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ATTABOY! RIDE HIM, COWBOY! GUSSY'S THE STAR OF THE CIRCUS—

GUSSY'S STAR TURN!

By
MARTIN
CLIFFORD



The clever horsemanship of the swell of St. Jim's "brings the house down" at Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus. But the appearance of the sour-tempered Mr. Ratcliff on the trail of a truant junior, makes the "house" rise up—in wrath!

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy is Trodden Upon!

"I AM thinkin' of takin' you fellows to a circus," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's made that observation with a thoughtful expression upon his aristocratic face.

He made it to half a dozen juniors of St. Jim's, who were standing in a group outside the School House, chatting.

There were Blake and Digby and Herries of the Fourth, D'Arcy's own special chums, who had the honour and advantage of sharing Study No. 6 with him. There were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three—of the Shell Form. They were talking cricket as Arthur Augustus came up and made his remark.

The six juniors all left off talking, and stared at Arthur Augustus in a way that would have disconcerted anybody but the swell of St. Jim's.

But D'Arcy simply put up his eyeglass and returned their scrutiny.

"It's a wippin' aftahnoon aftah the storm," he remarked. "The woads are wathah wet for cyclin', but we can take a twain to Wayland. I'm goin' to take you chaps."

As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the very youngest of

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the party, there was a certain amount of coolness in the way he put it. But that was D'Arcy's way.

"I twust," he went on, "that you will not try to give me a lot of twouble. It's goin' to be a wippin' aftahnoon, as I remarked, and if you chaps will keep out of mischief, we shall have a jolly good time ovah there."

Still the juniors did not speak. They only stared fixedly at the swell of the School House.

"I suppose you'd like to come," said Arthur Augustus. "You all enjoyed the circus when it was here at the school, and we agreed that we would pay it a visit while it was stayin' at Wayland. I'm quite willin' to take you."

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther. "The best thing I can think of, under the circs, is to bump him."

"Jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry heartily.

Arthur Augustus retreated in alarm.

"Pway don't play the giddy ox!" he exclaimed. "I am goin' to give you a tweek by takin' you to the circus. Now—"

"Bump him!" said Manners.

The three Shell fellows advanced upon Arthur Augustus, who retreated towards the School House steps, eyeing them warily.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked on. The swell of the School House looked at them through his eyeglass.

—IN THIS SPARKLING COMPLETE YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.!

"I twust, Blake, that you are not goin' to join in a silly wag!" he exclaimed. "Keep off, you silly asses! Wescue, deah boys!"

Jack Blake shook his head. "I'm not interfering in this," he remarked. "I'm merely a looker-on. I think you need bumping." He glanced at his chums. "What do you think, Digby?"

"I think he needs bumping," said Digby solemnly. "What do you think, Herries?"

"I think he needs bumping," said Herries. "Collar him!"

Arthur Augustus backed quickly away. He did not intervene, in his haste, that he was backing towards the steps of the School House. He discovered it, however, when his heels clicked on the lowest step, and he sat down suddenly, with a bump that brought a gasp from him.

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you uttah asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus sat on the lowest step, still gasping. The concussion of the cold stone had considerably jarred him. A youth in big spectacles—whose spectacles did not seem to assist his vision much—came out of the School House and descended the steps.

"Look out, Skimmy!" shouted Tom Merry. But Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, was buried in thought—thinking out plans for new aeroplanes, or schemes of social amelioration—those being the favourite subjects of Skimpole of the Shell.

He walked right on—on D'Arcy. He gave a sort of gasp as he trod on D'Arcy's back instead of the lowest step, and pitched forward.

"Oh—oh dear!"

He fell round D'Arcy's neck from behind, clutching him frantically and yelling, rolling with him off the steps into a puddle left by the storm.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a fearful yell. His silk hat crumpled up like cardboard under Skimpole's weight, and his fancy waistcoat was flattened out against the ground, and his nose was driven into the muddy puddle.

Skimpole sprawled over him in a state of great astonishment. "Dear me!" ejaculated Skimpole. "This is most surprising! I must have trodden on something!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Get off!"

"Who is that speaking?"

"Ow! Get off!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, adjusting his spectacles. "I am resting upon D'Arcy! This is most remarkable!"

"Ow!"

"I trust you are not hurt, D'Arcy?"

"Yow! Gewwoff!"

"Certainly!"

Skimpole rolled off and rose to his feet, and Jack Blake gave a hand to his unfortunate chum.

Arthur Augustus was a shocking sight. His face and his collar and his waistcoat were dripping with mud, and the knees of his trousers were caked. His silk topper lay on the ground—a mere wreck!

And the unsympathetic juniors roared. It was certainly very funny—to all except Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Even Skimpole smiled. "Dear me," he said, "this is—this is ludicrous! Really, D'Arcy, I should have imagined you to have too much sense to play tricks like this."

"Twicks!" roared D'Arcy.

"Yes. It is a dangerous trick to sit on a step to trip people up," said Skimpole severely. "I might have broken my spectacles, or even my neck."

"You uttah ass—"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"I wasn't playin' a twick, you feahful duffah! I was sittin' there—"

"A most dangerous place to sit—"

"I fell down there!" shrieked D'Arcy. "It was all through those wottahs! Now my clothes are simply wuined! I shall have to change before I go to the circus."

Skimpole pricked up his ears. "The circus! You are going to Tomsonio's Circus?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I will come with you. I intended to visit the circus, but have unfortunately run out of money," said Skimpole, blinking at the grinning juniors through his big spectacles. "If, however, I go with you, you can pay for my admission."

"You uttah ass!"

"Really, D'Arcy, I cannot but regard that as almost rude. I—"

"I'm goin' to change my beastlay clothes, you fellows. If you are weady in half an hour, I'll take you to the circus."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went into the School House.

CHAPTER 2. Detained!

TOM MERRY chuckled at the swell of St. Jim's disappeared.

"Accidents will happen—especially to Cussy's toppers," he remarked. "All the same, it's a good idea to go to the circus this afternoon. We told young Talbot that we should visit the circus once more."

"Good!" said Jack Blake. "There's nothing else to do, unless we rake up a row with the New House."

"It's a long time since we had a House row," remarked Digby—"days, I think."

"Then the question is—shall we rag Figgins & Co. and the New House bounders, or go to the circus?" said Manners.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows over that important problem. School House and New House were always ready for a row, and, as Digby remarked, it was a curious thing that there had not been a House row for days. It seemed to show that the times were out of joint, so to speak.

"Toss up for it," suggested Monty Lowther.

"That's not a bad idea."

"Hallo, kids!" exclaimed a sturdy junior, coming out of the School House. "I'm going over to Wayland to see the circus. Coming?"

It was Harry Noble of the Shell, more familiarly known as Kangaroo.

"We're just thinking it out, Kangy," said Tom Merry. "You're not going alone? Where are Dane and Glyn?"

The Cornstalk laughed.

"Oh, Glyn's making an experiment in electricity, and won't come out, and Dane is looking after one of his blessed pets that's got the measles!"

"Measles!"

"Well, measles or mange or mumps or something," said Kangaroo cheerfully. "I'm not particular. Something, anyway. Are you chaps going to the circus?"

"Either that, or a row with Figgins & Co.," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We were going to toss up for it."

"Why not both?" said Kangaroo. "A House row first to liven us up, and then a run over to the circus."

"Jolly good wheeze! That will fill up the time while we're waiting for Gussy," said Blake cordially. "We'll go over to the New House and call on the bounders. I think old Ratty's out—"

Blake caught an agonised expression upon Kangaroo's face, and stopped. He turned his head in the direction Kangaroo was looking.

"Oh, my only hat!" he murmured. "Ratty!"

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House—referred

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—EDITOR.

disrespectfully to as Ratty—was glaring at Blake in silent wrath. Mr. Ratcliff had a very silent tread, and he frequently turned up like this in unexpected places.

"Blake!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Were you referring to me?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Answer my question, Blake!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Now if I were your Housemaster, Blake, I should cane you most severely for using such a disrespectful expression. As it is, my only resource is to report you to your own Housemaster."

Blake looked dismayed. There was no love lost between the two Housemasters at St. Jim's; but Mr. Railton of the School House was certain to visit any disrespect with a heavy hand. Blake had not really meant to be disrespectful; but Mr. Ratcliff was unpopular in the school, and never spoken of affectionately. Besides, as Blake thought—how was he to know that Ratty was creeping about like a cat just then?

"Oh, sir, I'm sorry!" said Blake.

"Quite possible," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a sneer. "Wrongdoers are generally sorry when they are found out. Come with me!"

Blake exchanged a hopeless glance with his chums. Mr. Ratcliff strode off with rustling gown and wrathful face towards the School House. Blake followed. He had no choice about the matter. But he was feeling very annoyed.

"Beast!" murmured Tom Merry. "He oughtn't to take notice of anything heard by accident like that. And he oughtn't to creep about like a cat. Beast!"

"Rotter!" said Manners.

Monty Lowther burst into a chuckle.

"My hat! Look at Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were answering chuckles from other parts of the quad. Jack Blake was following Mr. Ratcliff, as he had been bidden; but he was doing it his own way.

Mr. Ratcliff stalked ahead, with his peculiar jerky steps, and his nose high in the air. Blake had thrown back his head, elevating his nose and chin in absurd imitation of Mr. Ratcliff, and was walking along with jerky strides in exactly the same manner.

The New House master had not the faintest suspicion that Blake was mimicking him, but everybody else in the quadrangle could see it, and they roared.

Mr. Ratcliff was somewhat surprised to find his progress towards the School House attended by loud laughter, but he did not at first connect it with himself.

He marched up the steps, and Blake marched after him, still in the same manner, and a yell of merriment followed them into the School House.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Tom Merry wiped his eyes. "Ho, ho, ho!"

The roars of laughter in the quad drew Mr. Railton to his window. The School House master looked out, just in time to see Blake ascending the steps after Mr. Ratcliff, mimicking the New House master in the most ridiculous manner.

Mr. Railton could not help smiling.

"The young rascal!" he murmured, his smiles soon changing to a frown. "This certainly will not do. But, really, I wish Mr. Ratcliff would not take so much trouble to make himself unpopular."

Mr. Ratcliff strode into the House with rustling gown, and a fresh outbreak of laughter greeted him as Blake strode in after him.

Then some suspicion dawned upon the New House master's mind, and he turned quickly round and looked at Blake.

Blake tried to get back into normal manners and customs at once, but he was not quick enough; Mr. Ratcliff saw it all.

His sallow face went a dark crimson with rage.

"Blake, this insolence! Follow me!" he said, in a choking voice.

He knocked at the door of Mr. Railton's study, and entered.

Blake followed him in.

Mr. Railton looked at them with a slightly worried expression.

"Mr. Ratcliff, what can I—"

"This boy has been most disrespectful," said Mr. Ratcliff, with a wave of his thin hand. "He has insulted me."

"Surely not."

"He has referred to me in my hearing by a most disrespectful term."

"Blake!"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Blake meekly. "I didn't know that Mr. Ratcliff was creeping—ahem!—I mean, walking just behind me."

Mr. Railton coughed.

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"But you should never refer to a master by a disrespectful expression, Blake. You know that that is very wrong."

"That is not all, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff chokingly. "He has dared to mimic me, sir, in the most ridiculous manner in following me here."

"It was only fun, sir," said Blake repentantly.

"Fun, indeed—fun! If you were in my House, boy, I would flog you!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Yes, flog you soundly!"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton. "Blake certainly should be punished, but—"

"Oh, I do not expect you to use proper severity!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a sneer. "But I hope that you will, at least, detain Blake for the afternoon."

Jack Blake's face fell.

He badly wanted to go to the circus that afternoon, and he knew that Mr. Ratcliff knew it, and had chosen this means of punishment as the most likely to be painful.

"Very well," said Mr. Railton quietly. "That is adequate, I think. Blake, you are detained within the House for the afternoon."

"If you, please, sir—"

"Not a word! You may go!"

Jack Blake left the room.

"You are satisfied, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Oh, certainly!" said the New House master.

And he followed Blake out of the study, with a grim, sour smile upon his face. He left the House, leaving Blake standing looking gloomily out of the doorway into the sunny quad.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came downstairs a little later, resplendent in a fresh topper and a brilliant waistcoat. He tapped Blake on the shoulder with a delicately gloved hand.

"Weady, deah boy?"

"No!" grunted Blake.

"But you're coming?"

"Can't!"

"Why not?"

"Detained for the afternoon."

"Bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Ratcliff in a Rage!

F IGGINS of the New House came across the quad with his hands in his pockets, whistling cheerily.

Figgins was looking for the chums of the School House, and he expected to find them in the quad somewhere; but they were not in sight.

Mellish of the Fourth was eating toffee under the trees, and Figgins spoke to him as he passed.

"Seen Tom Merry?"

"Yes, he's indoors," said Mellish, with a grin.

Figgins looked at him.

"What are you sniggering at?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"You worm!" said Figgins, who knew that Mellish was never amused unless something unpleasant had happened to somebody. "Is anything the matter with Tom Merry?"

"Oh, no; not Tom Merry!"

"Who else, then?"

"Oh, Blake's detained, that's all!"

"Poor old Jacky—on an afternoon like this, too!" said Figgins, with much feeling. "It's hard cheese! What's he been doing?"

"Cheeking your Housemaster."

"Old Ratty! What a rotten thing to be detained for! And I wanted him to come to the circus," said Figgins regretfully.

"Oh, you going over to the circus?"

"Yes, at Wayland."

"I'll come with you, if you like."

Figgins gave the cad of the Fourth a look of disdain.

"I jolly well don't like!" he said. "You won't come with me! I believe it was you played that cowardly trick with the fireworks in Blake's study when the circus was here, and nearly injured Miss Clotilde."

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see why you should put it down to me," he said sullenly.

"Well, I don't see who else could have been cad enough," said Figgins frankly. "I'm not sure, of course. If I were sure you did it, I should wipe up the ground with you now."

Mellish hastily backed away. Figgins went on towards the School House. He found the chums of the Shell and the Fourth in the entrance, all of them looking decidedly glum.

They all gazed at Figgins.

"Blessed if here isn't a New House rotter!" said Dig wrathfully. "Let's roll him out, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"



As Gussy was receiving his tea, the humorous Mr. Pye drew forth a mouse from the sugar-basin. The waitress gave a start of fright and the teacup overturned in the saucer, the contents shooting into the lap of D'Arcy. "Ow! Oh!" yelled Gussy.

"Bump him!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Figgins hastily. "Pax, my sons! I've come over to see if you chaps will make up a party for the circus."

"Blake's detained," said Tom Merry. "We were going, but your beastly Ratty complained about him, and he's booked to stay in."

"Rough, I know," said Figgins. "But I suppose you're not all staying in with him? Blake really ought to have had more sense than to stir up Ratty, you know."

"But how was I to know that he was creeping about behind me like a blessed cat?" growled Blake. "And how was I to guess that he would turn round and look at me just when I was mimicking him? Ratty doesn't play the game!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter!" grunted Blake. "I'm detained. Of course, I don't want you fellows to stay in. I'll do some carpentry in my study."

"Weally, deah boy, if you will excuse us, we had bettah go to the circus," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Oh, I'll excuse you with pleasure, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why not cut and run?" asked Figgins boldly. "You could sneak out without being noticed, you know, and once outside it would be all serene. Railton isn't likely to look in your study to see if you're there. He's not like Ratty—always spying about."

"Bai Jove! That's out, Blake, deah boy. Cut and wun!" Blake thought it out.

"Well, I haven't said I'd stay in," he remarked reflectively. "If I choose to run the risk of being spotted, that's my bisnay, isn't it? Railton can't complain—so long as he gives me a licking. That's his business."

"Exactly, deah boy!"

"Then I think I'll jolly well hook it," said Blake

"Bwavo!"

"Shove your cap on, and walk out in the middle of the crowd, and you won't be noticed," said Figgins. "Wait a bit till Ratty's got his eye off you, of course. I'll meet you at the gates, then, with Kerr and Wynn, in a quarter of an hour."

"Right-ho!"

And Figgins walked back to his own House. Kerr and Fatty Wynn, his chums in the Fourth, were waiting for him at the door of the New House. There was a very thoughtful expression upon Wynn's plump face.

"Well?" said Kerr.

"They're going," said Figgins cheerily. "We're to meet them at the gate. What are you making that face about, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn started.

"I—I was thinking that we shall get hungry before we get home, Figgy. Hadn't we better cut across to the tuckshop, and have a bit of a feed before we start?"

"You porpoise! It isn't an hour since dinner."

"Well, I didn't have much dinner," said Fatty Wynn plaintively. "Only three helpings of beef, some bacon and sausages, and a couple of helpings of plum duff, and the mince pies and pudding. I haven't had anything since, either, except a few tarts at the tuckshop. You know, it's always a good idea to lay a solid foundation before starting out anywhere."

"Rats!" said Figgins. "By the way, have you seen Ratty?"

"He's just come in," said Kerr. "He was grinning, so I suppose he has been making trouble for somebody."

"It's Blake. Ratty's complained of him, and he's detained."

"Just like Ratty!"

"Yes. Blessed if I know why they should spring a Housemaster like that upon nice fellows like us!" said

Figgins discontentedly. "It's rough. But come in and get yourselves ready."

They went into the house. Mr. Ratcliff's study door was open, and he called to the juniors as they passed.

Unwillingly enough Figgins & Co. entered the Housemaster's study.

Mr. Ratcliff looked them over keenly with his gimlet eyes. "You are going out, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir."

"To the circus at Wayland, perhaps?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, I want you to do me a little service, Figgins!"

"With pleasure, sir."

"Blake of the Fourth Form is detained for the afternoon," said Mr. Ratcliff. "He has been guilty of the greatest insolence towards me, your Housemaster. You are not, I believe, on good terms with Blake?"

Figgins' lip curled a little. He certainly had plenty of rows with Blake and the other fellows in the School House, but there was nothing like ill-feeling between them. Mr. Ratcliff was on quite the wrong scent.

"Well, we have rows sometimes, sir," said Figgins.

"Ah, yes! Now, Figgins, I have a suspicion that Blake will attempt to escape his detention this afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it would be difficult, or rather, impossible for me to keep any kind of surveillance upon him in the School House, and I am sure that Mr. Railton will not give a thought to the matter at all. Now I particularly want to know if Blake breaks bounds. If he does so he will certainly go to the circus. I want you to report to me when you return if you see Blake there."

Figgins stood petrified for a moment.

He could hardly believe that the Housemaster was really asking him to play the part of a spy and a sneak.

But when it fully dawned on his mind, his eyes blazed, and his cheeks flushed crimson.

"You want me to spy and tell tales?" said Figgins, between his teeth.

The Housemaster started.

"Figgins!"

"I'll be cut in pieces first!" said Figgins recklessly. "You can lick me if you like, but you won't catch me tale-bearing!"

Mr. Ratcliff clenched his hands convulsively. He did not understand boy nature much, and he understood a fellow like Figgins least of all. Mellish of the Fourth would have accepted the commission with avidity; Figgins would have died first. But Mr. Ratcliff never could understand that all boys were not cast in the same mould.

