. His duty was to speak out.

But there was Joe Tuttle. Speaking out meant disaster for that wretched outcast. Was there no way to avoid that? Tom went straight out into the quadrangle on making sure the news was true, and started to pace under the leafless old elms as he thought his problem out. He knew that his chums realised something was amiss with him—that he knew something about the affair—something that he would not tell. They little dreamed of the truth.

It did not take Tom long to decide. There was one way out, and that was to get Joe Tuttle to confess—to come to St. Jim's and tell all and throw himself on the Head's mercy. It would clear Wally, and he felt sure Dr. Holmes would be merciful to the wretched ne'er-do-well. He himself would tell of the villager's reckless bravery—of how he had risked capture and his very life to save the fellow who was attempting to capture him. Dr. Holmes would surely take this into consideration, and would not prosecute the wretched Joe; though it was Taggles' place to do that!

There was the rub. The Head might be prevailed upon to be merciful. But Taggles was a stubborn old fellow, and it was questionable what he would do. Still, there seemed nothing else for it.

Having made up his mind, Tom left the school at once. He did not think about dinner, and he had a fairly good idea as to where he might find Joe Tuttle. The fellow had no regular job, but ran errands and did odd jobs for Mr. Jolliffe, of the Green Man Inn. He was usually to be found hanging about the riverside inn at most times of the day.

Knowing this, Tom took the footpath across the fields, came out on to the towing-path, and made for the Green Man.

He soon knew he had not had his journey for nothing.

Outside the inn garden, lounging against the garden gate, was the thin, slovenly figure of Joe Tuttle. He was smoking a cigarette, and his face looked pinched and cold.

He stared in alarm as Tom Merry ran up to him and stopped. Tom imagined he was about to bolt for it, and he caught the youth by the arm.

"Hold on!" he snapped. "I want a word with you, Joe Tuttle!"

(Continued on page 28.)

Thrills and Surprises in this week's instalment!

THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!

Whatever the cost
Ferguson & Co. are deter-
mined to expose their Form
master—the "Woolly
Lambe."

Treachery :

THE convict gave a deep sigh of relief as the warden disappeared over the hill.

Ferguson and his companions did the same, and with good reason. They were in an agony of apprehension during the interview, and it was well the warden had not taken much notice of them.

Now it was over, Kempe leaned against a tree, and looked as green as a Channel passenger.

"That's a bit of all right!" said the convict, with an emphatic nod. "This 'ere wig did it. If I'd 'ad cropped hair to show him, the clothes wouldn't ha' saved me. Lucky the light ain't very good in here."

"My Sam! I thought it was all up!" muttered Ferguson. "We'll get away back now. Come on, you chaps!"

"Alf a mo'!" said the convict. "Alf a mo', sonny! You ain't told me where I'm to find Methuen—Lambe, I mean—yet."

Ferguson hesitated. The arrival of the Longmoor official had upset him, and he felt more anxious to get away than anything else.

"Well, look here," he said hurriedly, "do you know the little grove at the back of the school—about three minutes' walk from the gates?"

"Yes, I've seen it."

"There's a path through it—a short cut leading to the village from the school. Nearly every night Lambe walks down it, about ten minutes to eight, to send off his letters by the last mail."

"Every night?"

"He hardly ever misses onc. Lambe writes a lot of letters, and always goes himself for exercise. There's plenty of bushes and shrubs near the path, where you can hide if you want to have a talk with him."

