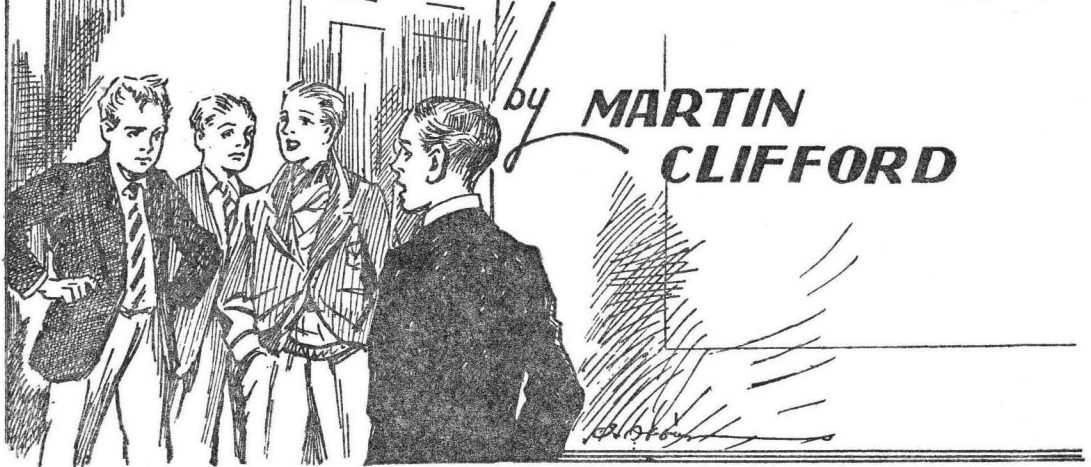


ARTHUR AUGUSTUS'S CHRISTMAS PARTY



by **MARTIN
CLIFFORD**

Chapter One.

GUSSY'S GHOST STORY.

"HAUNTED!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
"Yaas, wathah."

Six fellows, in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's gazed at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus's noble visage was quite serious. Apparently he regarded the family ghost at his ancestral home as a thing to be taken seriously. If so, he was the only fellow in the study who did.

"Rot!" said Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bosh!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Tosh!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

Merry, Manners and Lowther smiled.

Being guests in Study No. 6, the three Shell fellows did not remark that it was rot, or bosh, or tosh. But they smiled. Blake and Herries and Dig belonged to the study, so they expressed their opinion with the frankness customary in the Fourth Form.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass

in his noble eye, and surveyed the three Fourth-formers severely.

"I wepeat," he said, with dignity, "that the old tuwwet at Eastwood House is weputed to be haunted."

"Seen the spook?" asked Blake.

"I have not seen the ghost, Blake," answered Arthur Augustus, stressing the word "ghost." "Spook" evidently seemed to him below the dignity of a family ghost.

"Anybody else seen it?" grinned Herries.

"Not in wecent times, I believe."

"Sort of invisible ghost!" remarked Digby. "Well, if he stays invisible, he won't worry us, Gussy."

They were discussing the Christmas holidays, round the fire in Study No. 6 after tea. St. Jim's was about to break up for Christmas, and Arthur Augustus was taking half-a-dozen friends home with him for the holidays. It was a very cheery party in the study. Only the day before, Tom Merry and Co. had beaten Carcroft School at soccer, in the last match before Christmas, by three goals to two. It was Gussy's aristocratic foot that had kicked the odd goal. So Gussy was a man whom his friends delighted to honour. They

were prepared to take his remarks on the subject of soccer with all seriousness. But on the subject of ghosts, they smiled.

"But who's the jolly old ghost, and why?" asked Monty Lowther.

"It is the ghost of a chap whose name I forget, who pewished in the old tuwwet in the weign of King What's-his-name," explained Arthur Augustus. "He was imprisoned there by one of my ancestahs."

"Your aunt must have been a fierce old lady," remarked Lowther.

"I did not say anythin' about my aunt! What do you mean, Lowthah?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass on the funny man of the Shell.

"Your aunt's sisters would be your aunts, wouldn't they?" asked Lowther, innocently. "So if the chap was imprisoned by one of your aunt's sisters—"

"Weally, Lowthah, I did not say one of my aunt's sistahs, I said one of my ancestahs! I wegard you as a widiculous ass, Lowthah."

There was a chuckle in Study No. 6.