"Figgins, how dare you? I—I will flog you! I—"

"You can flog me if you like!" said Figgins recklessly.

"You jolly well won't make me sneak, though."

"You—you insolent cub! Take that?"

And Mr. Ratcliff struck out furiously, and Figgins reeled back from a violent blow.

CHAPTER 4.

Off to the Circus!

FIGGINS uttered a cry, more of surprise than pain.

It was unheard of at St. Jim's for a master to strike a pupil in so ruffianly a way, and the junior had not expected that even of Ratty.

Mr. Ratcliff, the moment the blow was struck, seemed to realise that he had gone too far. He drew back, breathing hard, with a flush in his cheeks.

"Go!" he said hoarsely. "Leave my study!"

Figgins stood looking at him. There were hot words on Figgins' tongue—words that would have got him into trouble if they had been uttered.

But Kerr and Wynn dragged their chum towards the door.

"Hold on!" muttered Figgins. "Hold on a minute—"

"Come away, Figgy!"

"I'm going to tell him—"

"You're going to tell him nothing!" said Kerr, dragging his chum from the study.

"But—"

"Oh, come on, Figgy!"

"Shut that door!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

None of the three heeded him. They went down the passage. The Housemaster did not call after them. He closed the door himself.

Figgins' ear was burning, and his eyes were glinting. He came to a stop at last at the foot of the stairs, out of hearing of the Housemaster's study. His chums allowed him to halt there.

"What do you think of the rotter?" said Figgins.

"Beastly!" said Kerr. "But I think he was sorry as soon

as he had biffed your napper. It was going pretty strong, even for Ratty."

"We're not supposed to stand that sort of thing," said Figgins. "It would serve him right if I complained to the Head. Only a chap can't sneak."

"I believe he's half afraid you're going to!" chuckled Kerr.

"It would get him into a row with Dr. Holmes," observed Wynn. "The Head wouldn't allow it if he knew. But Ratty forgot himself; and, as a matter of fact, Figgy, you did put it to him rather straight, you know."

"Well, the cad," said Figgins hotly, "fancy asking a chap to sneak for him."

"It was the limit, and no mistake!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "I've a jolly good mind now to go back and tell him what I think of him."

"That you jolly well won't!" said Kerr, getting hold of his chum's arm again. "You're coming with us! Come and get yourself ready."

And Figgins was dragged off. He was cooling down, however, and he soon realised that it would not be exactly prudent to go and tell a Housemaster what he thought of him. But he was still simmering with wrath, and his ear was still very red, when the chums left the New House to go to the circus.

The School House fellows were waiting outside the gates of St. Jim's.

Jack Blake, screened by his chums, had managed to get out of the quad without being noticed.

"Hallo, here's Figgins!" said Tom Merry. "Let's get off before Ratty starts nosing round. Anything wrong, Figgy?"

"Yes; Ratty!"

And Figgins related the enormities of Ratty as the party tramped down the muddy lane towards Rylcombe.

The indignation of the juniors at the unspeakable conduct of Ratty was very great; but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took it the most seriously of all.

"He actually stuwck you, Figgins," he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"I wegard it as an outwage," said D'Arcy—"the most feahful outwage I have evah heard of since the days when it was open to a gentleman to defend his honah with his own wight arm!"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake gravely. "And my idea is that Figgins should send him a challenge. Mr. Ratcliff has disgraced his profession and dishonoured the country he was born in, and there is nothing for it but to call him out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suggest that after the circus Gussy shall call upon Mr. Ratcliff as Figgins' friend, and make the necessary arrangements."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should wegard it is an honah to act for Figgins," said D'Arcy. "I considah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, so you are wottin', you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And D'Arcy walked away with his nose very high in the air.

The juniors lost no time in getting to Rylcombe, where they caught the local train to Wayland.

Blake heaved a sigh of relief as the train steamed out of the station.

"Can't be a row now until after the circus," he remarked. "I don't mind doing five hundred lines, if it comes to that. You fellows can all help."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I think there will be a good many St. Jim's fellows over there," remarked Kangaroo. "I saw several of our fellows on the platform. Gore was among them."

"If Gore is on the twain, deah boys, I considah that it would be only the pwopah thing to ask him to join our party."

Some of the juniors looked doubtful.

Gore of the Shell had always been a most unpleasant character, and Tom Merry & Co. had been on the worst of terms with him. Of late he had turned over a new leaf; but the juniors did not feel exactly like chumming with him. But Tom Merry nodded approval of D'Arcy's suggestion.

"Right-ho!" he said. "We'll look out for him."

"Did you put those sandwiches in your pocket?" said Wynn, pulling out a bundle that seemed large enough to stock a railway bar with. "Any of you fellows hungry?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Good! There will be nearly enough for me here, if you chaps don't want any. But, mind, share round if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha! Go ahead, Fatty, and we'll watch you!" And they watched him with great interest as they might have watched the lions feed at the Zoo. As Lowther said, he had paid money in his time for a less interesting sight.

But Fatty Wynn did not mind. He demolished the sandwiches to the last crumb before the train steamed into Wayland Station.

The juniors streamed out of the train. Gore was in the next carriage. He stepped out and made for the exit of the platform.

Tom Merry quickened his steps and tapped him on the shoulder, and Gore looked round in surprise.

"Coming with us?" asked Tom cheerily.

Gore flushed red.

"Do you want me?"

"Well, I haven't asked you because I don't want you," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Thank you, Merry! I'd like to be with somebody."

"Good! Come along!"

Mellish of the Fourth had stepped out of the train. He stood regarding the chums of St. Jim's with a very unpleasant expression. He dropped into stride with Tom Merry, walking beside the hero of the Shell.

Tom glanced at him in surprise.

"I'm stony," said Mellish. "Will you stand me a circus ticket, Merry? I'll let you have the money back some time."

Tom Merry felt in his pockets.

"There you are!" he said, handing a shilling to Mellish.

The cad of the Fourth slipped it into his waistcoat pocket.

Tom strode on.

Mellish kept pace with him.

"Look here, Mellish," said the junior skipper abruptly. "just buzz off, will you? You're not a friend of mine, and I don't want your company."

Mellish's eyes glittered.

"Is that the Merry brand of politeness?" he asked, with a sneer.

"It's the Merry brand of plain English," said Tom warmly. "You played a cowardly trick on my old governess in the School House the other day. You're a worm! I never see you without wanting to punch your head! Buzz off!"

"Good!" said Blake. "Buzz off, and consider yourself lucky you're not bumped for your cheek in jawing to decent chaps."

"Oh, so you're here, Blake! I thought you were detained."

"That's not your business, my son."

"You don't want me with you?"

"No."

"Oh, very well!"

Mellish strolled away to an automatic sweet-machine, and

stood fumbling with it till the juniors of St. Jim's were clear of the station. Then he crossed the line and waited on the other side.

In five minutes the local train for Rylcombe came buzzing in, and Mellish boarded it. It was a curious proceeding. He had just come from Rylcombe, and now he was going back without having left Wayland Station.

But Mellish had his own reasons for that curious proceeding.

CHAPTER 5.

Joey, the Clown!

TOM MERRY & CO. came out of Wayland Station into the quaint old High Street of the market town, a cheery group of juniors.

It was not a difficult task for them to find where the circus was. Every wall in Wayland seemed to be smothered with huge blue-and-red posters, announcing that Signor Tomsonio's Circus was there, and giving details of the wonderful performance to be witnessed for the small sum of a shilling.

There were Jungle Jack, the King of the Tigers, and Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, and Carson, the King of the Trapeze, and Joey Pye, the King of Komic Komedians, as the bills had it—a whole family of kings and queens, as Lowther remarked.

The juniors had seen the circus at St. Jim's, but they were eager to see it once more, especially the turns given by the fellows whose acquaintance they had made. Talbot and Clotilde had had a study tea at St. Jim's with the School House chums, and, of course, that enhanced the interest of the performance in the boys' eyes.

"Hallo! The performance isn't till six o'clock," Manners remarked, as he ran his eye down one of the posters.

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Eh? How is it good, duffer, for us to have to wait two hours?" demanded Manners warmly.

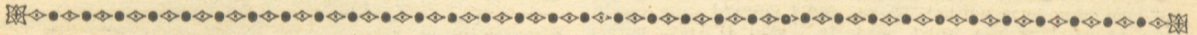
"I was thinking that there would be time for us to get some tea."

"My only hat!" said Manners. "He wants tea already! Where are those sandwiches?"

"I've eaten them."

"Don't they make any difference to you?"

"Well, a little, I suppose. Still, I'm hungry. You see, the performance lasts two solid hours, and it's no good trying to sit out that length of time without laying a solid foundation. I put it to you."



HOW TO COMPLETE YOUR PIONEER AERO-CAR.

The first job to finish making your aero-car is to fix the wheels. Cleanly pierce the four holes in the running-board of the chassis, pass the two axles through, the longer one at the rear, and securely glue the wheels on to the ends, seeing that they revolve without wobbling. If the axles are inclined to "pull" in the holes, rub the holes and the axles with lead pencil, which

is a very fine lubricant and doesn't saturate the cardboard like oil.

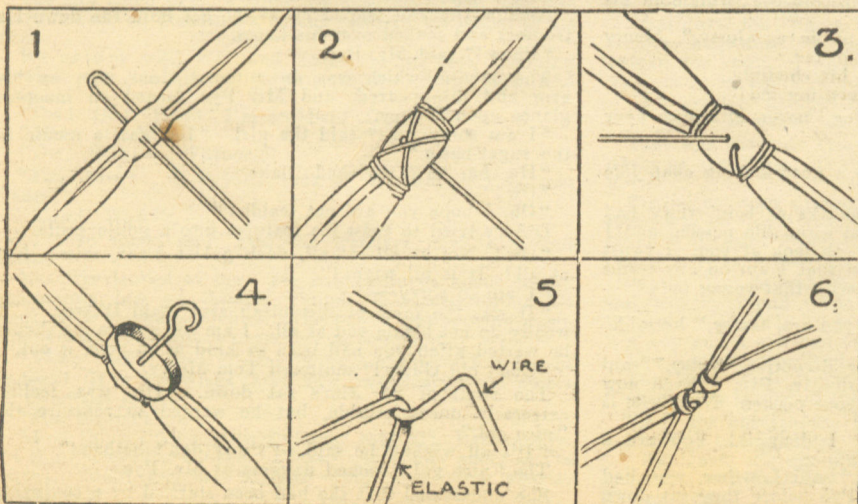
Finally, to complete the work on the coach, use the gumstrip, if necessary, to strengthen any joints where you may not have glued securely, such as at the junction of the chassis and the coach at the rear end, and also where you have fixed the cone which is to hold the engine-cap.

FITTING THE ENGINE.

To assemble the driving mechanism, first take the propeller and wire on to it, as shown in Figs. 1 to 3, a four-inch length of the wire. Pass the wire through the metal engine-cap and form a small crook on the inside on which to fix the elastic. (See Fig. 4.) Next make a small wire elastic holder of the shape shown in Fig. 5, which is to be used at the radiator end to hold the knotted elastic, and which is fixed through the hole pierced in front of the radiator.

Now knot the elastic as shown in Fig. 6, and using as a sort of threading needle all that remains of the wire, pass the elastic through the coach until you can fix the completed motor-cap, with propeller, on to the cone at the rear. Bend the propeller-blades, in opposite directions, to an angle of about 45 degrees, and your aero-car is completed.

For the trial run, wind the elastic to about one hundred turns. If the aero-car runs backwards, remember to wind the other way. If it goes slowly, then see that the wheels are revolving freely.



"As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I could do with something myself in the way of a cup of tea," said Arthur Augustus, "as we have to fill up the time owing to Tom Mewy's miscalculations."

"Eh—what's that?"

"You have brought us here a couple of hours earliah than there was any necessity for, deah boy."

"Well, I like that!" said Tom Merry. "I understood that you were taking us to the circus, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! Upon the whole I cannot wegard it as a miscalculation. It will enable us to have a stwoll wound and see the intwestin' sights of this extremely ancient Sussex town."

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy is like the King in the British Constitution—he can do no wrong."

"As a mattah of fact, deah boys, you will find that I am genewally wight. You can, as a wule, depend upon me to tell you the weally pwopah thing to do."

"Well, let's have a look for the teashop."

"Well, my only bath-bun!" exclaimed a voice suddenly, as a little, plump man halted in the street and stared at the juniors. "Is it—can it be—or do my aged eyes deceive me?"

"Bai Jove, it's that chap Pye!"

Joey Pye, the clown of Tomsonio's Circus, grinned at the juniors, and carefully raised the bowler hat he was wearing on the side of his head. Mr. Pye was, of course, not in his professional garb now. He took his walks abroad in a check suit loud enough to be heard in the next street, as Lowther remarked, sotto voce.

"It's my young friends from St. Jim's," said Mr. Pye. "It does my eyes good to see you again."

"Jolly glad to see you," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've come over to see the circus, and we find it doesn't start till six."

"Nothing like punctuality," declared Mr. Pye, with a shake of the head. "As the poet truly remarks, punctuality is the thief of time."

"Bai Jove, I thought it was pwocwastination."

"Well, I knew it was something beginning with P," said Mr. Pye cheerfully. "I'm not particular. Were you looking for an establishment where it is possible to quench the thirst caused by a gentle stroll? If so, I should be happy to accompany you, as I also am of a thirsty nature."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway come with us, deah boy! I know a nice teashop where there is a wemarkably nice gal who serves the tea."

"Good old Gussy! Is her name Ethel?" asked Blake.

"Her name is not Ethel, Blake, and I wegard your question as bein' in the worst of taste," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "Pway come this way!"

And D'Arcy led the way. Mr. Pye chatted cheerily with the juniors as they followed Arthur Augustus.

They crowded into the teashop. It was very nearly empty. The nice girl to whom Arthur Augustus had alluded came forward to take their orders, and Arthur Augustus raised his topper to her as if she had been a princess.

The waitress, with a smile, took their orders—Fatty Wynn's taking some time—and left them.

D'Arcy drew off his gloves, with a thoughtful expression upon his face. Mr. Pye had seated himself near the swell of St. Jim's, and there was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"It's a bit risky bringing us here, Gussy," Monty Lowther remarked.

Arthur Augustus came out of a brown study.

"Whisky, Lowthah! I fail to compwehend!"

"Well, you know the old saying, never introduce your lady friend to a pal."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You see, it's a temptation to a good-looking chap like me to cut you out, you know."

"Lowthah, I wegard your wemarks as bein' vewy bad form. That young lady is a most estimable person, and I am quite sure that she would nevah look at you. I twust you do not suppose for a moment that I am on any terms but that of distant acquaintance with that young lady."

Lowther shook his head sadly.

"Well, we know what a terror you are, Gussy," he said.

"You uttah ass—"

"I am afraid you are rather deceptive, Gussy," said Lowther, exchanging a wink with Mr. Pye. "Even now you have an engagement-ring in your pocket. Now, who is it for?"

"I have nothin' of the sort! I deny it! You are a wottah!"

"Turn out your pockets, then," said Lowther, who had exchanged a whisper with Mr. Pye before they sat down at the table. "You won't venture—"

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"Bai Jove, there's nothin' in my pockets anybody couldn't see. You ass—"

"Excuse me, then," said Mr. Pye.

He inserted finger and thumb into D'Arcy's waistcoat pocket, and drew out a ring and laid it on the table.

The juniors laughed, and D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and stared at the ring in blank amazement.

"Bai Jove, you know! It's a wing!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Who is it for, Gussy?"

"Weally, deah boys, I am in a state of gweat amazement. I haven't the faintest ideah how that wing came into my pocket."

"Too thin, Gussy!"

"Tell us her name!"

"What letter does it begin with?"

"D'Arcy turned his eyeglass indignantly from one grinning face to another.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Excuse me!" said Mr. Pye.

His fingers slipped into another of D'Arcy's pockets, and reappeared with a little missive tied with pink ribbon.

The juniors shrieked more at the sight of D'Arcy's face reappeared with a little missive tied with pink ribbon.

"Bai Jove!"

The explanation of the amazing things taken from his pockets suddenly dawned upon D'Arcy's mind. He remembered the wonderful conjuring abilities of the original Mr. Pye, and he turned a wrathful eye upon the clown.

"You—you feahful wottah! You have been plantin' things on me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Pye chuckled, and put the note and the ring in his pocket. He seemed to be always provided with a variety of articles for his little jokes.

Arthur Augustus sat with an expression of unbending dignity upon his face until the waitress arrived with the tea. Then, of course, he relapsed, as it was impossible for him to look annoyed in the presence of one of the gentle sex.

CHAPTER 6.

A Roland for an Oliver!

THE "nice gal," whose arrival had banished the frown from D'Arcy's brow, seemed to pay the swell of St. Jim's some extra attention.

Perhaps she was a little impressed by the manners of the St. Jim's Vere de Vere.

D'Arcy was as polite as a Chesterfield and a Grandison rolled into one, and as respectful as if he had been speaking to a princess. The waitress poured out D'Arcy's tea and handed it to him. But as it happened the result was unfortunate.

Mr. Pye at the same moment inserted his fingers into the sugar-basin—and drew forth a mouse, with an expression of perfect gravity on his face.

The waitress looked at the strange sight with starting eyes, and gave a jump—and the teacup overturned in the saucer, and the contents shot into D'Arcy's lap.

"Ow! Oh!"

Arthur Augustus leaped up as the hot fluid ran down his trousers and soaked over his knees.

"Phew!" said Mr. Pye.

The mouse, which was an automatic one, ran up his arm and disappeared, and Mr. Pye turned an innocent glance upon D'Arcy.

"I am sorry, sir!" said the girl. "I—I saw a mouse in the sugar-basin."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake.

"Ow!"

"Oh, I hope you are not scalded!"

D'Arcy tried to twist his features into a polite smile.

"Ow! Not at all—at all, deah gal—I mean, miss! Not at all! It is all wight!"

"I am so sorry—"

"It was the fault of this uttah ass!" said D'Arcy. "I weally do not blame you at all. I am sowwy the tea should be wasted aftah you had been so kind as to pour it out."

"Good old Gussy!" muttered Tom Merry.

The swell of St. Jim's sat down. He was feeling extremely uncomfortable, but he wanted to reassure the "nice gal."

"It's all wight," he said. "Pway don't bothah!"

The "nice gal" looked daggers at Mr. Pye.

She understood that she had been startled by a conjuring trick now, and she was far from being amused by it, as the juniors were.



"Out you go!" said the circus attendant. "No drunken men allowed in 'ere!" Mr. Ratcliff could not help going, for the man grasped him by the seat of his trousers and his coat collar and sent him flying through the opening!

"I think I will take coffee," remarked Mr. Pye. "I can smoke a cigarette with it. Miss, that coffee is for me."

"Yes, sir!"

And Mr. Pye received his coffee—not as he expected it. The cup tilted over, whether by accident or not, and the mirth-maker of Tomsonio's Circus received his coffee in his neck.

He gave a wild yell, and leaped to his feet, bumping against the table, and making the crockery rock and ring.

"Ow! Oh! Yow! I'm scalded! Ow!"

"Here, steady on!"

"Ow! Roo— Yaroo!"

"Bai Jove! I weward that as poetical justice, you know!"