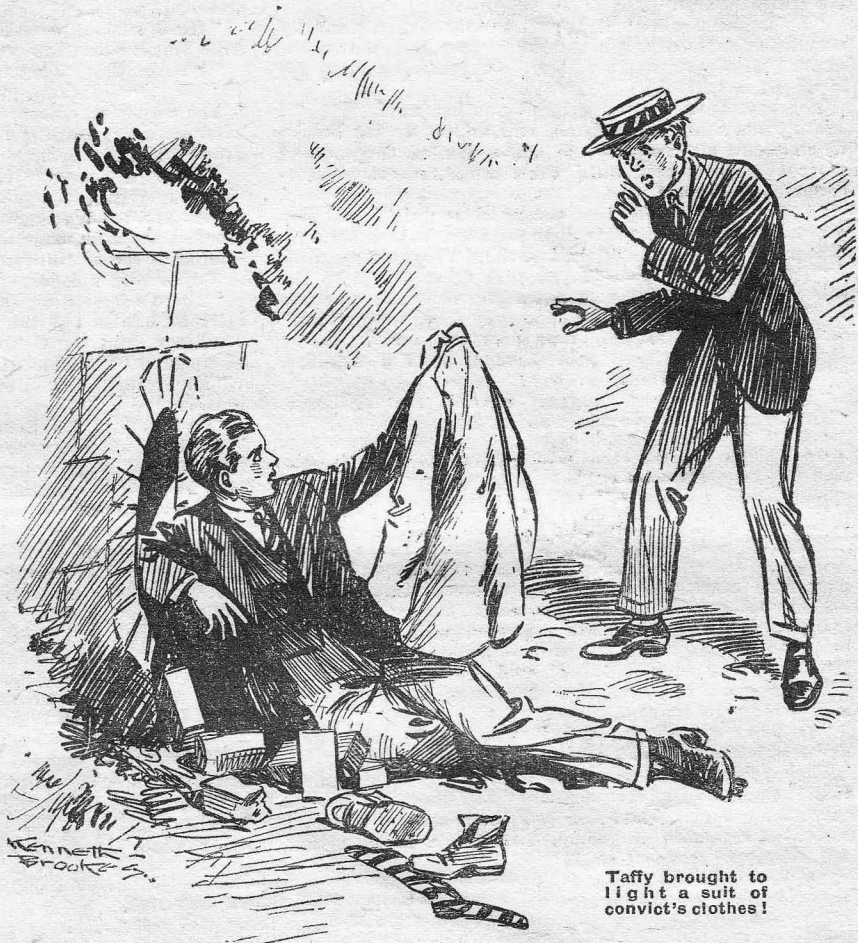
"Right!" said the man grimly. "I'll talk with 'im to-night."

"I say," said Kempe, in rather a quavering voice, "you haven't told us what your name is."

"The name as I gave the warden is good enough for you," said the man dryly. "John Chesham. Them gaol clothes o' mine has got to be made away with. It's no good leavin' 'em in the ditch, 'cause they'll very likely be found, an' then it'd be known for certain I was somewhere about 'ere. They'd ferret me out—see?"

The boys stared at him.

"I ain't takin' any risks. You must smuggle them



Taffy brought to light a suit of convict's clothes!

clothes home, and burn 'em. That's the best way. Get in a room by yourselves where there's a good fire, an' burn 'em up."

"No fear!" said Ferguson, with great earnestness. "You'll have to hide them yourself. We're not going to take them with us."

The convict fixed him with a malevolent eye. He had dropped the whining voice now, and used the tone of a man who knows himself to be master.

"You will," he said ominously, "for this reason, my young shavers. If I'm copped before I've met Lambe, I shall let the police know all you've been an' done, an' where I got these duds an' the false 'air. That'll mean at least six months apiece in the jug for you for aidin' and abettin' a dangerous criminal!"

At this change of front the three ornaments of the Remove fairly shivered. They looked at the speaker, and saw the menace in his eye.

"If you're going to give us away," muttered Ferguson, "after all we've done for you—"

"None o' that! You've got to see me through it. Once I've met up with Lambe," said the convict fiercely, "you're safe. I'll never say a word o' what you've done, on my oath, an' I'll put 'em off the scent o' you. I'll pitch 'em a yarn about how I stole the clothes. But if I get copped afore I've seen Lambe, then, as sure as death, I'll split on you! There'll be no gettin' out of it for yer. So make it your business to keep me goin' safe till I keep that there appointment."

The Remove trio looked at each other gloomily. They began to remember the proverbs about playing with edged tools.