"Of course, I do not weally believe in ghosts," confessed Arthur Augustus. "But it is a vevy old legend, and the servants at Eastwood House do not like goin' neah the old tuwwet aftah dark. Stwange sounds have been heard fwom the old tuwwet—stwange and unearthly sounds—"

"Well, strange and unearthly sounds have been heard from this study, if you come to that," said Blake, "when you've been doing one of your tenor solos."

"You uttah ass!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are going to talk like a silly ass, Blake—"

"I'll leave that to you, old chap!"

"So the jolly old turret is haunted by a jolly old ghost, Gussy?" said Tom Merry. "Just the thing for Christmas!"

"I have mentioned the mattah," continued Arthur Augustus, after bestowing a withering glare on Jack Blake, "because it wathah concerns you fellows, as you are comin' home with me for the Chwistmas hols. Your quartahs will be on the cowwidah leadin' to the old tuwwet, and though I wegard it as extwemely impwobable that the ghost will walk, you might feel wathah nervous about it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We're not afraid of ghosts, Gussy."

"If any!" murmured Manners.

"If the jolly old ghost walks, we'll put salt on his tail!" declared Monty Lowther.

"Let's have the ghost story," suggested Tom. "Let's see—it was in the reign of King What's-his-name, I think you said."

"I don't seem to remember that monarch in history class!" remarked Monty Lowther, thoughtfully. "Sure it wasn't King Thingummybob, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I nevah seem to wemembah dates and things," said Arthur Augustus, "I daresay young Wally could tell you—my young bwothah is vevy good at dates."

"He's pretty good at figs, too," remarked Lowther, "I saw him scoffing a whole box in the tuck-shop in break."

"I do not mean that kind of dates, Lowthah. You are wathah dense, old chap. When I say dates, I mean dates, of course, not dates."

"Clear as mud!" agreed Lowther.

"Oh, wats! I will tell you the ghost stowy with pleasuah, deah boys, if you would care to heah it. Pewwaps we had bettah put the light on, or you may feel cweepy."

At which there was another chuckle.

Outside the School House, the December darkness was thick. Snowflakes drifted on a keen wintry wind, which wailed among the old red chimney-pots of St. Jim's. Within, all was warm and cosy. A bright fire leaped and sparkled in the grate, ruddy firelight illumining the room. The juniors, talking round the fire after tea, had not troubled to put on the light. Arthur Augustus, always considerate, made a movement to rise, to turn it on, lest the other fellows should feel nervy when he related the ghostly tale of the phantom of Eastwood House.

"No, don't, Gussy," said Tom. "Ghost stories are best told in the firelight. Go ahead and make our flesh creep."

"Oh, vevy well, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, re-settling himself in his chair, "I daresay young Wally could tell the stowy bettah, as he wemembahs names and dates and things, which somehow nevah seem to stick in my memowy. Howevah, I will tell you all I wemembah of the legend

of the ghost of What-do-you-call-him, who pewished in the old stone tuwwet."

Several winks were exchanged among the half-dozen juniors.

In the firelit room, with flickering flames making strange shadows dance in the corners, a ghost story might have been creepy: but hardly so as related by Arthur Augustus. The tale of What-do-you-call-him, in the reign of King What's-his-name, seemed unlikely to make the flesh creep.

"It was a vewy long time ago," commenced Arthur Augustus. "In the days when knights were bold, you know."

"Is it a cricket story?" asked Monty.

"Nothin' of the sort, Lowthah. I don't know whethah they played cwicket in those days at all, but there is nothin' about cwicket in the stowy."

"Didn't you say the knights were bowled?"

"Bai Jove! If you are goin' to be a funny ass, Lowthah—"

"Shut up, Monty," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Don't mind him, Gussy—he just can't help it. Carry on."

"It was in the days when knights were bold," continued Arthur Augustus, with a severe glance at Lowther, "I don't know exactly why the dwarf—he was a dwarf, you know, they used to have dwarfs in those days hangin' about gweat men's castles—I don't know why he was imprisoned in the old tuwwet: but there he was. He was the earl's jestah, and pewwaps he had been too cheeky, or somethin'. Anyhow he was shut up in the old stone tuwwet, which is still standin', the vewy oldest part of Eastwood House. He pewished there."

"Poor perisher!" sighed Lowther.

"If you are goin' to intewwupt me with idiotic wemarks, Lowthah—"

"Shut up, Monty! Go it, old scout."