"Yow! Wow!"

"I'm so sorry, sir!" said the waitress, with a wicked smile.

Mr. Pye looked at her. He seemed to be about to say something, but he checked himself. He mopped at his neck with his handkerchief. The coffee was flowing down his person, and he was drenched on the chest.

"Vewy wuff!" said D'Arcy, with a smile. "Vewy wuff indeed! It is a cுவious thing how pwactical jokahs object to pwactical jokes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I think I'll be getting along," said Mr. Pye meekly. "I think I need a change. I'll see you young gents at the circus. You'll find the original Joey Pye going strong. Good-bye!"

"Au revoir, old chap!"

"Never be humorous with a woman," murmured Mr. Pye sadly. "They haven't any sense of humour—especially where a mouse is involved."

And Mr. Pye took his departure, leaving the chums of St. Jim's chuckling.

"Bai Jove, that was a Woland for an Oliver!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I get wathah fed-up with conjuwin' twicks, you know, I wondah whethah that coffee goin' oval was weally an accident, you know?"

"I wondah?" grinned Blake.

"Pass the saveloys," said Fatty Wynn.

That was the only remark Fatty had made since he sat down at the table. The Falstaff of the New House was busy.

Provisions were disappearing at an alarming rate, and there was no doubt that if the fat Fourth-Former did not spend a pleasant evening, it would not be for the want of laying a solid foundation.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, who had finished his tea, and was looking round while waiting for Fatty Wynn to get through. "Hallo! Look there!"

A boy and a girl had entered the teashop.

The juniors recognised them at a glance.

They were Jack Talbot—Jungle Jack of the Circus—and Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring.

They did not see the juniors at first; but Tom Merry jumped up immediately.

"Bai Jove, it's our old fwends!" said D'Arcy. "Pway come this way, deah boy! How do you do? Pway sit down at our table."

Clotilde and Talbot greeted the juniors with unaffected pleasure. Jack Talbot, though he was following a perilous and arduous calling, was no older than the juniors, and he was as boyish as they were when he was not in the ring.

He sat down with Clotilde at the same table as the juniors, and D'Arcy took tea again for the sake of sociability.

"We were having a stroll round Wayland," said Talbot. "It's a quaint old place. There's a ruined castle outside the town, too. Clotilde and I have been over it. But I suppose you know the place well?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes. We often picnic there," he said.

They chatted cheerily till Jack Talbot looked at his watch, and Clotilde rose. Tom Merry rose, too.

"Time for us to be getting back," said Talbot. "The show begins early."

"We're over here to see the show," said Tom Merry. "We're filling up time here—and Fatty is filling up himself, too."

"I've nearly finished," said Fatty Wynn.

"You've quite finished!" retorted Figgins, jerking his fat chum from the table. "Leave some of the crumbs for Lazarus."

"You're coming to the circus, you fellows?" said Talbot. "Walk down with us, then; it isn't far from here, and you'll be early for the seats."

"Good egg!"

And Arthur Augustus having settled one bill, and Talbot the other, the party left the teashop, and walked down to the moor, on the edge of which the circus encampment was pitched.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Ratcliff on the Track!

MR. RATCLIFF looked out of his study window, in the New House at St. Jim's, with a frown upon his brow.

Mr. Ratcliff was feeling very much out of humour just now.

He had never liked the chums of Study No. 6. There had been many rubs between them; but as he was not their Housemaster, Mr. Ratcliff had never been able to treat them as he would have wished.

He was very glad, therefore, to have caught Jack Blake in a fault, and to have detained him for the afternoon; but the fact that Blake was detained in the School House worried him.

For if Blake chose to break bounds, it was impossible for Mr. Ratcliff to discover it without taking up his stand in the School House to watch—which was, of course, impossible.

Blake might walk across the quad openly, with a crowd of other fellows round him, or he might cut off through the Head's garden, or leave St. Jim's by the tradesmen's gate; there were half a dozen ways of getting out without the slightest chance of its becoming known to the master of the New House.

Mr. Railton had detained Blake, and would punish him if he found that he had broken bounds, but he would never dream of watching to see if he did so.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced out into the quad.

He was spitefully determined that Blake should not enjoy that half-holiday. Yet how to make sure that the junior remained in the School House was a puzzle. As a matter of fact, Blake might already have gone out, for all he knew.

The New House master finally left his study, put on his hat, and went out into the quadrangle.

"If you, please, sir—"

The New House master stopped as he was spoken to. He peered down and recognised Mellish of the Fourth of the School House.

"Mellish, what is it?"

Mellish hesitated. He had been trying to make up his mind for some time past to enter the New House, and speak to Mr. Ratcliff. But he dared not do it. Fellows there might see him going to Mr. Ratcliff's study, and it would come to the ears of Figgins & Co., and thence to Blake.

But the sight of Mr. Ratcliff pacing alone in the quadrangle relieved Mellish of his fears of detection. Still, he hesitated a little.

"Well," said Mr. Ratcliff sharply, "do you want to speak to me?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Speak, then, and don't waste any time!"

"It's—it's about Blake, sir," said Mellish, in a whining voice.

Mr. Ratcliff started.

"Blake?"

"Yes, sir. I hope you won't think I'm doing wrong in mentioning it to you, sir?" said Mellish. "I am speaking from a sense of duty."

"I am quite prepared to believe that," said Mr. Ratcliff. "What do you wish to tell me? Has Blake broken bounds?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he? Have you seen him?"

"He's at the circus in Wayland, sir."

"Oh, you are sure?"

"I saw him there, sir."

"Thank you, Mellish! You are a good and dutiful boy," said Mr. Ratcliff, who would have regarded anybody as good and dutiful who had helped him to wreak his dislike upon Blake of the Fourth. "I shall look into this."

"But—but you won't let anybody know who told you, sir?" faltered Mellish.

"You may be assured upon that point."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Mellish walked away, quite satisfied with his revenge upon the chums of the School House.

Mr. Ratcliff walked towards the School House, and then paused and hesitated.

It was useless going to Mr. Railton. Suppose he should inform him that Blake was gone, and a search should result in finding that Blake was not gone? Mellish might be mistaken. It might even be a jape, designed to make him look ridiculous in the School House master's eyes.

It was not likely; but it was possible. Mr. Ratcliff felt that he must be very careful.

He turned his steps towards the gates of St. Jim's.

"I will visit the circus," he murmured. "If the boy is



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there I shall discover him, and catch him in the very act. Then—"

Mr. Rateliff did not finish that sentence, but there was a very disagreeable expression upon his face, and a glint in his eyes that boded no good to the truant junior. He left the school, and walked quickly down the lane in the direction of the village. Half an hour later the train was bearing him from Rylcombe to the old town of Wayland, where Tom Merry & Co. were enjoying themselves in utter unconsciousness of the approach of Nemesis.

CHAPTER 8.

An Accident at the Circus!

"SEEMS very restless to-night, sir."

It was the groom who spoke as Jack Talbot came to mount Demon. Miss Clotilde was sitting her black Arab, ready to ride into the ring, and Demon had just been led out for Jack Talbot.

Talbot was clad in the garb of a Wild West cowboy—fringed leggings thrust into huge boots, leather belt supporting a revolver and a knife; loose shirt and sombrero; and very handsome he looked in cowboy attire.

It was a new act that the two riders were to perform, and one that never failed, since it had been started, to bring rounds of applause.

Miss Clotilde was clad to represent a girl of the Texas plains, and a dozen of the circus hands were painted and feathered as Commancho Indians. Jack Talbot was the handsome cowboy who dashed to the rescue, and carried Miss Clotilde off upon his horse, while the Indians shot arrows into the air, or banged away with blank cartridges.

It made a thrilling scene, and then after the mock fight Jack and Clotilde gave a splendid display of horsemanship, with the Indians taking a minor part in the display.

Clotilde could not help smiling as she looked at Jack. Few would have recognised the handsome young tiger trainer.

For Signor Tomsonio was not taking the public into his confidence on the matter. Jungle Jack, the Tiger-Tamer, was one person, and Cowboy Dick, the Dashing Horseman, was another. And as Cowboy Dick, Talbot had his cheeks stained to a very good imitation of sunburn, and had a moustache fastened to his upper lip.

He looked thirty, at least, and made a handsome cowboy.

The lad looked at Demon as the groom led him out, ready saddled and bridled. The horse was certainly very restive.

The groom showed a considerable dread of his hoofs and teeth, and the horse was dragging at the bit as he was led out.

Talbot looked at him a little anxiously.

Demon seemed to be getting back all his old temper again, and he refused to quieten even at Jack's caressing voice and touch.

"Is anything wrong with him, Jack?" said Clotilde.

"He seems all out of sorts."

"Mind, sir; he's savage."

"That's all right. I'll take him round for a few minutes, and get him into a better temper before we go into the ring. We've ten minutes yet, Clotilde."

The girl nodded, and Jack vaulted lightly into the saddle. Demon gave a quiver, and a sudden bound.

If Jack had not been on his guard he would have been unseated at once. But he sat fast, with an iron grip on the reins.

Demon's hoofs clattered on the ground as he sprang to and fro in frantic efforts to unseat his rider.

Jack was more and more amazed.

"What can be the matter with him?" exclaimed Clotilde anxiously. "Oh, mind— Look out, Jack!"

Herr Biberach, the Tiger-Tamer, was coming towards them, and his unsteady steps showed that he was in his usual state of being the worse for liquor. He was crossing the direct path of the furious horse.

Jack dragged hard on the reins to stop Demon in time, and the horse whirled round in his own length, with a wild clatter of hoofs, and then, stumbling, fell.

Jack Talbot went heavily to the earth.

Demon clattered furiously to his feet, and the groom sprang forward and caught the reins, and dragged him away in time. Talbot lay where he had fallen.

Demon, still clattering and rearing, was dragged into the stable, where his furious movements could still be heard.

Clotilde, in the twinkling of an eye, was off her black Arab, and kneeling beside Talbot with a white face.

"Jack—Jack! You are hurt!"

Talbot strove to rise.

"It's—it's all right!" he gasped. "I'm not hurt; only my leg! Oh!"

Clotilde cried for help, but already the circus folk

(Continued on page 12.)



Do you know a good rib-tickler? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4. (Comp.). A half-a-crown will be yours if the joke is published in this column.

THE FAMILY TIE.

Fred: "Dad, what's a family tie?"

Dad: "Mine. Every time I want it one of you boys is wearing it!"

R. Hennel, Ashleigh Farm, Braunstone, Leicester.

OLD IRON!

Owner of Car: "Well, and how do you like the car?"

Purchaser (perhaps!): "Why, everything makes a noise except the horn!"

V. Howe, 67, Buxton Road, New Mills, via Stockport, Derbyshire.

BANKS AND BRAES.

Sandy: "Why is a Scotsman like a donkey?"

Mac: "Because he stands on the banks and braes!"

A. Voermanek, 17, Pembridge Square, Bayswater, London, W.2.

DEFINITE.

Brown: "Robinson is retiring from business for five years."

Smith: "I've heard that before."

Brown: "Yes; but the judge said it this time!"

J. Smith, 15, Hulse Avenue, Romford, Essex.

HE SAID IT!

Office-boy: "P-p-please, sir, c-c-can I—I—"

Boss: "Hurry up—don't take half a day."

Office-boy: "B-b-but, sir, that's j-j-just what I want to t-t-take!"

J. Whaley, Hotel Strathcona, Lancaster Gate, London, W.2.

UNDOUBTEDLY.

Traveller: "Are you quite sure the manager is not in?"

Office-boy: "Do you doubt his word, sir?"

R. Johnson, 62, Elder Road, Cobridge, S.O.T.

A READY RETORT.

Thin Man (to fat man in bus): "The fare ought to be charged according to the size of the passenger."

Fat Man: "No bus would stop to pick you up!"

R. Pym, 5, Montpelier Road, Exmouth, Devon.

SOME GOLFER!

First Golfer: "Well, how many this morning?"

Second Golfer (a novice): "Oh, seventy-five."

First Golfer: "That's very good for a beginner."

Second Golfer: "Ye-es; I hope to do the second hole to-morrow!"

J. Dudley, 39, St. Mary's Road, Bearwood, Smethwick.

WORK-SHY.

Lady of House: "Have you ever been offered work?"

Tramp: "Only once, ma'am. Apart from that, I've met with nothing but kindness!"

J. Kilcullen, 153b, High Street, Sutton, Surrey.

GUSSY'S STAR TURN!

(Continued from page 11.)

who were not busy in the ring were gathering on the scene. Samson, the Strong Man, was the first upon the spot.

"Where are you hurt, lad?" he asked quietly.

Jack sat up, leaning upon Clotilde. His face was white, but he bore the pain he was suffering with quiet calmness.

"I think the ankle's hurt."

"I'll soon see."

Samson bared the ankle; it was already swollen, and Jack winced as the strong man touched it with a gentle finger.

"Did that hurt?"

"Oh, yes! Never mind! Go on!"

Samson felt over the ankle, while Jack set his teeth hard.

"It's a sprain," said Samson, at last. "You can't ride again to-night, Jack—not for two or three days, I should say."

"Oh!"

"Nonsense—nonsense! What?" exclaimed an excited voice, as Signor Tomsonio came bustling up. The signor was in silk hat and fancy waistcoat, with a whip in his hand, fresh from the ring. The news of the accident had brought him out. "What—what—not ride to-night? Why, the cowboy turn comes off in ten minutes!"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Talbot quietly. "There was something wrong with Demon."

"But—but we can't cut the turn!" exclaimed the signor aghast. "To-morrow, yes, we can paste slips over the bills announcing that it's off for the present; but we can't cut it to-night."

"I'm sorry."

"But they'll wreck the show!" shouted the signor excitedly. "I tell you they've come to see the cowboy act more than anything else! We simply can't cut it! It will mean giving the money back to the audience—if they'll take it. They're more likely to pull the tent down about our ears."

"I'll try to ride," said Jack. "I may be able to get through part of the show. I'll do my best."

"You can't!" said Clotilde quickly.

"You shan't!" said Samson. "You're not going to have a bad leg to please anybody. You shan't ride to-night!"

"But—"

"The public!" exclaimed the signor. "What about the public? What?"

"Blow the public!" said the Strong Man.

Clotilde placed a soft hand on the signor's arm.

"Signor, Jack is hurt."

The signor softened down at once, as he always did when Clotilde spoke to him.

"Well, of course, I'm sorry for Talbot," he said. "But I'm thinking of my show. The public have paid for that cowboy act."

"Couldn't somebody else go through with it?"

"Who else?" said the signor, with a hopeless gesture.

"We only introduced it because Talbot was such a fine rider, and Demon suited him so well. Nobody else here can ride Demon, especially if he's in a bad temper to-night."

Jack Talbot uttered an exclamation.

"There is someone else!"

"Whom?"

"The lad at St. Jim's, who the other day tamed Demon!" exclaimed Talbot excitedly. "He could do it if he chose!"

The signor started.

"By George! I believe he could; but what's the good of talking? He's miles away at school."

"He's here—in front."

"Here?" exclaimed Signor Tomsonio.

"Yes, I met him in Wayland, and he's in the tent now with his friends."

The signor stroked his moustache.

"By James! It's a good idea! He can ride—like anything, and he might lend us a hand at a time like this."

"I am sure he would if you asked him."

"Then I'll do it, Samson, you know the young gentleman? Go and look for him in front, and ask him to come here."

"Right-ho, sir!"

And the Strong Man hurried off.

"I'm sorry you're like this, Jacky," said Signor Tomsonio, a little late, perhaps. "I can't help thinking of the show first, you know. The public must be satisfied. What? As for that tiger turn, Herr Biberach will have to put up a show. Some of you look for him, and douse his head in a pail of cold water, and see that he doesn't get anything more to drink. You'd better get into your van, Jack. Here, lend a hand to carry him in."

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy to the Rescue!

TOM MERRY & CO. had noticed the disappearance of Signor Tomsonio from the ring, and they guessed that it portended something amiss. But Joey Pye was keeping the people in a roar with his quips and wheezes, and they did not notice for the moment that the time had come for the cowboy act, according to programme.

"That chap is weally a funny beggah, and no mistake," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Upon the whole, I forgive him for his beastly conjuwin' twicks. Weally, I wish the person who is tappin' me on the shouldah fwom behind would leave off. It weally incommodes me considewably."

But the person continued to tap, and Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the person with indignant inquiry.

It was Samson.

"Bai Jove! What do you want, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

"The guv'nor would like to speak to you, sir."

"Vewy well, deah boy. Tell him to come here."

Samson grinned.

"He wants you to come behind the scenes, sir."

"Oh, I see! Vewy good! I will come with pleasuah. Anythin' wong?"

"Yes, sir. This way," said Samson.

"Perhaps I had better come with you," said Blake thoughtfully. "I don't like to trust you out of my sight, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Any objection to my coming along, Mr. Samson?"

"None in the world, sir."

"Then, I'll come."

And Blake accompanied D'Arcy as he made his way through the crowded seats, and out of the tent. The swell of St. Jim's was puzzled and perplexed.

Potts, the Office Boy!



"I haven't the faintest ideah what the signor can want, Blake," he remarked.
 Blake chuckled.
 "I can guess."
 "What is it?"

"You're to go on and do a funny turn. The part will suit you. You could appear in the ring as the Funniest Thing on Earth. You wouldn't have to make up for the part."
 "Weally, Blake—"

"Seriously, I fancy there's something wrong with Demon, and they want you," said Blake. "I can't see anything else they could possibly want you for. You're not what's generally considered a useful animal, are you?"

"Weally—"
 "Anyway, I'll back you up," said Blake. "You can rely on me, and I like going behind the scenes, too."

The two juniors followed the Strong Man to the canvas stable behind the tent, where, in the light of a dozen lanterns they found the signor.

The stout circus master came towards D'Arcy at once. He raised his silk hat, and D'Arcy immediately responded by sweeping off his topper.

"Glad to see you, Master D'Arcy," said Signor Tomsonio. "You may remember riding a horse when the circus was at the school?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "I'm going to ask a big favour of you. Jack Talbot has had an accident—Demon's thrown him!"

"Bai Jove! I'm sowwy!"
 "It's most unlucky," said the signor. "He's in bed now with a damaged ankle. Would you care to take his place in the show?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 The signor gave a sigh of relief.
 "Good! And thanks!"

"I should be vevy pleased to do so," said Arthur Augustus, his eyes dancing. "Bai Jove! I should enjoy it more than anythin' else. It would be wippin'!"

"As for the riding," said the signor, "I know you could do it. The act is a pretty simple one, and you've seen it done. You'll have to dress in cowboy clothes, and fire off blank cartridges, and put in as much buck-jumping as you can—what?"

"I'll do my best, sir."
 "Then come into Talbot's van and change into his things. No time to be lost. Pye will have to keep the audience amused till you're ready. I shan't forget this."

"It is a pleasuah to me, my deah sir."
 And Arthur Augustus and Blake followed the signor into Talbot's van.

Talbot was lying on his bed, and his face was very pale. He nodded to the juniors with a rather ghastly smile. They could see that he was in pain, though he bore it well. He had taken off the cowboy garb.