"D'yer quite understand?" said the convict threateningly.

Ferguson shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he said gloomily, "I suppose so. We'll take the clothes away."

"Look sharp about it, then; an' at five o'clock to-morrow, if necessary, I shall expect you here with more grub. Mind yer, don't fail me, or you'll be sorry for it all yer lives!"

The boys turned away without another word.

Ferguson went to the ditch, and taking up the bundle of convict's clothes and the boots, stuffed them under his coat as best he could. Then the three conspirators departed in silence.

They got out of sight of the wood as quickly as they could, and when they were near the three ruined cottages that stood on the edge of the moorland Ferguson stopped.

"I'm blowed if I'm going to take these things to the school!" he said, flinging down the convict's uniform and the boots. "It's getting too jolly thick altogether!"

"Think what'd happen if we were fined with 'em by Lambe or somebody!" said Kempe, with a shudder. "What on earth should we say?"

"No, it's not good enough," agreed Kent-Williams. "That convict chap couldn't see us here, could he?"

"No."

"Stuff the beastly things up this drain-pipe, then!" said Kent-Williams, kicking away some bricks and rubbish from the mouth of an old culvert, long disused, that once drained the slope.

Ferguson lost no time. He crammed the accusing clothes up the culvert, and his chums tumbled the bricks back into place. Then, feeling relieved, they hurried back to call-over as fast as they could.

But the last part of their interview with the convict had made them all feel uncomfortable.

"I told you how it'd be," said Kempe mournfully. "The beggar's turned on us. Nice mess we shall be in if anything goes wrong!"

"It looks ugly," growled Ferguson. "I wish we'd never seen the fellow!"

They arrived at the school breathless, only just in time. One way and another, they felt they had done a good day's work. They also had the sensation of being seated on a powder magazine, with sparks flying about.

All through prep Kempe could see only one thing—the disguised convict lying hidden in his ditch on the moor, with goodness knows what dark schemes lurking in his brain.

The Discovery!

"THE case presents some peculiar features," said Jellicoe, in his primest voice.

"So it does, kid. You're quite right. But to go on keepin' a secret like this one day after day is enough to burst any fellow's gizzard. That sounds coarse, but it's a fact," answered Taffy.

He and the small champion of the Remove were strolling on the hill where they had once allowed themselves to be captured by Mr. Perkes.

They went out of their way to look at the shelter-pit, as they called it in times past—the hiding-place among the rocks.

"Hallo!" said Taffy. "Isn't that Ferguson and his lot down the valley?"

The Ferguson brigade were there, plain enough. The leader of the gang was carrying something on his back, and they seemed to be in a hurry.

"It seems to me the blessed country's overrun with Ferguson and his pals," said Taffy impatiently. "What on earth's the fellow doing?" he added, watching.

The two chums, from where they were, had a very good view of the valley, and the three adventurers, without much likelihood of being seen themselves. Ferguson's actions were so peculiar that they paused and watched.

"He is stuffing something into the old brick culvert," said Jellicoe. "How very odd!"

"P'raps they've murdered somebody, and are hiding the body," said Taffy, grinning.

The three wayfarers were seen to depart hurriedly, after looking carefully round them. Taffy watched them go, and a frown came over his face.

They went down to the place without more ado, and Taffy, seeing that a pile of bricks and rubble had been moved and replaced again at the entrance of the culvert, scooped them away. He looked up the pipe, and, being unable to see anything, knelt down, and put his arm in as far as it would go.

"There's something here," he said. And a few seconds later he hauled out the prison dress, forage cap, orange stockings, and the Government boots. The boys stared at them in astonishment.

"By gum!" exclaimed Taffy. "It's a convict's uniform!"

"So it is," said Jellicoe, with interest, "and I remember seeing in the paper this morning that a prisoner had escaped from Longmoor. But how did this come into Ferguson's possession?"

"That beats any Chinese puzzle I ever saw," said Taffy.

He stood looking at the clothes for some moments, and then jammed them into the pipe again.