"The unfortunate dwarf was a pwisonah in the tuwwet for yahs and yahs and yahs," went on Arthur Augustus. "But at last, when Chwistmas came wound once more, he pewished. It was wild wintah weathah, the snow was on the gwound, and the wild wind woarin'—ovah the woofs. In the midst of the wild woar, a gwoan was heard fwom the old tuwwet, and aftah that—silence! When they ascended the tuwwet stair, and unbarred the door, they

found him dead. It was his last gwoan that had been heard."

Arthur Augustus paused, apparently for dramatic effect.

He glanced round at the circle of faces, glimmering in the firelight, perhaps for a sign of nerviness or creepiness. But no such sign met his eye. Six cheery young faces were quite unperturbed.

"Is that the lot?" inquired Blake.

"That is not the lot, Blake. Fwom that time, stwange sounds have been heard fwom the old tuwwet, wesemblin' the last gwoan of the unfortunate dwarf, when the weathah is wild and wuff. Of course," added Arthur Augustus, "it might be the wind in the chimney, or somethin' like that. But nobody weally likes goin' neah the old tuwwet aftah dark, especially at Chwistmas time. A stwange white figure has been seen to descend the tuwwet stair, and glide along the cowwidah—at least, that is the twadition—and in the darkness it is heard to gwoan."

"Well, if we see a strange white figure knocking about, we'll jolly well give it something to groan for," said Blake.

"It hasn't been seen in wecent times," went on Arthur Augustus, "and as a mattah of fact, I don't see how it can evah have been seen at all, as ghosts are all wot. But that is the twadition: and if you fellows feel nervy about it—"

"Not a lot!" smiled Tom Merry.

"Not so's you'd notice it!" yawned Blake.

"I don't sort of think that we shall hear the ghostly groan—," began Monty.

He stopped suddenly.

From behind the half-circle of school-boys, round the fire, strange and eerie in the shadows, came a startling sound. It was a deep groan. It was so strange, so unexpected, that they leaped to their feet, with beating hearts, staring with startled faces into the shadows.

Chapter Two.

A CALL FROM CARCROFT.

THE telephone bell rang in Mr. Railton's study, in the School House, and the house-master glanced up from a pile of papers on his study table. He frowned slightly as he glanced at the buzzing instrument.

Just before break-up, a housemaster was a busy man: and the buzz of the telephone was not a welcome sound. That wonderful invention, which enables anyone to speak to anybody from anywhere, is sometimes a mixed blessing—especially to a schoolmaster whose natural desire is to keep anxious parents at a safe distance.

However, Mr. Railton reached out and took off the receiver. He had little doubt that some over-anxious parent at the other end was concerned about Smith minor or Perkins minimus or Tompkins of the Fourth: but he was patient and long enduring, as a schoolmaster must always be, and prepared to waste a few minutes in quite unnecessary conversation.

But the voice that came through, as he put the receiver to his ear, apprised him that it was not the anxious parent of some St. Jim's fellow who was speaking. It was a youthful voice, which sounded a good deal like the bleat of a sheep—not a voice that Mr. Railton had ever heard before. The words that came through, too, were quite unexpected.

"Blow! Why don't the idiot answer?"

Perhaps the speaker at the other end had been waiting to be put through, and was getting impatient. Evidently that remark could not have been intended for Mr. Railton's ears.

"Hallo!" said Mr. Railton.

"Oh!" The bleat sounded a little startled. "Are you there?"

"What is wanted?" rapped Mr. Railton.

"Is that St. Jim's?"

"Yes—the School House. Mr. Railton speaking. Kindly tell me what is wanted."

"Oh, all right! Can I speak to D'Arcy?"

Mr. Railton's frown intensified. Telephone calls from over-anxious parents were bad enough. Telephone calls from some unknown youth who wanted to speak to a junior in the Fourth Form were really intolerable.

"I'm speaking from Carcroft."

That did not interest Mr. Railton. He was aware that Carcroft School was nine or ten miles from St. Jim's, on the Sussex coast, and that St. Jim's juniors played Carcroft juniors in football matches. But he saw no reason whatever why a Carcroft junior should ring up a St. Jim's junior on a housemaster's telephone.

"Really—!" began Mr. Railton.

"It's rather important, sir," bleated the voice from Carcroft. "If you'd be kind enough to tell D'Arcy that it's Tuck—."

"Tuck!" repeated Mr. Railton, blankly.

"Yes, sir—Tuck—."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, testily. "Kindly understand that the school telephones are not at the disposal of junior boys. Certainly a boy would be permitted to take a call in a matter of importance, but in a matter relating to comestibles—upon my work!"