"The lad's going to take the job on, Jacky," said the signor.
 "It's jolly good of him," said Talbot. "He'll pull it off, all right."

"Not at all, deah boy. I say, I'm awfully sowwy to see you like this," said D'Arcy, with real concern. "I suppose it hurt you a gweat deal?"

"Not so very much. You must be careful with Demon. I don't know what's the matter with him, but there is something wrong. I can't quite make out what it is. I should think it was foul play of some sort, but it doesn't seem possible."

"Bai Jove! I'll be careful."

Arthur Augustus stripped off his natty attire in Talbot's van, and donned the cowboy garb. His figure was a little slimmer and a little taller than Talbot's; but a close fit was not required. The clothes fitted him fairly well, and he looked very handsome in the sombrero, though it certainly looked a little odd with the eyeglass.

"You'll have to take that window-pane off," said Blake, who was helping his chum to dress. "Cowboys don't wear monocles, as a rule."

"Bai Jove! No!"

"I'll mind it for you."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Thank you, deah boy, but I nevah twust my monocle out of my own hands. I suppose there is a pocket of some sort in this shirt. Yaas, I perceive there is. I suppose I shall have to have my face stained?"

"Of course, feathad! You can't go about with a chivvy like that under a cowboy hat."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'll find all the stuff there," said Talbot.

"Thank you, deah boy!"

Signor Tomsonio returned to the ring, satisfied that D'Arcy would be effectually disguised under Talbot's directions. The artificial sunburn changed Arthur Augustus' appearance considerably, and the moustache finished it. Then, with his eyebrows darkened, he looked like anybody but the swell of St. Jim's.

He gave a little jump as he looked into the glass.
 "Gweat Scott! Is that weally I?"

Talbot laughed.

"It's a change, and no mistake!"

"Some blessed bargees have all the luck," said Blake, with a grunt. "I wish I had the chance of going on, that's all!"

Talbot glanced up.

"Can you ride?" he asked.

"Oh, heaps better than Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, hold on!" said Blake, laughing. "To be exact, my riding isn't a patch on Gussy's; but I can ride. I've ridden over some of the steepest tracks in Yorkshire. My dear chap, I was brought up on horses."

"Then you can go on as an extra Indian, if you like," said Talbot.

"My hat! The signor—"

"He would be glad. You see, we make all the show we can in this turn, and every fellow who can ride is bundled on as an Indian on some sort of a horse or other," said Talbot, with a smile. "If you can ride well, the signor would be glad to put you on instead of one of the stable hands. Some of them fall off the horses."

"Jolly good!"

"Here's the signor. I'll tell him."

The signor looked in with an anxious face.

"Nearly ready? Joey and Puggles are amusing the audience, but they're beginning to stamp and yell for the cowboy act."

"Almost weady, deah sir."

Jack Talbot explained to the signor the idea of Blake going on as an extra Indian, and the signor concurred instantly.

"All right, if you can ride," he said. "Here, Sammy, show Mr. Blake where to get the Redskin rig, and help him on with it, will you? He's an Indian to-night."

BEATING IT!



Blake's change took less time than D'Arcy's. He dragged on the Indian leggings over his trousers, and the buckskin hunting shirt over his waistcoat. Then he donned the girdle and the moccasins. All he discarded was collar and shirt and tie; and Samson daubed his face and neck and hands with copper-hued paint, and then streaked him with warpaint of red and yellow. His hair was tousled up, and feathers were stuck in it; and Blake was ready for the warpath.

"Here's your horse, sir," said Samson.

"Thanks, my son!"

Blake jumped upon the animal's back without assistance from the stirrup. It was a delight to the Yorkshire lad to find himself upon a horse at any time. He made the animal curvet, and nearly rode Arthur Augustus D'Arcy down as the latter emerged from Jack Talbot's van.

"Bai Jove! Take care, deah boy!" exclaimed Cowboy Dick.

And Blake chuckled.

CHAPTER 10.

Foul Play!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY did not feel for the moment quite at home without his monocle; but he was looking a very handsome cowboy.

He crossed to the canvas stables for Demon, who was still making considerable noise. The groom had tethered him, and retired to a safe distance. D'Arcy looked at the horse and noted the wildness of his eyes and the foam upon his mouth.

The junior's brow contracted.

"There's somethin' wong with the horse!" he exclaimed.

"Looks like it," said Samson. "Mind his hoofs!"

But D'Arcy did not heed the warning. He ran in close to the shying horse, and seized the bridle.

Demon backed and reared and kicked.

"His saddle's hurting him," said D'Arcy.

"I saddled him, sir," said the groom. "It was all right when I put it on."

"There's somethin' wong with it."

The man looked sullen.

"I've saddled 'orses afore," he said.

"You don't know as much about horses as this young gent, Bill," said Samson. "I bet he knows what's the matter."

Arthur Augustus had the saddle off in a few moments. Then a cry of indignation escaped him.

"Bai Jove! What wascal has done this?"

He held up a bunch of thorns that had been jammed between the saddle-cloth and the skin of the horse.

It was no wonder that Demon had been restive and savage, with the thorns tormenting him at every movement. Bill, the stableman, gazed at it in blank astonishment.

"I swear I've never seen it afore!" he exclaimed. "It wasn't put there when I saddled the 'orse. I swear it, signor!"

Signor Tomsonio had just come in.

"Thorns under the saddle!" exclaimed the signor, scarcely able to believe his ears and eyes. "What scoundrel—"

"I swear I never seed it afore, sir!"

"There's been foul play," said Samson. "And it was done to spoil Talbot's performance to-night, too."

He did not add that he suspected Jim Carson, the Handsome Man. But the thought was in his mind.

"Who's been in the stable since you saddled the horse, Bill?" said the signor quietly.

"Nobody that I know of, sir, except his master."

"Mr. Carson?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh!" said the signor, exchanging a quick look with Samson. "Well, never mind. I'm glad you've found out the truth, Master D'Arcy. I shall look into this. Demon seems to be quiet enough now."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy, replacing the saddle with deft hands.

The irritation gone, Demon seemed to become quite good-tempered again. D'Arcy led him out of the stables and vaulted into the saddle.

The Indians were gathering round the staff entrance of the tent on all sorts of condition of horses, Jack Blake among them.

"Hallo! Talbot's riding, after all!" exclaimed the Handsome Man, in amazement, as D'Arcy came up on Demon.

"No," said the signor, "that's a substitute."

"Oh, I see! Talbot's hurt?"

"Only a sprain," said the signor. "If he had been

badly hurt the scoundrel who played a trick upon him would not have remained long in my circus!"

The Handsome Man changed colour.

"There was a trick?" he asked, as carelessly as he could.

"Yes; a trick with the horse."

"Who did it? Do you know?"

"I've got a pretty clear idea."

And the signor passed into the tent.

The Handsome Man looked curiously at D'Arcy. In the cowboy rig he was scarcely distinguishable from Talbot, got up for the ring.

"So you're taking the part?" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ah, I know you now! Well, I am glad the show won't be spoiled. And what was the matter with Demon?"

"Some beastlay scoundwel had placed thorns under his



"Tat you vas a peast!" roared Herr Biberach. "I tink I teaches you it—the German's fat fist on his nose!" "Ow!"

saddle," said D'Arcy, in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that it was the "beastlay scoundwel" in question whom he was talking to.

The Handsome Man coloured a little.

"And you found it out?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You are a very sharp lad," said the Handsome Man.

"Yaas, wathah! I've got my wits about me, you know," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Bai Jove, I should like to give the scoundwel a lickin', if I knew who it was, you know. He is about the wottenest wottah I have evah heard of! What do you think, Blake, deah boy?"

"I think he's the meanest kind of worm I've ever heard of or read about," replied Blake, with great heartiness.

The Handsome Man walked away.

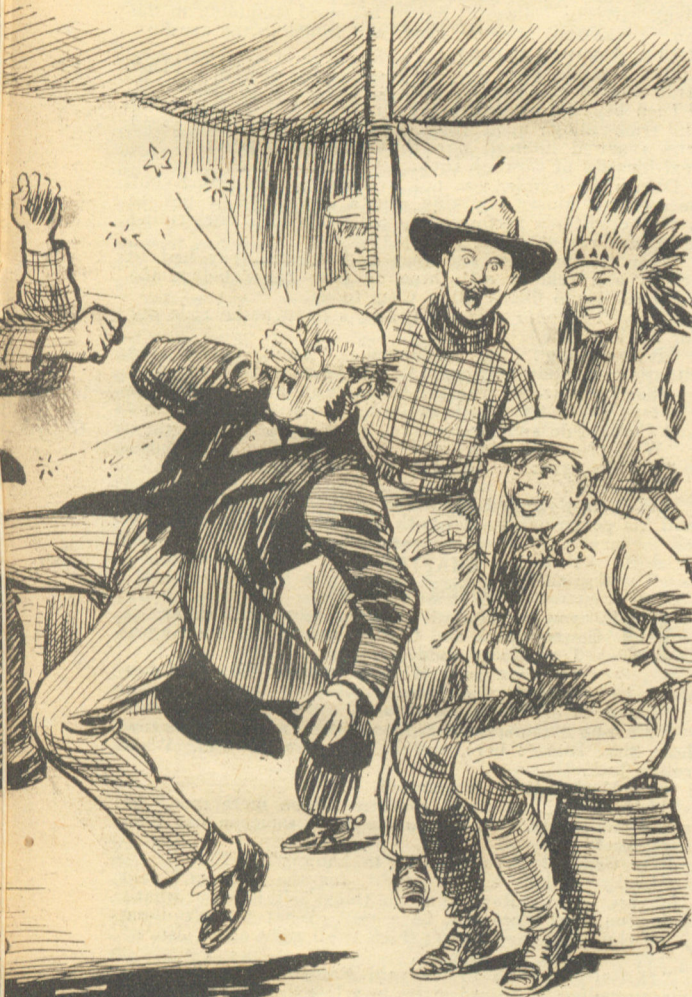
Blake looked in at the circus entrance. The people were stamping their feet, refusing to be amused any longer by Mr. Pye's wheezes, and loudly demanding the Red Indian turn.

But all was now ready.

Miss Clotilde rode into the ring, and dashed round it upon her black Arab, and the shouting and stamping died away.

After the girl rider had been once round the ring the Red Indians were to dash in, and chase her round once more. Then, as they overtook her opposite the staff entrance, Cowboy Dick was to dash in to the rescue. That was the programme. And Clotilde had already entered the arena, and was cantering round the tan.

"Ripping Rider!" said Blake, looking in after her.



you to trow to vater ofer me, ain't it? Take tat!" Mr. Ratcliff took
Dw!" he gasped, holding his injured nasal organ.

"Tom Merry and the chaps will be wondering what has become of us."

"Yaas, wathah! They won't wecognise us."

"Not likely! My only hat!"

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

Blake pointed.

"Look there—across the ring—just behind Tom Merry and Kangaroo."

Arthur Augustus looked.

Right across the circus ring, at the back of the sea of faces opposite, a familiar figure had come into sight—a late comer to the circus.

It was Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House!

There was no mistaking the thin, stooping, tall figure,

the sour, thin face, the contracted brows, and generally unpleasant expression.

It was the New House master, and he had just entered the circus, and, instead of sitting down, he was standing up and taking a survey of the assembly.

Blake's face looked comical as he frowned under the war-paint.

"Ratty himself!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Jack Blake gave a groan.

"Fancy that boulder taking to visiting circuses at his time of life! I never guessed that Ratty would turn up at a show of this sort."

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"He hasn't come to see the circus, Blake, deah boy."

Blake whistled as a new thought struck him.

"Do you think he has come for me?"

"Yaas, wathah! He guesses that you've cleared out, atah all, and come to the circus, and he's come to see if you're heah."

"My only hat! And I'm going into the ring under his very boko," said Blake in alarm. "I can't draw back now."

"No need to dwaw back, deah boy. Your own fathah wouldn't wecognise you in that wig," said D'Arcy cheerfully.

"Eh? What are you talking about? I'm not wearing a wig!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "My hair is just a lbit tousled up, with feathers stuck in, that's all."

"I mean the general wig you are in."

"Oh, fathead, the rig! I see. I had forgotten that. I suppose he won't know me in this rig," assented Blake.

"Blessed if I should know myself, if I met myself anywhere by chance looking like this. I suppose I can risk it?"

"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact, deah boy, you're lucky to be heah in Wed Indian wig, instead of sittin' ovah there in the seats. Watty would have spotted you there at once."

"By George, yes!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter! came the hoofs of the black Arab. Clotilde was passing the staff entrance, and it was time for the Redskins to rush in. With a terrific uproar of hoofbeats and jingled bridles and wild yells, they dashed into the arena, and Clotilde galloped off, with Blake and a dozen other wild Redskins in hot pursuit, while the audience burst into a cheer at the sight.

CHAPTER 11.

D'Arcy's "Turn"!

TOM MERRY & CO. were watching the show keenly. They had not the faintest idea that Mr. Ratcliff was in the tent, not having glanced round, and the New House master being directly behind them.

The burst of Redskins into the ring riveted the attention of the St. Jim's boys, as well as that of the whole audience.

"Jolly good!" exclaimed Figgins. "Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

"How wonderfully Clotilde rides!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's splendid! When they get round once more, Talbot comes in as Cowboy Dick."

"I wonder where Blake and Gussy are all this time," said Lowther.

"Curious!"

Crack, crack, crack!

Clatter! Thud, thud!

Right into the midst of the Redskins charged Cowboy Dick from the staff entrance, banging away with blank cartridges from his revolver.

It was a thrilling sight.

Cowboy Dick, riding without touching the reins, guiding his steed with his knees only, dashed among the Redskins, perfectly master of his steed, and his splendid horsemanship elicited loud cheers.

"By Jove, I never thought Talbot could ride like that!" said Kangaroo.

"It's splendid!"

In the midst of the excitement, there was some disturbance in the seats behind Tom Merry & Co., and several voices were heard at once.

"Keep back!"

"Sit down!"

"Order!"

The juniors were too interested in the scene before them to think of turning round, but Tom Merry gave a sudden jump as he heard a familiar voice behind.

"I wish to get to the front—"

"My only hat! Ratty!"

"I dessay you do, you bag-o' bones!" said a stout farmer

disrespectfully. "We want to get to the front, only we wasn't early enough. You're late. Sit down!"

"You're in the light, old 'un! Get back!"

"Don't spoil the show!"

"I do not wish to witness this ridiculous entertainment; only suitable for children!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff angrily.

"I wish to speak to those boys——"

"Get back!"

"Sit down!"

"Merry! Noble! Figgins!"

Tom Merry and Kangaroo took no notice; but Figgins turned his head. Mr. Ratcliff was his Housemaster.

"Did you call me, sir?"

"Yes, Figgins. I want to know——"

"You want a thick ear!" exclaimed a young man, rising from his seat and taking forcible hold of Mr. Ratcliff.

"Out you go!"

"Fellow——"

"I'll fellow you!" said the young man; and he whirled Mr. Ratcliff back, and sent him crashing against the canvas wall. "Now, you come in and interrupt again, and I'll squash you, you old duffer! You ought to know better than shove among the front seats when you come late, at your age."

Figgins chuckled, and turned back to watch the show. The rescue of the Texan maiden by Cowboy Dick from the yelling Redskins was very exciting, and Figgins didn't want to miss it.

Mr. Ratcliff had disappeared. He was trying to scramble up, and feeling for his hat, when a circus attendant reached down and grasped him.

"Thank you!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, thinking that the man was trying to assist him. "I have been brutally assaulted——"

"Out you go!"

"Eh?"

"Outside! No drunken men allowed in 'ere!"

"What?"

"Nuff said! Out you go!"

And Mr. Ratcliff went. He could not help going, for the man grasped him by the seat of his trousers and his coat collar, and sent him flying through the exit. Mr. Ratcliff landed outside with a yell and rolled on the grass.

He staggered to his feet, wondering whether he was on his head or his heels, and whether the world was coming to an end. Two or three circus hands stood grinning at him and exchanging jeering remarks.

"I—I will have you prosecuted!" panted Mr. Ratcliff.

"I—I am a master at a Public school, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go home!"

"Go and sleep it off, mister!"

"I insist upon entering that tent," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am a schoolmaster, and some of my boys are there, and I wish to speak to them."

"Now why don't you go 'ome quietly?"

"I—I tell you I am a master at St. Jim's——"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Samson, coming on the scene, attracted by the scuffle. "Do you belong to the school, sir?"

"Yes," spluttered Mr. Ratcliff. "I wished to speak to some of my boys in the tent, and I have been brutally assaulted."

"Sorry, sir," said Samson, who remembered having seen Mr. Ratcliff at St. Jim's, and so guessed that he was not an intoxicated disturber, though the Housemaster looked flustered and wild enough to excuse the mistake of the circus hands.

"I have paid for admission, too."

"He was trying to crowd to the front seats!" growled one of the men.

"I merely wished to speak to my boys."

"I am sorry, sir," said Samson, who was far from guessing Mr. Ratcliff's object in visiting the circus, of course; otherwise, he would have left him to the tender mercies of the circus hands. "I suppose the people were annoyed at your interrupting the show. Will you wait till the end of the act, then I'll take you in."

To which reasonable request Mr. Ratcliff, as he could do nothing else, gave an ungracious assent.

The act, meanwhile, was drawing to its close. It was not a long one. Cowboy Dick rescued Miss Clotilde from the Redskins in the most realistic manner, emptying his revolver among the Comanches.

Not the least suspicion had the chums of St. Jim's that Cowboy Dick was their elegant comrade in Talbot's guise.

If D'Arcy had spoken they would have known him at once, but as yet he had not had occasion to utter a word.

With Miss Clotilde on his saddle bow he dashed round the ring, firing blank cartridges, and putting the Redskins to flight, or levelling them with the sawdust. But one of

the Redskins, carried away by the excitement of the scene, refused to either fall down "dead" or to run away, and stood his ground, and D'Arcy shouted to him in his amazement.

"You uttah ass!"

Tom Merry gave a yell.

"Gussy!"

"Gussy!" gasped Figgins. "My only hat!"

"Oh, come off, you fathead!" replied the Redskin; and Tom Merry yelled again.

"Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cowboy and the Redskin were just opposite the chums when that exchange of remarks took place. The yell of laughter from the juniors recalled Blake to himself, and he put spurs to his horse and dashed away.

Bang, bang!

"Hallo! There goes Blake!"

Blake was going down. It was not the effect of the blank cartridge, however, but of his steed stumbling in the tan. Blake shot over his head, and rolled in the sawdust. Arthur Augustus grinned.

Miss Clotilde gave a low call, and the riderless, black Arab dashed up, and the girl slipped upon his back.

Then began a display of horsemanship and buck-jumping and trick-riding; upon which the juniors of St. Jim's gazed with renewed interest, now that they were aware of the real identity of Cowboy Dick.

D'Arcy, of course, was not well up in trick-riding, but he could do almost anything with a horse, and he put up a very creditable performance, while Clotilde's trick-riding brought down thunders of applause.

When it was over, and they had retired, they had to return and take a call three or four times before the audience would finally allow them to go.

Signor Tomsonio grasped D'Arcy's hand as he rode out for the last time.