"I vote we leave them where they are," he said. "We'd better have a consultation about this."

Wondering greatly what was in the wind, they sprinted back to the school. The delay had made them late for call-over, and the result was a hundred lines apiece. Neither of them worried about that, however. They forgathered with Dereker and Birne as soon as possible, and Taffy told the story of his find.

"What on earth can it mean?" said Dereker. "You say a convict's escaped, too! Can Ferguson have had anything to do with him?"

"It looks to me as if it must be something to do with Lambe," Taffy replied. "Remember, those three chaps don't know the truth about him yet. I vote we keep our eyes extra wide open."

Ferguson & Co., however, were singularly quiet that evening. They kept to themselves, and did not look particularly happy—in fact, very much the contrary.

"It's murder he means to do!" muttered Kempe to himself. "It was all a lie about his wanting to beat Lambe. He intends to way-lay him and kill him!"

Kempe went and shut himself up alone in the box-room, and tried to think the thing out. To be mixed up in a murder was too horrible to imagine, and he was convinced that it would be nothing less if things were allowed to go on.

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 Coodrington, determine to bring pressure to bear to rid the school of the new master. 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 startles the school by catching a cracksman in the act of looting the school's strong-room. Although Wynne & Co. are now ready to back up the Woolly Lambe, Ferguson and his cronies are still determined to expose him. Later, while Taffy Wynne and his chums, together with the headmaster of Coodrington and Mr. Wollaston Lambe, are dining at Roydon Hall, the home of Sir Harry Beckford, a governor of the school, Ferguson & Co. express an anonymous letter, warning the wealthy baronet that the Form master is a thief. Although Sir Harry ignores the incriminating missive, a robbery duly takes place at the Hall. Having seen two men acting suspiciously in a culvert under an old bridge, Taffy and his chums closely examine the spot and discover the hidden loot. Rushing to Roydon Hall with their "find," they learn to their astonishment, that the thieves have been captured by the Woolly Lambe, who proves to be none other than Mr. Slade Methuen, the greatest crime-investigator of the day. Meanwhile, Ferguson & Co. are discussing a further campaign in a near-by wood when they are confronted by an escaped convict, who has a grudge against the Form master. The three conspirators procure some make-up and a suit of old clothes. The man dons the suit just in time to deceive a warder who appears.

(Now read on.)

"I must stop it," he said to himself, "at any cost. It's no good talking to Fergy or Kent. They don't understand, or else they don't care. What fools we've been! But I'll end it now. I'd rather go to prison than go on like this. Shall I warn Lambe? No; I daren't do that! I—I couldn't face him!"

Kempe tried to collect his thoughts.

"I've got it!" he said, rising. "I'll let Wynne know! He'll find a way to dish it, and—and perhaps he'll be able to keep me out of it, if I make him promise. Ferguson'll curse me. But I don't care, I've had enough of this!"

He went straight upstairs after tea, and entered Study No. 12. All four of the chums were there, and they stared on seeing Kempe enter. There was a cold silence.

"Well," said Taffy curtly, "what do you want?"

"I want to speak to you, Wynne. I—I've got to tell you chaps something. I'm in ghastly trouble!"

He was deathly white, and for a moment swayed as if he were going to faint. Kempe's nerves had given way altogether, and he was a pitiable sight. Taffy came forward quickly, and made him sit down.

"Now, old chap," he said quietly, putting a hand on Kempe's shoulder, "what is it?"

Kempe almost broke down at the touch. But he pulled himself together, and, amid dead silence, the four chums listened intently as he told the whole story.

Taffy gave a long whistle.

"You've cut pretty close to the bone this time," he said grimly.

"I couldn't stand it!" groaned Kempe. "I had to tell somebody! Put it right somehow, and keep Ferguson and Kent-Williams out of it if you can. I don't want to sneak about them."

"There's only one thing to do," said Taffy, "and that's to let Lambe know. Nothing else is safe."

Dereker, Birne, and Jellicoe all agreed with one voice. Kempe said nothing.