"But I say—!"

The bleat from Carcroft got no further, Mr. Railton jammed the receiver back on the hooks, and returned to his occupation. He was a kind man, and would certainly have stretched a point if the Carcroft fellow had had something of importance to say to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. But a talk about tuck was altogether too much. Food, no doubt, was an important matter, from a schoolboy point of view—but Mr. Railton did not contemplate calling a St. Jim's junior to his study, to hear a Carcroft fellow talking about food.

He settled down to his pile of papers for exactly one minute. Then the telephone bell rang again.

Once more Mr. Railton picked up the receiver. He had no doubt that it was a parent this time.

But it was the bleat he had heard before that came through.

"I say, are you there? We've been cut off somehow! I say, is that St. Jim's?"

Mr. Railton breathed hard and deep. It was the Carcroft fellow again!

"Can I speak to D'Arcy? It's Tuck—."

"You cannot speak to D'Arcy, or anyone else, on such a subject, on my telephone," snapped Mr. Railton. "Kindly do not ring up again."

"But I say, its important—it's Tuck speaking—."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Tuck—James Smyth Tuck—."

"Oh!" Mr. Railton gave a gasp, "Do you mean that your name is Tuck?"

"Eh? Yes! I said so, didn't I? It's Tuck—James Smyth Tuck! My pals call me Turkey! Can I speak to D'Arcy?"

"You may do so, if the matter is of

importance," said Mr. Railton, "There are two boys in this House of that name,—D'Arcy of the Fourth, and D'Arcy minor of the Third Form. To which of the two do you allude?"

"D'Arcy of the Fourth, sir—the chap who kicked the winning goal in the soccer match here yesterday—".

"Why do you wish to speak to him?"

"It's about coming over to see him, sir—he asked me to look him up and I find I can come over to-morrow—I'd like him to meet my train, and—."

Tap!

It was a tap at the door of the house-master's study, and Mr. Railton glanced round from the telephone. The door opened, and Wally of the Third—otherwise Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, minor of the great Arthur Augustus—entered, with a sheaf of impot paper in a somewhat grubby hand.

"My lines, sir," said Wally.

"Very well: you may lay them on the table, D'Arcy minor."

"I say, are you there?" came the bleat from Carcroft. "I say, can I speak to D'Arcy, please—?"

Mr. Railton was very much inclined to jam the receiver back on the hooks, and leave it at that. But he was always good-natured, and he decided otherwise.

"Very well: if you hold the line, I will send for D'Arcy," he said. He turned to Wally of the Third, who was about to leave the study. "D'Arcy minor! Please find your brother, and tell him that a boy named Tuck, at Carcroft School, desires to speak to him on the telephone, and that he may come to my study and take the call."

"Yes, sir," said Wally, dutifully.

He did not look so dutiful when he was outside the study. He gave a sniff. Mr. Railton apparently did not know—though Wally could have told him—that a Third-Form man had plenty of things to occupy his time, and no inclination whatever to root about the House with a message for a Fourth-Form man—even his major. D'Arcy minor, having done his lines, was anxious to rejoin Reggie Manners and Frank Levison and others of the Third in the locker-room, and not in the least anxious to carry messages.

However, a housemaster had to be given his head, so Wally of the Third set forth in search of D'Arcy major.

"Seen my major?" he asked, as he passed Cardew of the Fourth.

Cardew glanced at him.

"Too often!" he answered: and strolled on, leaving Wally to make the best of that unsatisfactory reply.

Wally of the Third breathed hard, and went on to the junior day-room. He stared, or more accurately glared, into that apartment, where a good many School House juniors were gathered together.

"I say, seen the biggest ass at St. Jim's knocking about, Levison?" he called out to the junior nearest the door.

Levison of the Fourth looked round.

"Not till you came," he answered.

"Oh, can it!" hooted Wally, "Look here, where's my major?"

"Look for a silk topper, and you'll find him under it," said Clive, laughing.

"I think he's up in his study, kid," called out Talbot of the Shell.

Wally grunted, doubtless by way of thanks for the information, and headed for the staircase.

The door of Study No. 6 was ajar, but no light came therefrom, excepting a flicker of firelight. However, a sound of voices from within apprised Wally that the study was occupied. Several voices in turn floated out as Wally came up the passage, and he heard the tail-end of Gussy's ghost story and the remarks that followed it. He grinned as he stopped at the door, Monty Lowther's voice reaching him from within. Wally played up automatically, as it were—interrupting Monty with a deep, dismal, hair-raising groan, that echoed through the shadowy study, and brought all the fellows there to their feet.