"It's ripping!" he exclaimed. "You've saved the situation, my boy. Splendid! Look here! Will you give another turn later? I've got to cut the tiger act as Talbot can't go on, but the audience will take it all right if you and Clotilde do another turn."

"With pleasuah, deah boy!"

"Thanks again!"

"Not at all."

And D'Arcy jumped off Demon, well satisfied with himself and his performance, and with the fun he was having.

CHAPTER 12.

Looking for Blake!

"DID you see Ratty?" Figgins murmured softly, as Cowboy Dick and Clotilde finally left the ring.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, rather! What is he here for? I didn't think he was fond of circuses."

"Blake, of course!"

"What-ho!" remarked Kangaroo. "He's scented it, somehow, that Blake's here, and he's come after him. What rotten luck!"

Tom Merry's brows contracted.

"It's curious he should come so far on mere spec," he remarked slowly. "Looks to me as if someone has been sneaking."

"By George! I should like to know whom!"

"Lucky Blake's out of sight for the moment," said Manners. "But if Ratty is on the track, he'll nose out what's going on, and there will be a row. What Gussy's doing is all right, but they mayn't think it all right at St. Jim's."

"Possibly not."

"If Ratty gets on to it," said Kangaroo, "he'll call it masquerading in absurd attire in a low show, and bringing disgrace on the school. You know what a sweet, lovable way he has of putting things."

"Yes, the worm!"

"We shall have to keep it dark, if we can. If he asks after Blake, we don't know anything."

"Good! Look out! Here he is again!"

Mr. Ratcliff was coming in with Samson. There was nothing going on for the moment, except some tumbling by Puggles to fill up time before the next turn, and the audience allowed Mr. Ratcliff to approach undisturbed, though some far from favourable glances were cast upon him.

"Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff, tapping the New House junior on the shoulder.

Figgins looked round.

"Yes, sir."

"Is Blake here?"

Figgins looked up and down the row of faces.

"No, sir; he is not here."

"I do not mean he is in your immediate neighbourhood

(Continued at foot of opposite page.)

NOTES AND NEWS FROM—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THIS week I am proud to welcome a host of new readers, in addition to the great body of loyal Gemites who have well and truly supported this paper for so many years. Of these new friends some have been enthusiastic readers of the "Nelson Lee Library," now, for reasons of policy, incorporated in this paper, and for them I have a special message. It is this: Give to the GEM the same splendid support and the fine loyalty for which "Nelson Lee" readers have always been specially distinguished, and I, on my part, will pledge myself to maintain intact the old traditions of genuine, honest-to-goodness school stories of the true vintage, which with their clean humour and wholesome thrills, have always been your sheet-anchor.

Our future has never been brighter than now, and no stone will be left unturned to ensure that this paper maintains its reputation of being the best and brightest school story paper on the market.

Martin Clifford and Edwy Searles Brooks are the master writers of schoolboy fiction—and the GEM will now have them both.

Let us, then, go forward joyfully from strength to strength, making new friends into old friends, and each passing week forging new links in the bonds of true comradeship which bind together Reader and Editor!

YOUR AERO-CAR.

You are all set, now, chums, for putting the finishing touches to your Aero-Car—that is, fixing on the wheels and giving the car its motive power. Take pains with the final assembling—don't rush to get it done too quickly, for more haste will mean less speed. On the fitting of the wheels and driving mechanism depends, to a great extent, the performance of your model. You want yours to be as

fast as the next fellow's, so follow carefully the simple instructions given on page 7.

Last week I promised to give you some hints on how to get the best out of your Aero-Car. Here are a couple. Firstly, your car will go farther and at a faster speed if you lubricate the elastic with a mixture of soft soap and glycerine. Without the elastic lubricated you should not give the propeller more than 250 turns, but with it you can safely go up to 400. Secondly, a little spot of fine oil between the engine-cap and the propeller will increase the speed of your car, for it will make the propeller revolve more freely.

Now let us see what grand treats are in store for you next Wednesday. The first item on the programme is a superb long complete story of the popular chums of St. Jim's. It is entitled

"UNDER SUSPICION!"

and it is, of course, written by Martin Clifford.

Who is under suspicion? It is none other than Jack Blake, who is accused by the cads of the school of having stolen a fiver from Gussy's desk! Blake plays a jape on his aristocratic chum by putting rats in his desk—the funny result of which makes our next cover picture, shown in miniature on page 21. It is from this jape that trouble commences for poor old Blake. You will enjoy immensely this ripping yarn of human interest.

Next, there is another full-of-thrills instalment of our serial, "St. Frank's versus Foo Chow," starring the chums of St. Frank's in China. Following the lead of his dare-devil brother, Willy Handforth escapes from Foo Chow's stronghold! Don't miss his breathless adventures.

Potts, the office boy, will be on the scene again in another "spot" of trouble, and another batch of readers' prize-winning jokes will complete our next star number. If you have not given your newsagent a regular order for the GEM, take my old advice and do so right away.

Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly. "I mean is he at the circus with you?"

Figgins did not appear to hear the question.

"Figgins!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Is Blake at the circus with you? Did he come with you? Have you seen him here?"

Figgins set his lips hard.

"Do you refuse to answer me, Figgins?"

"Is it right to ask me to sneak, sir?"

"Will you answer my question?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Which means that you refuse?" said Mr. Ratcliff tartly.

And he looked as if he were very near repeating the performance that had taken place in his study that day.

Figgins was silent.

"Very well, sir, I shall know how to punish your dis-

respect," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall ascertain for myself if Blake is here."

"Very well, sir."

And Mr. Ratcliff retired, baffled.

Samson, the Strong Man, was looking at him now. Samson knew that Blake was a Red Indian in the late performance, and he understood that the master was looking for him with far from friendly motives. It might be rough on Blake if he were discovered.

Mr. Ratcliff turned to Samson as the curtain dropped behind him at the entrance.

"I believe," he remarked—"I believe that while this circus was at the school, Blake—a junior named Blake—became friendly with some of the circus performers."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Samson shortly.

"Do you know the boy by sight, my man?"

"Yes."

CHOCOLATES!

Don't forget this great offer when you are at the seaside this year, chums. Messrs. Cadbury Bros. have contributed a huge quantity of their famous Dairy Milk bars for the consumption of all readers who buy their GEM from beach sellers, kiosks, and such places at most of our well-known seaside resorts. In addition they have contributed pound boxes of their delicious assorted chocolates as prizes at our gala, cinema, and concert party competitions. Don't forget your chocolate—and your GEM—when you go to the sea!

NUMBERS!

Would you like to know just how many ancestors you have had since the beginning of the Christian era? If you can carry the number round in your head you must be pretty bright; but let me say right away that I do not guarantee this number as absolutely correct—you see, I didn't work it out myself! The number is 288,230,376,151,711,744.

ÆSOP'S FABLES.

From America comes the news that Æsop's fable about the tortoise and the hare has been put to the test and found to be perfectly correct. It happened at the John Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, where they have a tortoise race every year. This year it was decided to match the winning tortoise against a hare, and this was duly done. The tortoise, as in Æsop's story, plugged steadily on, while the hare frequently stopped to eat and look about him—and in the end it was the tortoise that won!

ODDS AND ENDS.

The strangest church in the world stands in a vineyard at Asti, California. It is built entirely of wine casks, and was originally intended as a wine store, but when Prohibition came windows were added and it became a church.

The most valuable motor-car in the world belongs to the Shah of Persia. The dashboard and steering gear are studded with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. The car is valued at £25,000!

A bather from Glasgow came out of the sea and felt something solid between his chest and his bathing dress. He investigated and found—a one-pound sole! Free dinner for a Scotsman!

DEPORTATION!

F. G. B. (Dalston) writes to ask if a man can be deported from his own country. The answer is no, he cannot, unless you include exile as deportation. The point is that no country would accept a deported foreigner, but in the case of a man exiled for political crime, he would be allowed to enter another country.

YOUR EDITOR.

"Have you seen him here?"

Samson stared at Mr. Ratcliff, and did not answer the question. There was very much of contempt in his look, and Mr. Ratcliff coloured.

"It is an important matter," he explained. "The boy has left school, in spite of being detained by his House-master. He has broken bounds, and I am here to take him back to the school."

"That's not my business," said Samson.

"But it is mine. I think it extremely probable that, Blake having made friends with the circus performers, he is behind the scenes."

"Oh!"

"Can you tell me whether that is the case?"

"I can't tell you anything," said the Strong Man, walking away, and turning a deaf ear to the further remarks on the New House master.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard through his nose.

"I think I am on the right track," he remarked. "If Blake were not here, the man would say he had not seen him. I cannot discover him in the audience, so he must be behind the scenes. I notice that D'Arcy is not with the others, either, and so they are probably both behind the scenes. I will ascertain."

And Mr. Ratcliff proceeded to ascertain.

He picked his way round the tent from which a fresh burst of music showed that a new turn was on. The Handsome Man was doing his acrobatic act, which was only second in popularity to the cowboy and Indian turn.

Mr. Ratcliff found some difficulty in finding his way round to the back.

"Oh!" gasped the New House master suddenly.

He caught his foot in a rope and stumbled, and fell headlong.

He threw out his arms wildly to save himself, as he rolled upon the outstretched edge of the thick canvas of the circus tent.

The shock of the sudden fall rendered him breathless, and he rolled on the ground, gasping.

"Out of that!"

A rough-looking man came up, and raised his boot threateningly.

"Get out of it!"

"What—what—I—"

"Out of it, you swindler, trying to get a sight of the

show without paying!" said the stableman, in disgust.

"Man of your age, too!"

Mr. Ratcliff trembled with rage as he rose unsteadily to his feet. To be accused of attempting to peep under the edge of the canvas to see the circus without paying for admission! It was really too bad!

"You low ruffian!" he stammered.

"Nuff of that!" said the man, giving him a shove that sent him staggering. "Get out! By gosh, I'll 'elp you off with my boot if you don't go!"

"I came here to find a boy—"

"Get out!"

"I demand to see the proprietor of this circus!"

"Haw, haw!"

"A boy belonging to my school is here, hiding away, and I demand to see him!" said Mr. Ratcliff heatedly.

Bill, the stableman, started.

He guessed now that he had done Mr. Ratcliff injustice in one way, but he was less inclined than ever to let him be near the circus.

"Get out!" he said. "You can tell that to the marines! Now, are you going, or shall I boot you?"

And he lifted his big foot with so determined and business-like an air that Mr. Ratcliff thought he had better go.

He turned away in the dusk, and Bill, the stableman, walked off, chuckling.

But Mr. Ratcliff did not go far. He was not beaten yet.

CHAPTER 13.

Mr. Ratcliff Investigates!

SIGNOR TOMSONIO came out of the staff entrance. The Handsome Man was bringing down the house with his trapeze performance, but the signor was somewhat anxious about the next turn.

The tigers were a big draw, and it was impossible for Jungle Jack to go through the usual performance. Jack was still lying in his caravan, and, though not now in much pain, it was impossible for him to use his ankle. The signor had determined to cut the tiger turn as short as possible, and fill up the time with an extra turn of the cowboy performance. And for what the tigers were to contribute to the bill he had to look to Herr Biberach, the German tiger-tamer. If the herr were under the influence of liquor, however, as usually he was, there would be trouble.

Signor Tomsonio had directed his men to find the fat German and douse him with cold water, and watch that he did not get anything to drink; but since the accident to Talbot the German had disappeared. It was easily surmised that he was sleeping off the effect of his late potations in some corner, but exactly where they could not discover. And the signor, hearing that he had not been found, was anxious.

"Found that dummy yet?" was his question, as he came out.

"No, sir," said Bill, the stableman. "He's out of sight somewhere, sir. But we'll soon rout him out. I've found somebody else, sir."

"Eh—what? Who?"

"A skinny gentleman, sir. He's a schoolmaster, and is looking for a boy here."

"Phew!"

Jack Blake, still in his Indian garb, was chatting with D'Arcy close at hand, D'Arcy still being Cowboy Dick. They both turned round as Bill spoke.

"It's Watty!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Jack Blake gave a grunt.

"Yes. He's coming round for me, as he didn't find me in the audience. The inquisitive beast—can't be satisfied!"

"Yaas, I wegard it as extremly bad form of Watty to push into the affair like this. It shows an inquisitive mind." Signor Tomsonio frowned a little.

"Why is your master looking for you?" he asked.

"He's not lookin' for me, dear boy. He's not my mastah. Nor Blake's eithah for that mattah. But Blake was detained in the School House this aftahnoon, you see, and I advised him to cut and wun, as we wanted to come to the circus. Mr. Watliff has come aftah him to see if he's heah. You see, it's no biznay of his weally, but he's an inquisitive sort of beast."

"And if he finds Blake here—"

"I am afwaid that Blake will get a wiggan' f'wom his own Housemastah if Watty weports him. It's wathah wotten, you know. Watty ought to mind his own biznay."

"He says he's going to see you, sir," said Bill.

"See me?" said Signor Tomsonio. "Well, he won't get much change out of me. After all, the man's not likely to recognise you boys in that disguise, so long as you don't speak."

"Ah! Is that Signor Tomsonio?" said an unpleasant voice, as Mr. Ratcliff came up. "You are the proprietor of this circus?"

The Shipwrecked Schoolboys!

Six schoolboys and their headmaster adrift on a raft in the mighty Atlantic Ocean! Water all around them—nothing but water, and never the faintest glimpse of land!



Desperate indeed is the plight of Dr. Sparshott and Jim Dainty & Co. of Grimslade School. What for them had been a glorious cruising holiday on board a tramp steamer has now developed into a grim adventure, with their very lives at stake! Then comes the time when despair changes into hope. A ship is sighted! But will the raft be seen? Will the shipwrecked schoolboys be saved? There are thrills galore in famous Frank Richards' gripping adventure story entitled "The Cheerio Castaways!" If you want a real treat read this magnificent yarn in the seven-story issue of

The RANGER 2^d.

Now on Sale.

"What? I'm the proprietor of Tomsonio's World Famous, certainly!" said the signor. "What?"

"I wished to see you—"

"Well, here I am!"

Blake and D'Arcy stood still and silent. Mr. Ratcliff saw them both quite plainly, but he never dreamed that the Red Indian and the cowboy were two of the juniors at St. Jim's, and one of them the very junior he was seeking.

"I'm sorry to take up your time," said Mr. Ratcliff. "It is rather an important matter, however. I—"

The signor shook his head.

"Sorry," he said, "but it's no good going into it. It's no good."

"I beg your pardon—"

"Granted! But it's no good wasting breath," said the signor kindly. "Sword-swallowing's simply a drug in the market."

"What?"

"I dare say you can give a good show; but, bless you, my man Puggles can do all the sword-swallowing that's wanted, and that's not much. Sorry! If you could do something original in the ventriloquist line, now—"

"You—you hardly understand me!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"I—I am a schoolmaster—"

"Eh?" exclaimed Signor Tomsonio, with an air of great astonishment. "Ain't you Tweedy, the sword-swallower, looking for a job?"

Mr. Ratcliff nearly choked.

The two juniors nearly choked, too, but it was from merriment.

Mr. Ratcliff's indignation at being mistaken for a sword-swallowing artist rendered him speechless for some moments. He found his voice at last.

"Sir," he gasped, "you are insulting!"

"What's your line, then," said the signor—"tumbling?"

"I am a master at St. Jim's!"

"Oh, my mistake! Glad to see you, sir!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, in ecstasies.

Mr. Ratcliff started and looked round. He had heard D'Arcy's voice and knew it at once; but he could not see D'Arcy.

"I heard D'Arcy speak just now—"

"What? Who?"

"A boy belonging to my school. Are there any of my boys here?"

"Your—er—boys?"

"Yes! I am looking particularly for a boy named Blake of the Fourth Form, who has broken bounds. I have reason to believe that he is here somewhere."

"Blake?" said the signor. "Did you say Blake?"

"Yes, sir! Is he here?"

The signor looked round.

"Can you see a boy named Blake belonging to this gentleman's school, Bill?" he demanded.

"No, sir!" said Bill, the stableman, turning his back upon the juniors. "I can't see anybody of that sort here, sir!"

"I expected prevarications!" said Mr. Ratcliff, who was too exasperated to be polite. "I fully expected it, sir! I shall not leave without Blake!"

"My dear sir—"

"I insist upon your telling me whether that boy has been here—"

"Here he is, signor!"

It was an exclamation from Samson, the Strong Man.

Mr. Ratcliff turned quickly towards him, imagining that the words referred to the missing junior.

But it was Herr Biberach whom the Strong Man was bringing forward. The stout German was very red and flustered. And there were particles of hay sticking all over him, as if he had been roused out of sleep in some corner of the stable.

He was expostulating loudly as he came along, and resisting a little; but he was as a child in the hands of the Strong Man.

"I tink tat I goes to sleep, ain't it?" he exclaimed. "I tink tat I does no more for tat signor who haf gif me te order of te sack!"

"I've a jolly good mind to give you a thick ear, too!" said the signor. "You've got to go on with the tigers next turn. Talbot is hurt, through your sticking your fat carcass in the way of his horse here."

"I tink tat I goes to sleep."

"Douse him with cold water, Bill!"

"Yes, sir!" grinned Bill.

He caught up a stable-pail that was half full of water, and Samson let the herr go. The cold water splashed into the red face of the German, and he staggered back, with a wild howl.

"Ach! Yah! I am trown!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The German, half-sobered, knuckled the water out of his

eyes, and glared round furiously in search of his assailant. Bill had upended the pail, and was sitting on it, gasping with laughter. Mr. Ratcliff was standing nearest to the herr, and the German picked upon him as the guilty party.

He pranced up to the New House master.

"Tat you vas a peast!" he roared. "I tink I teaches you to trow te vater ofer me, after! Ain't it? Take tat!"

"Ow!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

And he took it—on his nose, and sat down with a bump.

CHAPTER 14.

Bad Luck for Ratty!

HERR BIBERACH danced round the fallen master like an exuberant elephant.

Mr. Ratcliff, dazed, and considerably hurt by the thump on his nose, sat on the ground, staring at him stupidly.

A yell of laughter went up on all sides. The herr's mistake seemed funny enough to all—except to Horace Ratcliff.

"Tat you gets up!" roared Herr Biberach. "Tat you puts up te fist, ain't it? Yah! I tink I gif you te licking. Ain't it? Ach!"

"Dear me!"

"Yah! Coward! Tat you gets up, and I knocks you town again! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ruffian!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I will have you arrested!"

"Oh, my only hat!" murmured Blake, staggering with merriment. "What a night for Ratty! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I werged it as extremely funny!"

"Ratty is having a night out, and no mistake. He will be sorry presently that he came to look for me and see me home."

"Ha, ha, ha! I should not be surprised!"

"Tat you gets up!" shrieked Herr Biberach.

"I—I decline to get up!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "I call upon you all for protection against this—this intoxicated ruffian."

"Ring off, Bibby!"

"I tink I licks him—ain't it?"

"Nuff's as good as a feast," said Samson, seizing the fat German by the shoulder. "You've got to get ready for the tiger turn, you duffer!"

"I tink tat I licks him mit me fist—ain't it?"

"You've licked him already; that's all right."

"I tink I goes and has a drink."