"He must know it at once, too," said Taffy. "You chaps stay here, and I'll go and tell him. This has got outside sneaking altogether; we're playing with murder, or something like it. Wait where you are, Kempe.

Whatever you get you'll deserve, but I'll say as little about you as I can."

He went straight up to the Woolly Lambe's study, and knocked. He was admitted at once.

"Ah, Wynne!" said the Form master cheerily. "What news?"

"Do you know there's a convict escaped from Longmoor; sir?"

"Yes. Edward Jacques, the Hatton Garden diamond thief, who was convicted two years ago. The police asked me to help them in the case, and luckily I was able to trace the scoundrel. What about him?"

"He intends to murder you at about eight o'clock this evening, sir. He will be waiting for you in the grove behind the school."

The Woolly Lambe turned and looked at Taffy in utter astonishment.

"I've never known you tell a lie, Wynne, and I believe what you've told me. Very good. I shall act upon it. Capital youngster you are to have about the place. For the present, then, I'll make no inquiries, but deal with the case as I find it. Eight o'clock? I shall be there.

"Ten minutes to eight now," he remarked, glancing at the clock. "Hand me my hat, Wynne, will you? Thanks! I shall see you in twenty minutes' time, or less. Open the door, please."

The Woolly Lambe quietly went downstairs, and Taffy fled to Study No. 12, where he rapidly told his chums what had happened.

"I don't half like it," he said. "He's a wonderful chap in a scrap, no doubt; but suppose something happens to him? I vote we go and help."

"Give me a poker, and I'll come with you," said Kempe.

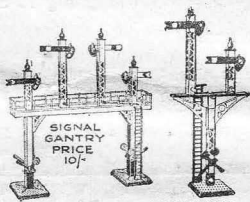
"You!"

"Yes. D'you think I daren't? I'm a funk in some ways, but not that kind of funk. And I told you about the business."

"Come on, then!" said Taffy. "You're better stuff than I reckoned on."

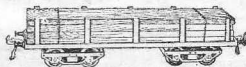
(For the concluding chapters of this grand serial see next week's GEM.)

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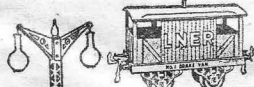


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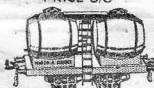
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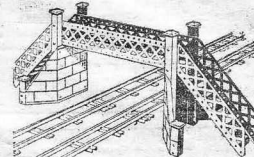
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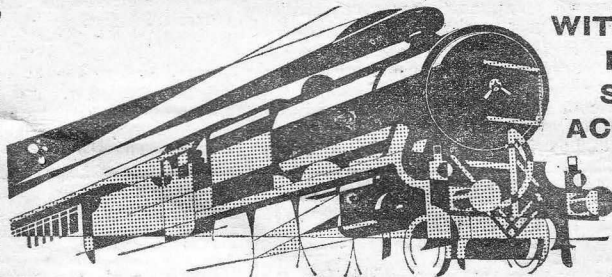
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ALL THROUGH PONGO!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Lemme go!" growled the youth, eyeing Tom in mingled alarm and rage. "What d'you want with me? I done nothin'!"

"You know what I want you about, I think!" said Tom. "I know you must have recognised me last night—just as I recognised you!"

"Lemme go, dang you!" hissed the youth. "I done nothin'—I took nothin'!" He changed his tone and looked at Tom almost pleadingly. "Look 'ere, you're not goin' to get me inter trouble about it?" he panted. "Old Crump's jest, it ain't to get his hands on me! He's got 'is knife inter me, and I took nothin' last night. That old bloke came out, and I 'ad to run for it—you knows that! I took nothin'!"

"You have done before this, I fancy," said Tom grimly. "But that doesn't concern me just now, Joe. You saved my life last night. I'm not likely to forget that! If anyone tells Crump anything it won't be me—if anyone gets you into trouble it won't be me."

"Oh!"

The outcast looked at Tom, and his expression changed.