Samson chuckled.

"I think you won't, Bibby. You'll come with me."

Mr. Ratcliff staggered to his feet as Samson drew the herr forcibly away from the spot. The New House master's nose was red and swollen.

"I have been brutally assaulted!" he said gaspingly.

"I— Signor Tomsonio—"

But the signor was gone. He had had enough of Mr. Ratcliff, and he had re-entered the tent to escape further questioning by the gentleman from St. Jim's.

"I demand to be shown the boy of whom I have come in search!" said Mr. Ratcliff, almost foaming with rage.

Samson shrugged his shoulders and walked away. Bill, the stableman, whistled and went to the stable.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed his eye upon the Indian and the cowboy.

"Can you give me any information?" he asked, little dreaming whom he was addressing. "I should be willing to recompense you for any information you could give me as to the whereabouts of this boy Blake."

He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a shilling.

"I will give you this if you tell me where Blake is."

The Indian and the cowboy shook their heads.

"I shall not leave this place till I have discovered him!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Do you know the boy by sight?"

Blake was nearly exploding. He was pretty well acquainted with his own features; but he did not intend to confide the fact to Mr. Ratcliff.

"Why do you not speak?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff angrily. "I suppose you can speak English?"

Jack Blake gurgled.

"Answer me at once!"

Another gurgle.

Mr. Ratcliff gave them a furious glance, and turned away.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The New House master whirled round in a flash. He had heard the words.

"D'Arcy!" he cried.

Arthur Augustus, thinking that he was discovered, was about to give the show away completely by speaking, when Blake clapped a hand over his mouth. His voice died away in a gurgle.

"G-r-r-r!"

Mr. Ratcliff looked round him in amazement. He had

distinctly heard D'Arcy's voice; but he did not see Arthur Augustus.

"The boys are hidden here, I know that!" he exclaimed angrily. "This is the second time I have heard D'Arcy speak. The voice, I think, came from this van."

And Mr. Ratcliff stared scrutinisingly at the van usually occupied by Herr Biberach, but at the present moment empty.

He ascended the steps at the rear, and tapped at the door. The Indian and the cowboy watched him, with blissful smiles.

Tap, tap, tap!

There was no reply from within the van. Mr. Ratcliff put his mouth close to the door and called out:

"I know you are in there, Blake! You may as well come out!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy softly.

There was no reply from within the van. Mr. Ratcliff tried the door, and it came open in his grasp. The interior of the van was dim, but the New House master stepped into it and lighted a match. It did not occur to him in his excitement that he was trespassing into a private residence.

Blake exchanged a look with D'Arcy, and stole quietly up behind the van, and suddenly slammed the door to.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a jump.

He turned quickly to the door of the van, and the match burned his fingers as he did so, and he gave a yell. He blundered at the door in the dusk, and bumped his head on it, and his elbow on a shelf, bringing down a heap of crockery, with a crash and a clatter, to the floor.

Then he hurled himself upon the door to open it. But the door was fast. Jack Blake had jammed a big chip of wood under it from the outside, and as it opened outwards, it was immovable from within.

Mr. Ratcliff hammered on the door furiously.

Blake retreated, chuckling.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "I wegard that as wathah wippin'. Watty has caught himself in a twap—like a wat in a twap! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Indian and the cowboy strode away.

Mr. Ratcliff, almost in a frenzy, hammered savagely on the door from inside. He knew that a trick was being played upon him, and he was beside himself.

"Ach! Tere is somevun in my van!" exclaimed Herr Biberach, in surprise.

The herr was nearly sober now, the ministrations of Samson—and showers of cold water—having brought him round. He was greatly surprised, as he came up to his van to change into his professional garb, to hear someone hammering away at the door from inside.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Ach! Tat is fery strange!"

Thump, thump!

Herr Biberach ascended the step behind, and, observing the peg planted under the door, jerked it out, so that the door would open. It happened quite unfortunately that Mr. Ratcliff delivered a tremendous thump inside at the same moment.

The door flew open, and swept the fat German backwards.

He gave a tremendous yell as he rolled on the ground, with very nearly all the breath knocked out of his plump body.

"Ach! Mein gootness! Yaroooh!"

Mr. Ratcliff looked out of the van in astonishment and alarm.

"I am really very sorry—" he began.

Herr Biberach staggered to his feet.

"Ach! I tinks I make you sorrer!" he roared. "I tinks I smashes you!"

"I—I beg your—"

"Come out of tat!" roared the herr, rushing at the Housemaster and seizing him, and dragging him out of the van.

"Oh! Help, help!"

"Ach! Peast! Pounder!"

"Help!"

They rolled together on the ground, and Blake and D'Arcy were near doing the same, from helpless merriment.

"Oh dear!" gasped Blake. "What a night for Ratty! But let's go and yank that fat Deutcher off, or he'll kill him!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yaas, wathah!"

The Red Indian and the cowboy laid hands upon the German, and yanked him off.

Mr. Ratcliff jumped up.

Without stopping for a word of thanks, he dashed off as fast as his long, thin legs would carry him.

Blake and D'Arcy released the herr, who was shouting and struggling, and scuttled off before the excited German could go for them in turn.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,331.

Herr Biberach, growling and grumbling, went into the van.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake. "This is better than the circus!"

And Arthur Augustus chuckled and replied with emphasis:

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 15.

After the Show!

TOM MERRY & CO. wondered a little what had become of Mr. Ratcliff; but they did not give him much thought. They had little fear that he would penetrate Blake's disguise, and he was letting them alone, and so there was nothing to worry about.

They enjoyed the show, and dismissed him from their minds.

The Handsome Man's turn came to an end, amid bursts of cheering.

The acrobat retired, and then came the turn of the tigers. The big cage was rolled into the arena with Herr Biberach rolling along with it.

Signor Tomsonio announced that, owing to an unfortunate accident, Jungle Jack could not appear, but that his place would be taken in an extra turn by Cowboy Dick; and the audience gave a cheer of sympathy and approval.

Herr Biberach went through the performance with the tigers, watched with very keen anxiety by the signor.

It was impossible to omit the tiger turn altogether, or the signor would gladly have done so; but he was far from relying upon Herr Biberach.

He had cut the turn as short as possible, and done his best to get the German in a proper state for it; but he still had his doubts.

However, all went off without mishap.

Julius and Julia were in a good temper, and the herr managed pretty well, though the turn was nothing like that Jungle Jack was accustomed to give.

The signor breathed a deep sigh of relief when the tigers' cage was wheeled off and the herr disappeared.

"That's over, Joey," he remarked, "and I'm glad of it. Since Herr Bibby has taken to the bottle so much I don't like to see him with the tigers. He wasn't so bad to-night, after all, though."

Joey Pye nodded.

"Not so bad, but once is enough," he remarked. "By gum, the audience have taken it very well, and they've even given him hands. They wouldn't part with Jungle Jack so easily but for Cowboy Dick! Ha, ha, ha!"

The signor grinned.

"Yes; Jack is growing as popular in both characters. And Master D'Arcy takes his place wonderfully well in the cowboy act."

"What-ho!" agreed Mr. Pye heartily.

A bare-backed turn came next, and then some conjuring by the original Mr. Pye, and then it was time for the extra turn by the cowboys and Indians and Miss Clotilde.

While Joey Pye was producing yards and yards of ribbons from his ears, and cakes and cigars from his eyelashes, the Indians were gathering at the staff entrance ready for the gallop in the ring.

Blake was among them, in high spirits. Nothing had been seen of Mr. Ratcliff since his row with the herr, and Blake hoped that he was gone.

But D'Arcy shook his head.

"Not much, deah boy," he remarked, as he patted Demon. "Watty won't give in till he's found you, or till he gets his neck broken. It would have made him look an awful ass to go back to St. Jim's now without you."

"Well, he seems to have cleared off."

"He will come back, deah boy."

Blake chuckled.

"Then I hope he will meet the Deutscher again, that's all."

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

And then came the cue for entering the ring, and the Redskins dashed in with a wild yell, Blake yelling as loudly as any.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on eagerly. They knew now that Arthur Augustus was the cowboy and Blake an Indian—but which Indian they could not tell, so exactly was he like the others in his savage disguise.

"Well, Ratty won't know him when we don't know him ourselves," said Kerr. "Blessed if I can tell one from another."

"Only if Ratty hangs round after the show, he may find Blake changing. I don't know whether Blake's seen him," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to get round before the end and warn him."

"Good! We'll miss the last turn, then," remarked Figgins.

"That's not a bad idea," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "I'm beginning to get hungry."

"Oh rats!"

Bang, bang, bang!

The cowboy and the Red Indians were going it merrily enough.

The turn, although D'Arcy was quite new to it, went off very well, and the audience were quite satisfied, as they showed by their loud cheers.

As soon as it ended, and the riders had gone from the ring, Tom Merry & Co. vacated their seats.

There was an elephant turn to come now, before the finish, and they were anxious to get round and speak to Blake before Mr. Ratcliff could collar him.

They left the tent quietly, only Gore and Skimpole remaining to see the finish.

The juniors found their way round to the staff exit from the big tent, to find the Indians mostly there, and among them a Redskin whose voice was strangely familiar.

"Better get this rig off now, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!" replied Cowboy Dick.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Hallo, deah boys! Here's the fellows, Blake."

"You young bounders!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We know you were in the ring, or we shouldn't have known what had become of you."

"Yaas! It's been awfully good fun, deah boys!"

"What-ho!" said Blake emphatically.

"Yes, you lucky bargees," said Monty Lowther. "I jolly well wish I had had the chance. I suppose you ride better than I do, Gussy. Now, if it had been a question of good looks—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Come to business," said Tom Merry. "Ratty's here, on the prowl. Have you seen him?"

"Yass, wathah!"

"You bet," said Blake, laughing. "He's been having a regular beano here—fighting with Herr Bibby, and falling foul of everybody. He hasn't found me. He asked me some questions, but I didn't answer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I managed to keep Gussy quiet, too, so that his beautiful accent wouldn't give us away, and I kept him from talking for nearly a minute; so, you see, the chap who said that the age of miracles was past was quite wrong."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We've got to get off now," said Blake. "We shall have to change and clean the grease-paint off, and the trouble is that Ratty is pretty certain to be hanging about for us. He's bound to be on the look-out, even if he doesn't come back."

"Houp-la!"

Joey Pye came out of the tent in a succession of hand-springs, and right-ended in the midst of the juniors with a cheerful chuckle.

"All serene!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you young gentlemen are staying to supper?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We should like to," he said; "but we've got to get in for calling-over, and there's a master after Blake, too, for breaking bounds. The trouble is that he's watching for him, and will most likely spot him as he leaves the circus."

Joey Pye rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"It's wathah an awkward posish for Blake," remarked D'Arcy. "Watty has been watchin' for a long time to catch one of us off guard, you know, and he'll be on Blake's twack like a cat aftah a giddy mouse, you know."

"Ah! Merry! Figgins!"

The juniors started. It was Mr. Ratcliff's unpleasant voice.

The New House master came upon the scene with a venomous glitter in his little eyes and a sour expression upon his face.

The boys touched their caps respectfully.

"Merry, I am fully aware that Blake is here. I presume that you have come to take him with you. Where is he?"

CHAPTER 16.

Caught!

TOM MERRY did not speak. Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered, and he raised his voice a little as he went on:

"Merry, where is Blake?"

Still Tom Merry did not speak.

"This is a conspiracy," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a choking voice. "You are all in a conspiracy to protect that boy."

Blake chuckled.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at him angrily.

"I am surprised and shocked, Merry, to see you associating like this with low persons," said the Housemaster spitefully.

There was a general grin. The low persons Mr. Ratcliff alluded to were Blake and D'Arcy, in their circus disguise.

"And I shall report your conduct to your Housemaster!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff angrily.

"Mr. Raitlon has not objected to us visiting the circus, sir," said Tom Merry. "He knows we have friends among the company, too."

"I am here to find Blake," said Mr. Ratcliff, changing the subject. "That he has broken bounds, I am sure."

"Have you looked for him in the School House, sir?"

"I have not. I am certain that I shall find him here."

"You know best, sir."

"You need not prevaricate, Merry. I do not expect to receive any assistance from you in maintaining discipline in the school."

"Mr. Raitlon may be able to manage the discipline of his own House, sir, without assistance from outside," suggested Monty Lowther, as softly as a cooing dove.

The New House master flushed.

"Don't be impertinent, Lowther."

"Oh, sir! Impertinent to you!"

"Silence!"

"Certainly, sir."

Joey Pye closed one eye for a moment, with a comical expression that made several of the juniors burst into a roar of laughter, and then approached Mr. Ratcliff, lifting his paper hat in an absurdly ceremonious salute.

"You want to find a boy, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, my man."

"Will you follow me, sir?"

"You know where Blake is?"

"Well, sir, if you'll follow me, I'll do my best for you," said Joey Pye; and he walked away from the spot.

The Housemaster gave the juniors a bitter look. Then he

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followed the clown, utterly unconscious of the fact that he was leaving the boy he sought behind him with Tom Merry & Co.

Tom Merry was looking puzzled.

"What's the little game?" he muttered.

"Blessed if I know!" said Kangaroo. "Only Pye's going to play some jape on Ratty, that's as safe as houses."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors of St. Jim's waited for Mr. Pye to return.

Mr. Ratcliff followed the clown, nothing doubting.

Joey Pye led him into a tent, where it was dark, for it was now dusk. Mr. Ratcliff hesitated and dumbled.

"Can you see, sir?" asked Joey Pye, with great solicitude.

"No, I cannot!" snapped the Housemaster.

"Better take my hand, sir."

"Where are you taking me to?" asked Mr. Ratcliff snappishly, groping for Joey Pye's hand in the darkness.

"This way, sir?"

"But—"

"Straight ahead!"

Joey Pye drew the Housemaster forward, and then suddenly released him and left him.

Mr. Ratcliff called out, but there was no reply. He heard a key click, and that was all.

"Where am I?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Man, where are you? What does this mean?"

There was no reply.

Mr. Ratcliff groped about and his hands came in contact with the bars of a cage. He fumbled in his pockets, and drew out a matchbox.

He struck a match, and gazed round him furiously.

He was inside a cage—empty save for himself. The clown had tricked him, and locked him up in an empty cage.

The Housemaster dragged at the door furiously. But it was locked.

"Oh! Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "They shall pay for this. It is a plot. All of them are in it, of course. But they shall pay dearly for it."

He dragged at the cage door and shouted. But only the echo of his own voice answered him.

Joey Pye, meanwhile, rejoined the juniors of St. Jim's with a joyous grin upon his comical face.

"Where's Ratty?"

The question was asked by all the juniors at once.

Joey Pye chuckled.

"Locked in a cage!"

"My only hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors looked serious. It was no light matter, locking a Housemaster up in a cage.

"It's all right," said Mr. Pye. "It was I that did it, not you. You didn't even know it was being done. You get those things off, and get back to the school, and we'll let the old fellow loose in an hour's time."

"An hour! Poor old Ratty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, sooner, if you think it's safe," said Mr. Pye generously. "He's making plenty of row."

"Bai Jove! I think half an hour will be enough," said D'Arcy. "Then he will have to catch a latah twain home to Wylcombe, you know."

"Yes, that's all right."

"Half an hour let it be, then," agreed Mr. Pye. "You go and get that paint and those things off, then. Mr. Ratcliff won't trouble you for a bit."

The juniors, chuckling, did so.

Tom Merry & Co. helped Blake and D'Arcy to clean down and change into their normal attire; and the change did not take so long as it had taken to assume the disguise.

In ten minutes or so Blake and D'Arcy were looking themselves again, save for a few slight smears of paint that were hardly noticeable.

Then they were ready to depart.

Signor Tomsonio and Miss Clotilde and Joey Pye bade them good-night; the signor overfrowning with thanks for the good turn Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had done them.

The swell of St. Jim's disclaimed thanks in his graceful way.

"Not at all, my deah fellow," he said. "You were in a deucid awkward posish, as a mattah of fact, and I was inly too pleased to be able to help you. I'm awfully glad I was on the spot, that's all. It was a weal pleasuah to me."

"Well, good-bye, and good luck!" said the signor. "If there should be any trouble about what's happened to-night, let me know, and I'll call and explain to your headmaster."

"Thank you, deah boy! But it's all wight; there won't be any trouble. As a mattah of fact, Blake has been saved from bein' nabbed by takin' on the Wedskin turn."

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"Good-bye, signor! Good-bye, Miss Clotilde!"

"Good-bye!" said the girl softly.

And D'Arcy went into Talbot's van to shake hands with him before he went. Then the juniors of St. Jim's trooped off and joined Gore and Skimpole outside the tent, and they went together to the railway station.

In a few minutes more the train was bearing them swiftly towards Rylcombe.

They arrived there, and walked down to the school in

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high spirits. They had had a most enjoyable afternoon out, and even if there were to be consequences to face, that was all in a day's work, as Figgins remarked.

"But I think it will be all right," Tom Merry remarked.

"When Ratty comes back he'll find Jack Blake in the School House—gated, as he ought to be. Who's to prove that Blake has been at the circus at all?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ratty can't say that he saw him there," grinned Kerr. "He did see him, as a matter of fact, but he doesn't know it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors entered the school, chuckling.

Blake easily dodged in across the shadowy quadrangle, and up to the Fourth Form dormitory, where he changed his clothes, in order not to have a single tell-tale sign of dust or mud about him. Then he went down to the Common-room, and started a game of chess with Digby.

CHAPTER 17.

Checkmate!

MR. RATCLIFF raged in the lion cage, in the darkness of the tent, as if he had been one of the wild animals for whom it was intended.

He shook the bars, and he shouted and threatened. But all was of no avail; and finally he gave it up, and waited in sullen wrath for his release.

It came at last. A light gleamed in the tent, and a voice was heard.

"The row seemed to come from here, signor."

"Somebody in the cage, Bill, perhaps."

"Oh, no; it's locked!"

"Well, then, what—"

"I am here," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a choking voice—"I am here. I insist upon being immediately released! You shall pay for this outrage!"

"My 'at!" ejaculated Bill. "There is somebody in the cage!"

"Release me immediately!"

"Hold on, Bill!"

"The key's in the lock, sir," said Bill.

"Yes, but hold on!" Signor Tomsonio gazed sternly at the New House master through the bars of the cage, the lantern gleaming upon Mr. Ratcliff's furious face. "Who are you?"

"You know me well enough."

"My 'at!" exclaimed Bill again. "It's the feller who was tryin' to look in under the edge of the tent, sir, when the performance was hon!"

"You—you ruffian!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff. "I was doing nothing of the kind."

"I found 'im on 'is 'ands and knees just outside the tent, sir."

"I had fallen down—"

"A likely story!"

"Lemme see," said the signor, peering at Mr. Ratcliff with close attention. "Are you the man I was speaking to some time back? You claimed to be a sword-swallower, and—"

"I am a master at St. Jim's," said Mr. Ratcliff furiously. "Oh, yes, I remember now! You were looking for your little boy."

The Housemaster nearly choked.

"I was looking for a boy belonging to my school."

"Have you found him?" asked the signor innocently.

"I have not, sir!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "I have not found him, because I have been trapped in this place in the most outrageous way, sir!"