"I ain't wantin' to make no fuss about what I did last night!" he said sullenly. "If it 'ad been me you'd have got me out—I know. I couldn't run off and leave you to it, could I?"

Tom could have laughed at the outcast's view of what he had done.

"You're too modest, old chap," he said. "You're so used to being kicked and treated like a dog that you don't know there's something more than slacking and pinching in you! I do, though, and I'm not likely to forget last night in a hurry!" He shuddered. "But never mind that now. I want you to come with me to St. Jim's, Joe!"

Joe Tuttle stared at him, his face darkening again.

"What for?" he almost gasped. "I ain't comin'—not me!"

"You know what happened last night—at the lodge, I mean. You struck old Taggles; whether you meant to hurt the old chap I don't know—I don't believe you did. But another fellow's got blamed for it. And if the truth doesn't come out—"

"What d'you mean?" panted Joe Tuttle, staring. "I—I didn't hurt that old bloke, did I? I swear I never meant to. He 'ad hold of me leg, and I 'it out to make 'im let go. I didn't know as I'd touched 'im—I lost my head, and don't know properly what happened—even now, sir."

"I believe that, Joe!" said Tom quietly. "And I'm sure the Head will believe it and make allowances, especially when I tell him how you saved me last night. Taggles may want to get old Crump on the job, but—"

"I—I swear I never meant to hurt the old chap," said Joe Tuttle, his face going whiter with alarm now. "I—I ain't comin'. You clear off and lemme alone! I ain't been in

prison yet, and if old Crump gets 'alf a chance he'll 'ave me there, I know. I ain't comin'!"

"Yes, you are—you must, Joe!" said Tom, grasping his arm earnestly. "I promise you—On!"

Tom Merry staggered backwards as the outcast's fist suddenly crashed in his face. The next moment Joe Tuttle was running for his very life along the towing path.

"Ow!" gasped Tom, his hand to his mouth. "Oh, my hat! The—the silly owl! Ow, ow!"

By the time Tom Merry had recovered himself Joe Tuttle's ragged figure had vanished along the towing path. And realising it was futile to think of following him, Tom turned dismally and hurried back to St. Jim's.

He had failed; his appeal to Joe Tuttle had failed utterly. He might have known that it would—that the wretched outcast would be afraid to come, afraid to face the august headmaster of St. Jim's after what he had done at the lodge. Tom could scarcely blame him, either; he bitterly blamed himself for going about his errand so crudely, bluntly. His statement that Taggles might want to bring P.-c. Crump on the job had been more than enough for Joe, who obviously held the podgy constable in something like terror.

Tom's face was grim as he trotted back along the frosty lane. But in his mind now was growing another plan—a resolution that was fixed by the time he had reached St. Jim's.

At all costs young Wally had to be saved. And he would never give Joe Tuttle away of his own accord. There was only one other way out of it that he could see.

Someone else would have to take the blame, and who better than himself! It would mean deception, possibly telling an untruth. Yet an untruth in such circumstances was surely justified?

Tom Merry had his doubts about that. He was a fellow who believed that two blacks would never make a white. Yet, in the circumstances, he was ready to do it—indeed, grimly determined to do it. He felt sure it would not mean expulsion—certainly nothing less than a flogging. Well, he could stand that—he would stand it rather than allow an innocent youngster to suffer; rather also than allow the wretched outcast who had saved his life at the risk of his own to be imprisoned, or even risk being imprisoned.

There was nothing else for it. He would go to the Head and claim to be the fellow who had struck Taggles. Why young Wally did not explain where he had been the night before Tom did not know or care. But the fag was innocent, and should not suffer for it. Neither should Joe Tuttle suffer though guilty! And with his mind resolved upon that Tom Merry hurried into the School House! Wally Bancroft had been falsely accused. Tom Merry was going to accuse himself falsely!

THE END.

(It's just like Tom Merry to shoulder another's blame, isn't it, chums? But where will it land 'im? You'll be surprised when you read the sequel to this gripping yarn which will appear in next week's GEM. Order it early!)

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