"Dear me! What are you doing in that cage?"

"I was locked in here."

"Is there anything missing from the tent, Bill?"

"I don't see nothin', sir," said Bill, casting the light of the lantern round him with an air of keen scrutiny.

"Missing!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "Do you think I am a thief? I—"

"Then what are you doing in this tent?"

"I was brought here by a—a clown, who pretended that he was going to show me where Blake was!" panted the Housemaster.

The signor shook his head seriously.

"Mighty poor yarn!" he said. "You're either a thief, or drunk and disorderly. Still, perhaps we might let you off, if you promise that it shall never occur again—what?"

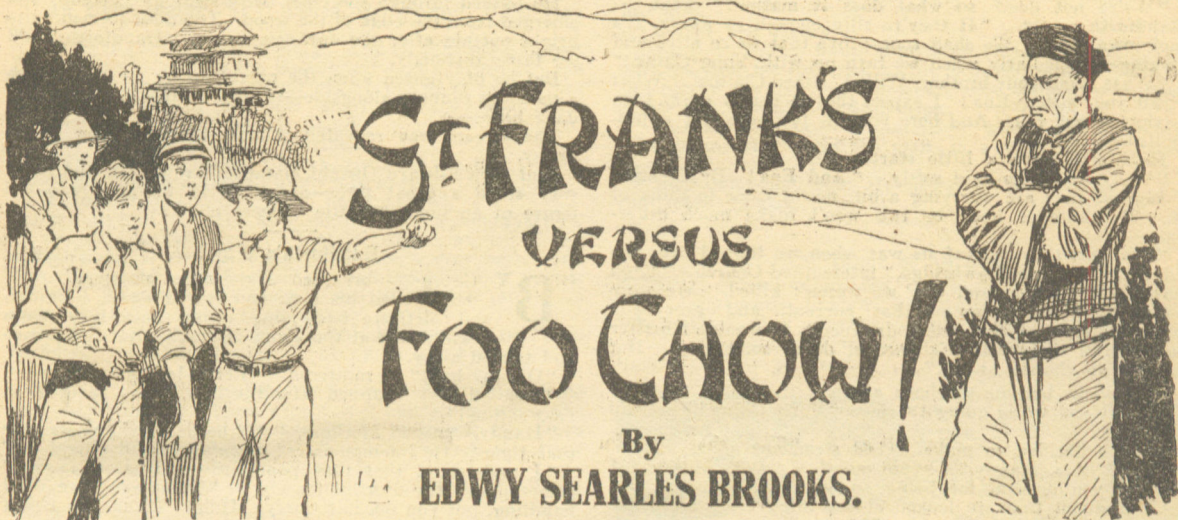
"Man—villain! I—"

"Let him out, Bill!"

The grinning Bill unlocked the door of the cage, and Mr. Ratcliff stumbled out. He was white and stuttering with rage. Had Bill been a little less muscular in appearance, Mr. Ratcliff would probably have assaulted him there and then.

(Continued on page 28.)

ALL-THRILLING SERIAL OF THE ST. FRANK'S CHUMS IN CHINA!



Yung Ching, of the St. Frank's Remove, has been kidnapped by Dr. Foo Chow, an all-powerful mandarin of inner China, who covets the province of Hu Kiang, ruled over by Yung Ching's father. A holiday party from St. Frank's set sail to rescue him, but they are captured by Foo Chow and imprisoned in his island stronghold. Edward Oswald Handforth and his chums, however, succeed in escaping.

The Scream in the Dusk !

THE dark, lithe form came stealthily through the sugar-canes, emerging into the dusk with noiseless movements. There he stood for a moment or two, looking across the adjoining rice-fields towards the lofty, graceful bamboo trees which formed a dense little wood farther on.

The lithe form moved forward again, vanishing amid some thick bushes like a shadow of the coming night. A tiger! A great, hungry, marauding beast of the Chinese countryside.

The bamboo wood was on rather high ground, overlooking the valley. In the rear the country rose into rocky wildernesses, with the great river vanishing amid the gorges. The view of the valley was a splendid one, although everything was now enshrouded in the deep dusk of evening.

There were stretches of young rice in the near foreground, the patches joining up with one another in successions of bright green, although this green was difficult to distinguish in the half-light. Away to the left was an orange grove, and to the right a field of sugar-cane. And villages were scattered about in endless profusion, sometimes half hidden among the dark banyan-trees. And beyond, now a mere blur, rose the high battlements of the city wall, with a pagoda or two. The roofs of the houses within the city were quite invisible, for these houses were of only one story.

A peaceful scene, but deceptive.

A Chinese boy was wandering idly along a pathway between two of the rice-fields. Just a child, having lost his way, perhaps. Farther away an anxious Chinaman was searching. And the tiger stood concealed amid the bushes, his luminous eyes fixed steadfastly upon that unsuspecting child.

And in the bamboo forest there were voices. Whispering voices, they were, with one decidedly stronger than the other two. And the language spoken was not one of the many Chinese languages, but English.

"I don't see why we should wait here any longer," the loud whisperer was saying. "It's nearly dark, and we might as well be pushing on."

"But you said we should wait until midnight—"

"I've changed my mind!" interrupted the other. "How the dickens shall we know when it's midnight, anyhow? Our watches have all stopped since we had that ducking in the river when we escaped, and there's no sense in hanging about doing nothing. Let's push on to the city—to Yang Fu!"

Edward Oswald Handforth and his two chums of Study D at St. Frank's were the owners of the

three whispering voices. Three junior schoolboys—hiding here, bedraggled and dishevelled, in the shadow of a bamboo wood, deep in the unknown recesses of Inner China.

Such a state of affairs seemed rather incongruous; but there was an excellent reason for the presence of these British schoolboys. Some miles away, imprisoned within the grounds of Dr. Foo Chow's island stronghold, were all the other members of the St. Frank's holiday party. And somewhere in Yang Fu, in the hands of his Chinese torturers, was Yung Ching, the little Chinese Removite.

"Do be sensible, Handy," urged Church. "It's sheer madness for us to venture into Yang Fu at all, at midnight or any other time; to try to get there now would be nothing else but lunacy. Don't you realise that we should be collared in less than ten minutes?"

"No, I don't!" retorted Handforth. "We're Scouts, aren't we?"

"Well, yes."

"We belong to the First St. Frank's Troop, don't we?"

"Of course we do."

"That's enough!"

"Enough for what?" asked McClure.

"Enough to assure us complete safety!" replied Handforth. "What we don't know about night tracking isn't worth learning! And you miserable weaklings squat there and tell me that we can't get across a few miles of deserted country!"

"You—you hopeless optimist!" snapped Church, stung into a display of spirit. "We can't go half a mile without hitting a village! We can't go in any direction without coming across some of Foo Chow's Chinese slaves! We're not in the Sahara Desert, you ass! We're in the most congested country in the world!"

Handforth waved an airy hand.

"We can dodge the villages," he said carelessly.

"And what about the dogs?" asked Church. "As soon as we get anywhere near a village or a house the dogs will set up an awful din and give the alarm. The whole thing is impossible, anyhow; but to start now would be simply asking for trouble at the top of our voices."

"Oh, what does it matter?" put in McClure. "Might as well get it over and done with. I don't suppose we shall be hurt. They'll just grab us and take us back to the stronghold. All the better, perhaps."

"All the better?" repeated Handforth.

"Yes," growled McClure. "Mr. Lee and Dorrie and the rest are probably worrying themselves thin over us, and our return would relieve their minds. I expect they think we're all dead."

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The boys of St. Frank's are famous throughout the world. This story of their holiday adventures in China is perhaps the most thrilling and entertaining narrative ever penned by famous Edwy Searles Brooks.

"Let them think it," said Edward Oswald.

"You—you callous rotter—"

"We're not dead, so what does it matter?" went on Handforth curtly. "If they're silly enough to worry, it's their own fault. We shall soon prove that we're alive and kicking—particularly when we turn up with Yung Ching!"

"What about your brother Willy?" asked Church. "What about your sister, Ena? I expect they're nearly crazy with anxiety about you. And here you sit, jawing about impossibilities!"

Handforth gave a little start.

"Willy, eh?" he said softly. "And Ena! By George! I suppose they are worrying a bit, now I come to think of it. But another hour or two won't make much difference—"

"The last they saw of us was when we topped over the edge of the rising drawbridge," interrupted Church. "Even now I can't understand why we weren't killed. We were swept down the gorge on that current, and everybody naturally believes that we're drowned. It wouldn't matter so much if there was a chance of doing something. But there's no chance at all."

Handforth became stubborn again.

"I tell you we're going to rescue Yung Ching!" he said doggedly.

Church decided to make a last strenuous effort.

"Look here, Handy," he said quietly. "Both Mac and I admire you no end for being so jolly determined. But isn't it about time we looked at the thing from a sensible angle? Think of the situation!"

"I've thought of it—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Church. "Yung Ching was kidnapped from St. Frank's and shoved on board Foo Chow's yacht. And Chingy managed to get a letter to St. Frank's, explaining—"

"Why repeat ancient history?" demanded Handforth tartly.

"Because I want to drive some common sense into your thick head!" retorted Church with exasperation. "Mr. Lee and a whole crowd of us followed Foo Chow's yacht in Lord Dorrimore's Wanderer, and then that beastly Chinaman's yacht turned out to be a warship in disguise, and the Wanderer was collared."

"That was the one fatal mistake!" said Handforth indignantly. "I was ashamed of old Dorrie for surrendering—"

"You chump, what else could he do?" put in McClure. "Didn't the Dragon fire her beastly guns on us? It was either surrender or sink! And both Mr. Lee and Dorrie had to think of the Moor View girls and the St. Frank's chaps."

"That's quite right," said Church, nodding. "And after that, Handy, we were brought up the unknown river into this part of China. We were shoved in Foo Chow's palace and treated like lords; but there's no chance of escape."

"You fathead, we have escaped!" sneered Handforth. Church nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"You—you crazy lunatic!" he panted. "If you think we've escaped, you must be off your rocker! There are tens of thousands of Chinese all round us—endless miles of Foo Chow's territory. We can't move a mile in any direction without meeting enemies. So what's the good of trying to rescue Yung Ching? We only know that he's in Yang Fu. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

Handforth was rather impressed.

"I expect you're right," he admitted grudgingly. "But I don't like to be beaten. Even if we fail we shall go down with flying colours. That's my argument. Anything's better than skulking here, idle."

"Foo Chow is a kind of king out here," said Church. "He's the governor of this province, and his word is law. Millions of Chinese are compelled to obey him. And Yung Ching's father is the governor of the adjoining province. And old Foo Chow means to collar his lands—"

"Yes, by torturing Chingy," growled Handforth. "The poor beggar is probably being put through it now! I tell you we've got to get on the move!" He rose to his feet resolutely. "We've got to start on the job at once. So the sooner we're off the better."

"Might as well humour him," muttered Church in McClure's ear. "We shall be copped and taken back to the palace, but—"

"What's that?" demanded Handforth suspiciously.

"Nothing!" said Church.

"If you chaps are going to whisper—"

Handforth broke off with a start. Without warning, a sound had come through the night, splitting it with startling suddenness. A scream, a terrified, agonised wail of horror. The last sounds of that dreadful note quivered on the air as Church and McClure leapt to their feet.

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"What—what was it?" gasped McClure.

"We'll soon see!" snapped Handforth between his teeth.

He pushed through the trees, with their great stems, and emerged from the edge of the wood. The dusk seemed quite bright outside after the darkness within. Handforth could see fairly distinctly.

But he only gazed upon the neighbouring rice-field, with a pathway running alongside— But what was that? That dark blur—

The scream was repeated, almost blood-curdling in its agony.

And then Edward Oswald Handforth saw. On that pathway stood a great tiger—and held in its jaws was the figure of an innocent little Chinese child!

Handforth's Way!

"BY George!" breathed Handforth, staggered. He rubbed his eyes and stared again. Church and McClure had joined him, and they were deathly sick at the sight. Church covered his eyes and turned away.

"Oh, my hat!" he muttered. "Let's—let's get away—"

"You idiot!" snapped Handforth. "We've got to rescue him!"

"Handy," gasped McClure, "it'll be death if you go near that tiger! He's a man-eater! Don't you understand—"

"I understand that that poor little kid is in agony!" interrupted Handforth tensely. "This needs careful handling, but you needn't worry. Huh! Think I'm afraid of a rotten tiger?"

Edward Oswald Handforth was a fellow who never counted the odds. He would cheerfully enter into a fight which meant certain defeat; but he always entered it with the conviction that he would win. His optimism was supreme. His belief in his own powers was without limit.

Until now he had discredited the yarns of tigers in China. He had always pictured China as a place where there were lots of funny bridges, and plenty of opium dens, and endless willow-trees, and any amount of smugglers and secret societies. But he had scoffed at tigers.

Yet here was one in full sight! Here was a man-eater, with a helpless little Chinese boy in its grip! It seemed incredible that these deadly beasts should roam wild in such a populated country. But it was a fact.

Church and McClure grabbed their leader and held him back.

"Don't, Handy!" panted Church. "You'll be killed!"

"What about that poor kid?"

"He's dead already—"

"Think I'm afraid of a cat!" roared Handforth indignantly. "The thing's only an overgrown pussy! You simply need plenty of noise to frighten these beastly things away! Watch me!"

Church and McClure were no cowards, but they were terribly afraid of their leader. They know how reckless he was, and they had a terrible dread that he would go to his death in front of their very eyes. They always thought before they acted, and thus they hesitated. But Handforth invariably acted without thinking at all, and in nine cases out of ten he was amazingly lucky.

The tiger was about two hundred yards away, crouching over its prey in triumph. For the moment it was making no attempt to bolt, but stood there in the pathway, its eyes fixed upon another figure, farther along.

A Chinaman had appeared, and he was stunned and frozen. He stood there, just staring. His stupefaction was not difficult to understand, since that little boy was his youngest son. And a Chinaman's sons are precious to him. His daughters are not of much account.

But as for making any effort to rescue the youngster, the Chinaman was helpless. The fright which had gripped him kept him motionless. He could do nothing but stand there and stare, fascinated.

And in the meantime Handforth rushed to the rescue. Unfortunately, he decided to take a short cut across the rice-field, and plunged deeply into the thick, oozy mud. Rice will only grow in this moist, muddy state. And before Handforth had gone a couple of yards he was half-bogged.

"My hat!" he gasped. "I—I didn't realise—"

Another scream rent the air as the tiger swung his prey clear of the ground. Then, deliberately, he moved off across the rice-field, falling into exactly the same trap as Handforth himself. One bound, and he was hindered by the clinging mud.

Handforth clenched his teeth and made a desperate effort. Somehow he reached the path, having seen that the little Chinese was only held by his clothing. Perhaps he was only just scratched. There was a distinct chance of saving his life, and Handforth thought of nothing else.

Once on the path, he gave a wild bound and rushed in

chase of the tiger. The fact that it might turn upon him and strike death in one fearful blow of its paw never occurred to him.

"All right, young 'un!" yelled Handforth. "I'll save you!"

The tiger paused, half turning. And in that same second Handforth reached for the beast's tail and grasped it. He gave a tremendous tug which nearly pulled it out by the roots; and with a fearsome snarl of rage the brute dropped its prey and swung round.

"Oh!" panted McClure, horrified.

"He's done!" muttered Church, covering his eyes.

But Handforth appeared quite safe so far.

"Take that, you ugly brute!" he thundered.

He delivered a hefty kick on the tiger's hindquarters. It was only at that moment that Handforth gained a full appreciation of the situation. The tiger's eyes were upon him, the hot breath was nearly making him sick as the waves if it came to his nostrils, and the brute's jaws were open, the teeth showing in a deadly snarl.

One second later, and Handforth's life would have been forfeited. But the leader of Study D acted first.

Crash!

In spite of the overwhelming sense of fear which came over him—for the tiger's aspect was enough to scare the strongest—he brought his left round with all the force for which it was celebrated. The blow struck the tiger over the left eye with devastating force.

"That's another one to be getting on with!" roared Handforth.

Biff!

"And that's for luck!" he snorted.

Again his fist came round, and this time the tiger was struck on the point of its nose. The great animal didn't hesitate for a fraction of a second. It gave a bellow of fear, turned, and bolted.

In the whole course of its life the creature had never encountered anything of this sort before. Had Handforth attempted to run, he would have been clawed and probably killed. But Edward Oswald, as usual, had taken the offensive, and the rest was a matter of course.

The tiger, startled nearly out of its wits by those two blows, had come to the conclusion that this aggressive fellow was dangerous, and so he turned tail and made off. There was nothing surprising in the fact. Other wild creatures, in other situations, have bolted under similar circumstances. The extraordinary feature of the case was that Handforth had had enough coolness to act in that bold, fearless way.

"My only hat!" he muttered blankly.

He was more surprised than the tiger, for, during those last few moments, he had practically given up hope. Close proximity to the tiger had brought full realisation to him. But now, in a flash, his recent feeling of horror left him, and he looked round with cool contempt.

"Tigers!" he snorted. "Who's afraid of tigers?"

"Handy!" came a yell from the bamboo wood. "Oh, Mac, he's safe!"

"And the tiger's fled!" gasped McClure.

They were simply overwhelmed. Expecting to see their leader mauled and killed before their eyes, they now beheld him the victor. They were so astonished that they could hardly form their words. With one accord they hurried to Handforth's side.

"You scared him!" said Church breathlessly. "I've never seen anything like it in all my life! Handy, it was wonderful—"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Clear out of the way! By George! Look at this poor kid! He's got to be attended to—quickly. I don't think he's dead, but he's been badly mauled!"

Handforth was on his knees beside the Chinese child. Even in the dimness of the dusk the unfortunate little boy's condition could be seen—blood streaming down his face and chest. He was unconscious, too.

"Let's—let's rush him to the wood!" muttered Church. "That tiger might come back—"

"He'd better not!" interrupted Handforth grimly. "I'll give him another dose if he tries any more of his beastly tricks. Hi, you!" he added, turning and beckoning to the Chinaman. "Do you know anything about this kid?"

The Chinaman, who had witnessed the whole affair, came up with a dazed expression in his eyes. He was an unprepossessing-looking fellow, with work-soiled clothing and a greasy pigtail. He was obviously a land labourer—a coolie of some kind.

"It's no good talking to him—he can't understand English," said Church. "We'd better take the kid to a stream somewhere. There's one on the other side of that wood. This man may be a spy—"

"You've got spies on the brain!" interrupted Handforth. "Dry up! Can't you see the man's harmless as a kitten?"

He might know where the kid lives, and then we can take it home!"

"The way you scared that tiger was miraculous!" said McClure.

"Bother the tiger!"

Handforth didn't want to hear anything more about the incident, and he gathered up the injured child in his arms and turned towards the Chinaman, who seemed to be quite dumb and devoid of all emotion.

"This kid," snapped Handforth—"where does he live?"

"Him my son," said the man, in a high-pitched, husky voice.

"Your son, eh?" said Handforth. "By George! You can speak English, then!"

The Home of Ah Fong!

THE Chinaman nodded vigorously, the words having apparently brought him back to a normal state. Until that moment he had been held in a kind of trance, still terrified by the knowledge that the tiger was near at hand.



In spite of the sense of fear which came over him, Handforth acted without hesitation. His famous left shot out and took the tiger full on the nose. Biff! "Take that to be getting on with!" roared Handy.

"Me Ah Fong," he babbled. "Poor Chinaman—make living wateche lice fields. My son, he go off. Lostee. Me come search one time. Little Seng badee boy. Wander away—"

"Seng, eh?" interrupted Handforth. "So that's his name. Well, look here, old crinkled face, where do you live? I'm afraid your son is pretty badly hurt, and he's got to be attended to at once. My hat! He's got an awful gash on his shoulder, here. We've got to bathe him quickly."

"Where do you live?" asked Church hurriedly.

"Me livee just close," replied Ah Fong, pointing vaguely into the dusk. "We goee chop chop. Little Seng muchee hurt. Allee same bad."

"Well, lead the way, and we'll do the talking afterwards," said Handforth briskly. "Home!" he added. "Get a move on!"

The Chinaman understood by Handforth's gesture more than his words, and hurried off down the path. By this time Church and McClure had completely forgotten any possibility of recapture. This incident had altered the whole course of events, and it hardly seemed likely that

Ah Fong would give information against the boys after one of them had saved the life of his son.

But Church and McClure were rather doubtful even on this point. They had heard that the Chinese are peculiar in their ideas of gratitude. They had also heard that the Chinese regard human life very cheaply. There was no telling what might happen during the next hour.

But one thing was certain. Sheer humanity made it imperative for them to take this injured boy to his home and render first-aid. The chums of Study D were all Boy Scouts, and were fully acquainted with every essential in first-aid work. Their Scouts' training was promising to come in very useful.

That Ah Fong should speak English—although a very broken pidgin English—was another surprise. The juniors had taken it for granted that all the people here would understand nothing but their own language. This doesn't mean Chinese, but their own brand of Chinese. In the neighbouring province of Hu Kiang, ruled over by Yung Li Chang, the language was probably totally and absolutely different.

There are many distinct languages in China, which makes it so difficult for the foreigner to attempt any learning of the native tongue. The Chinese of the different provinces can only converse if they happen to understand the peculiar pidgin lingo which is universal.

Ah Fong happened to be one of these men. He had lived for some years in Canton, and had come in contact with Europeans. So he did not regard Handforth & Co. with the distrust and suspicion that a purely local native might have done.

Without another word, he led the way through a clump of sugar-canes, and then round a willow-lined stream to a characteristic Chinese house of the lower order. It was little more than a hut, but had the distinction of standing alone. Some distance farther on was a village, with the houses clustered together with unnecessary congestion. Ah Fong's house was isolated because he was a watcher—a man who kept guard over the rice fields and sugar plantations.

Handforth & Co. found themselves amid strange surroundings. They entered the house, and were rather horrified by the hundred-and-one smells which assailed them. A few pigs were knocking about, and in the dim light from the single native lamp the interior of the house seemed squalid beyond all description.

The juniors didn't realise that this was a perfectly normal Chinese household.

There were several others in the apartment—Ah Fong's wife—a stolid, unemotional sort of woman, who only stared at her injured son with a dull sort of lethargy. There were two older boys, and a couple of small daughters. The smell of food hinted that the evening meal was in preparation.

"Water!" said Handforth, after he had recovered from his first surprise. "Come on, Ah Fong, or whatever your name is—I want a bowl of water and plenty of bandages! Some ointment, too, if you've got any."

Ah Fong stared.

"No savvy," he said, shaking his head. "Speakee too quickly! Ah Fong not understand—"

"Water!" interrupted Handforth distinctly.

"Me fetchee doctor?" asked the Chinaman.

"Blow the doctor!" retorted Handforth. "I've heard about your native doctors! He'll probably kill the kid before he gets a chance to recover. I'm going to attend to him myself. Water!"

The Chinaman understood, and spoke to his wife. She vanished into another hovel-like apartment, and presently returned with an earthenware bowl of cold water. By this time Handforth had placed the injured child on the table and was stripping off its muddy and blood-bespattered clothing.

"Good man!" he said heartily. "Now some rags. This stuff," he added, indicating his shirt. "Linen! Cotton! Heaps of it!"

"Plentee cotton," said Ah Fong unemotionally.

"Mac, come and help here," went on Handforth. "Don't be squeamish, you two! It's a pretty nasty sort of job, but it's a matter of life and death. We've got to put a hustle on, too."

For the next fifteen minutes very little was spoken.

Handforth & Co. not only stripped the unfortunate child, but carefully bathed his wounds, the Ah Fong family watching, meanwhile, in a silent circle. There was something rather pathetic in their very silence. They seemed to know that these strangers were better able to attend to little Seng than they.

Furthermore, they were incapable of washing and binding the wounds as Handforth was doing. They watched with ever-growing admiration, although they said nothing,

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and only allowed their thoughts to find expression in their gaze.

Little Seng's hurts, much to Handforth & Co.'s relief, proved less serious than they had appeared at first. When the child had been stripped he had seemed beyond all hope of recovery—a poor, pitiful, mangled scrap of humanity, smothered in mud and blood in a horrifying fashion.

But the liberal application of cold water made a startling difference.

There were only two serious gashes—one on the shoulder and one in the back. The rest were mere skin-deep scratches, which had bled profusely, but which now revealed their true character. Seng, too, under the soothing cold water treatment, was conscious, his little eyes wide open, and his face screwed up with pain. He moaned slightly, but bore up well.

"You're the boy!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "By jingo, he's a little brick! Some more of those rags, Church! Buck up!"

Church and McClure were surprised by the tenderness which their usually clumsy leader was displaying. Handforth was always the same—when it came to a matter of really vital concern, he was fully capable.

He had washed the wounds with great care, and had bandaged them scientifically—as his Scouts' training had taught him. By the time he had finished, and when little Seng was wearing a clean outfit, he looked amazingly different.

"There you are," said Handforth. "There's nothing to beat cold water. What you've got to do Fong, old chap, is to take those bandages off night and morning, and keep the wounds thoroughly clean. Understand?"

Ah Fong looked rather blank.

"You speakee too quick," he said, shaking his head. "No savvy."

"Don't try, Handy," advised Church. "You've done everything possible, and you can rely upon the boy's mother to look after him now."

Handforth turned to the good lady.

"Put him to bed," he suggested. "He needs sleep." Not being able to understand a word of English, pidgin or otherwise, Mrs. Ah Fong merely looked stolid. But her husband grasped the idea, and the injured boy was carried gently out, and when Ah Fong returned he spoke rapidly for some time to his family.

From the actions he made during the course of this recital, it was evident that he was giving a description of Handforth's fight with the tiger. Until his son had been dealt with he had said nothing, but now he made up for his previous silence.

"What's the ass saying?" growled Handforth suspiciously. "Telling 'em about what happened, I suppose? It's all rot! There's nothing to make a song about."

"They're all looking pretty excited, anyhow," said Church. "Even Mac and I haven't been able to say much, Handy. But the way you scared that tiger was worth a million quid! I can't understand why the dickens you're not dead! The brute might have killed you on the spot!"

"We don't want to talk about trifles," said Handforth curtly. "We've done everything we can, so we'll be off. Perhaps Ah Fong can put us on the right road to Yang Fu. He might be able to show us a bit of the way."

Handforth paused, for Ah Fong was regarding him and his chums with a rather peculiar expression. Perhaps he was taking stock of the three British boys. They certainly presented an incongruous appearance.

All three were dressed in stained white shirts and flannel trousers. But all of them had been in the river, and their clothing had dried on them, with devastating effect. They were a disreputable-looking trio.

"You foieign boys from Excellency's palace," said Ah Fong at last. "You not dead! You muchee alive!"

"Not dead?" said Handforth. "Of course we're not dead!"

"Plentee talk that you die in liver," explained Ah Fong. "In liver?" said Handforth, staring.

"In the river, you ass!" whispered Church.

"Oh, the river?" said Handy. "Yes, we were in the river—"

"Coolie man say he see you sink," said Ah Fong. "Two coolie man say. Plentee soon Excellency hear, and not believe. Him sendee soldiers to search. Him soldiers lookkee for you."

"By George!" said Handforth. "The soldiers are looking for us, eh? I say, that's pretty decent of you to give us a warning."

"You savee my son from tiger," said Ah Fong simply. "No grateful. My family lookkee on you as honourable fiends. Plentee help. We likee to makee you safe. Excellency killee us if he know. But allee same, safe here."

"We want to get to Yang Fu," said Handforth. "It's jolly good of you to offer to help us, but we don't want to get you in trouble. Just shove us on the right road to Yang Fu, and we'll be satisfied."

Ah Fong looked alarmed.

"Not go?" he urged. "Muchee danger! Soldiers catchee you. One time chop chop!"

"They catch us which?"

"He means they'll collar us at once," said McClure. "He's right, too."

"You all stayee here," said Ah Fong. "All safee in my house. Eat from my miselable table. You honour us? You agree? Go out and quickly catchee. Stay here, and allee safe. Ah Fong your friend."

Handforth hesitated.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "It might be a lot better to wait until later on. And you said something about a feed, didn't you? What about it, you chaps? Shall we stay here for a feed, or hurry on to Yang Fu?"

Church and McClure were cunning.

"I think we'd better make a move at once," suggested Church carelessly.

"Yes, let's push off," added McClure.

Handforth firmly shook his head.

"Rats!" he retorted. "We'll accept Ah Fong's hospitality, and stay where we are!"

The Prisoners of the Palace!

DR. FOO CHOW took his seat at the head of the main table in the sumptuous dining-hall, and smiled pleasantly upon his guests. As usual, he was spotless. His evening dress was irreproachable, and his whole manner was that of a genial, punctilious host.

The scene itself was one of splendour.

There was nothing Chinese in the appearance of the dining-hall—or, if it came to that, in any of the apartments of this wonderful marble palace. The whole architecture was fantastic, but rather like the dream palace of a fairy tale.

The dinner-tables were resplendent with snowy linen and glittering silver. The cut glass was of the finest, and there were glorious bowls of flowers at intervals. At the main table sat Mr. Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Mr. and Mrs. Beverley Stokes, and Irene Manners and her chums of the Moor View School. At the other tables were the other members of the holiday party, mainly consisting of Remove fellows.

"We are promised a break in the fine weather before long," remarked Dr. Foo Chow, in perfect English. "My learned experts inform me that there is a possibility of rain in the near future. A pity, for it may debar you from the pleasures of my gardens. It will grieve me if there is any hint of monotony. I beg of you to make any suggestions that may occur to you."

PEN PALS

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The guests were all silent.

"Perhaps I am unwise to make any reference to pleasures this evening," went on Dr. Foo Chow gently. "The tragedy of our three young companions is still weighing heavily upon us. But we Chinese do not regard life so gravely as you British people do."

"By gad, I believe you!" said Lord Dorrimore grimly.

"We hold that our greatest happiness comes after death," proceeded Dr. Foo Chow. "So what is there in life to regret? We leave troubles and woes behind us. Death is the glory we all look forward to."

"It will be better, Dr. Foo Chow, if we avoid these discussions," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Nothing can alter the fact that we are prisoners in your hands—that we must do your bidding under pain of that death of which you speak. It pleases you to treat us as your guests, but that does not make any difference to the concrete facts. I ask you to avoid these controversial discussions."

"Hear, hear!" muttered Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Stokes.

Dr. Foo Chow shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you are right," he purred. "Perhaps the ladies will be interested in the tennis courts which will be open in the Eastern section of the grounds to-morrow. We have rackets and balls and nets in plenty—"

"Please don't!" interrupted Mrs. Stokes coldly. "I can safely speak for the girls, and say that we shall not be interested in any tennis or games of any description."

Several of the girls nodded.

"It is a pity," said Dr. Foo Chow, shaking his head. "I feared that you might adopt this attitude, but I was hoping otherwise. To-morrow, perhaps, you will all realise that this pessimism is quite unnecessary."

None of the guests knew exactly how they got through the meal. They were all feeling highly strung. Lord Dorrimore, indeed, was watched closely and consistently by Nelson Lee, for the latter feared that his lordship would fling himself at Dr. Foo Chow's throat at any moment. There was something fiendish about this cultured Chinaman.

He uttered no threats; he maintained his pretence of being a perfect host. And yet all the time he was a fiend in human form. His very treatment of his prisoners was a form of refined torture. They were all beginning to feel that it would be better if they were flung into prison cells, and treated frankly as prisoners. Then they would know where they were and what to expect.

But now they lived on the edge of a volcano, never knowing when there would be an eruption. At any moment Dr. Foo Chow might decide to submit them to untold horrors. They were in his grip, utterly and completely.

The "deaths" of Handforth and Church and McClure hung heavily over the holiday party like a brooding agony. They could hardly discredit Dr. Foo Chow's story that the three boys had perished—that eye-witnesses had actually seen them go under, struggling in the deadly current.

For hadn't they seen the chums of Study D topple over the edge of the rising drawbridge? Hadn't they seen them swept down the gorge? There seemed no possibility that they could have escaped death.

"Lee, old man, there's a limit to everythin', an' I'm just near that limit," exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, as he and Mr. Nelson Lee and Mr. Beverley Stokes strolled in the grounds in the dusk. "I can't stand much more of this. I'm sorry, but somethin's goin' to explode soon."

"I must admit I'm feeling the same," muttered Barry Stokes.

They were both looking flushed and tense. Lee, on the other hand, was as cool and collected as ever. His feelings were just the same as those of his companions, but he had trained himself to hide his emotions.

Some little distance in the rear came Umlosi, the giant African chief. Umlosi never allowed Dorrie to get out of his sight. He had a great love for his "N'Kose," and was ready to guard him in the event of any danger. For, although his beloved spear had been taken away from him, he still had his hands.

"I can understand your feelings, Dorrie, old man," said Nelson Lee at length. "I'm no different. But you mustn't allow that explosion to take place. Our duty is to hold ourselves in check—to set an example of calmness to the young people."

"They're not with us now," growled Dorrie. "I'm tellin' you this in private, an' it's no good beatin' about the bush. Somethin's goin' to explode," he repeated deliberately. "I've just got to that stage when I've got to do somethin' or bust!"

(Whatever you do, don't miss the thrilling developments in next week's chapters of this super serial. Order your GEM early.)

GUSSY'S STAR TURN!

(Continued from page 22.)

The signor gave him a stern look. "Now, my man," he said, in his heaviest style, "you'd better cut off. I won't have you arrested on suspicion, because I don't want any bother; but if I find you hanging round my circus again I'll have you run in, and don't you forget it! Scoot!"

"I—I—I—"

"Oh, scoot!"

Mr. Ratcliff almost staggered from the tent.

He could do nothing there; and he felt that if Blake had been at the circus, he was gone now. There was nothing to do until he returned to St. Jim's, and then—

He hurried away from the circus pitch, and reached the station, and walked up and down the platform for a quarter of an hour, waiting for the local train to Rylcombe.

He fumed and raged all the way to Rylcombe, fortunately having a carriage to himself; for his state of mind certainly bore out the signor's declaration that he was drunk and disorderly.

He nursed his wrath during the walk to St. Jim's, his temper not being improved by a shower of rain that began to fall when he was half-way to the school.

He arrived at St. Jim's and let himself in, and stalked across the quadrangle to the School House.

Straight in he went, and to Mr. Railton's study, and there he found the School House master, who was chatting with Herr Schneider, the German master.

Both of them stared in blank amazement at the New House master as he came in—or, rather, burst in, without the formality of knocking.

Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"Mr. Ratcliff, is anything the matter?"

"Yes, sir," almost shouted Mr. Ratcliff; "something certainly is the matter. Blake has broken bounds, sir, and gone to Wayland!"

"Indeed!"

"He has been to the circus there, sir!"

Mr. Railton looked worried. He had forgotten all about Blake and his gating, and he had not the faintest idea why Mr. Ratcliff was so excited.

"I went there to catch the boy in the very act of disobedience, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff savagely, "and I have been brutally assaulted by his low friends in the circus!"

"You are quite sure Blake was there?"

"Quite sure, Mr. Railton."

"I mean, did you see him?"

"I did not see him!"

"I cannot act in this matter without evidence," said Mr. Railton quietly. "If you prove to me, or give me your word, that Blake was there, I can act. Had you any reliable information on the point?"

"Yes, I had!" snarled the New House master. "I was told so by a boy who saw him there—a boy belonging to Blake's own Form and House."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"A boy who will tell tales will tell falsehoods also, as a rule," said Mr. Railton. "I presume the boy was no friend of Blake's, either, or he would not have spoken on the matter at all. You did not see Blake yourself?"

"I have said that I did not."

"Then I do not see what can be done."

"What! The boy is probably still out of the House!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"In that case, of course, I can act," said Mr. Railton. "Pray excuse me a few minutes, Herr Schneider, while I ascertain if Blake is in the House."

And Mr. Railton left the study, followed by the New House master, and as they approached the junior Common-room, the voice of Jack Blake was heard to exclaim:

"Check!"

"Oh, rats!" said Digby. "I didn't notice your blessed knight!"

Mr. Railton smiled, and looked into the room. Blake and Digby were playing chess, and Tom Merry, Lowther, Kangaroo, and Gore were sitting round watching the game.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton. "Blake does not appear to be out of the House."

And he walked back to his own study, Mr. Ratcliff following him.

"Do you mean to let the matter drop here, Mr. Railton?"

The School House master looked at him steadily.

"I do not see what else I can do," he said. "If there was a tittle of evidence against Blake, I could act. I cannot take the word of a tale-bearer, and I will not force the boy to incriminate himself. I am sorry you had such an unpleasant time at the circus; but, surely, Mr. Ratcliff, it was not worth so long a journey simply to catch a junior in the act of breaking bounds—for so harmless a purpose as visiting a circus?"

"Mr. Railton—"

"If Blake had done as you suggest, I should punish him, under the circumstances," said the School House master.

"But I—"

"Oh, very well, sir!" said Mr. Ratcliff briefly, hardly able to contain himself. "Very well, indeed!"

And he stalked away towards the door. As luck would have it, he met Mellish of the Fourth on the School House steps. Mellish smirked to the master, expecting an agreeable nod, at least, after his valuable service of the afternoon. But Mr. Ratcliff was not in an agreeable temper. Indeed, he was half-inclined to believe that, after all, Blake had never been to the circus, and that the cad of the Fourth had been japing him.

To Mellish's surprise, he received a ringing box on the ear that sent him reeling. He staggered into the House, and Mr. Ratcliff stalked away across the quad, leaving Mellish rubbing his reddened ear in wonder and wrath.

In the Junior Common-room, half a dozen juniors were chuckling over a game of chess.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's checkmate, you know."

"Eh?" said Blake. "It's check; but—"

"I wasn't alludin' to that game, deah boy. I was alludin' to Watty."

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy's right!" chuckled Tom Merry. "It's checkmate for Ratty this time, and no mistake! This is where we smile!"

And they smiled!

THE END.

(Watch out for "UNDER SUSPICION!" next week's super long complete story of the Chums of St. Jim's. Give your newsgate a standing order for the GEM to avoid risking disappointment.)

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