Chapter Three.

A TALK WITH TURKEY!

GROAN!

"Gweat Scott!"

"What the thump—!"

"Did you hear—?"

"What on earth—?"

Tom Merry and Co. in a startled group

before the flickering fire in Study No. 6, stared into the shadowy corners. They were not nervy fellows by any means, and they had taken Gussy's ghost story far from seriously: but that sudden groan in the gloom, coming so strangely and eerily, had certainly startled them.

"Put on the light!" exclaimed Blake.

He hurried to turn on the light in the study. It flashed on, illuminating Study No. 6 and seven startled faces.

The shadows vanished: the study was brightly lighted: and seven pairs of eyes roved about the room, quickly and uneasily. Exactly whence that deep and uncanny groan had come, they could not tell: but there was no one in the study, apart from themselves.

They looked at one another.

"Who—?" said Tom Merry.

"What—?" said Herries.

"Some ass larking," muttered Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! But weally—."

"Not the jolly old ghost from Eastwood House, anyhow," said Manners. "Bit of a trip from Hampshire—."

"Hardly," said Tom Merry. "Hallo, the door's ajar—some ass in the passage perhaps—."

That supposition was immediately confirmed, by the sound of a chuckle from the other side of the study door.

The door was pushed open, and a youthful, chubby, and cheeky face looked round it into the study.

"Scared stiff, what?" asked Wally of the Third, grinning.

Seven fellows looked at him expressively. They had not been scared: but they had been startled, puzzled, uneasy: and the whole and sole cause of it was the mis-directed sense of humour of a fag in the Third Form.

"Bai Jove! Was it you, Wally?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Was it you uttath that howwid gwoan, you young wascal?"

"Sort of!" admitted Wally. "Sort of climax to your jolly old ghost story, Gus. Sorry if I've frightened you kids."

"You cheeky young wapscaillon—."

"Collar him!" said Blake. "What's a measly fag doing in our passage, anyway? Roll him back to the landing."

"Good egg," said Herries.

"Bag him!" exclaimed Dig.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Hold on," exclaimed Wally, hastily, as Study No. 6 made a general advance all along the line, as it were. "Message from Railton."

"Bother Railton! Scrag him," said Blake.

"Pewwaps we had bettah heah the message, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "You are a cheeky young wascal, Wally, and I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin'. But what is it fwom Wailton?"

"You're wanted in his study."

"Oh, bai Jove! What's the wow now?" sighed Arthur Augustus. "Is Wailton watty about somethin', Wally?"

Wally of the Third grinned.

"It's all right, Gussy—only a telephone call. Chap named Tuck—."

"Tuck!" repeated Arthur Augustus, blankly.

"He's rung you up from Carcroft, and Railton says you can go to his study and take the call. That's the lot!" said Wally: and, with a wary eye on Blake and Herries and Dig, he backed out of the study.

"But weally, Wally—!" began Arthur Augustus.

Wally of the Third did not stay to listen. He had delivered his message, and he departed on his own more important affairs: whistling shrilly as he went down the passage to the landing, just to let the Fourth Form generally know that he, Wally of the Third, did not care a bean for them.

Arthur Augustus was left with a perplexed expression on his noble face. He seemed quite surprised to be called on the telephone by a chap named Tuck from Carcroft School.

"Hadn't you better go and take the call, Gussy?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, I suppose I had bettah," assented Arthur Augustus. "But I weally do not undahstand why I have been wung up fwom Carewoft."

"I suppose you know a chap named Tuck there, if he has rung you up," said Tom, in surprise. "We were over at Carcroft yesterday, and—."

"Oh, yaas, I wemembah now! There

was a wathah fat chap—not one of the footballin' fellows—who would keep on talkin' to me, and I wecall now that he told me his name was Buck, or Chuck, or Muck, or somethin'—he was wathah hard to get wid of. Bai Jove! I wemembah now that he said he would give me a look-in heah some time, and I hoped vewy much that he wouldn't. Howevah, I suppose I had bettah go and heah what he has to say."

And Arthur Augustus left Study No. 6, evidently not at all attracted by the prospect of a telephone talk with James Smyth Tuck of the Fourth Form at Carcroft.

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

The housemaster glanced up from his papers.

"D'Arcy! Someone at Carcroft School, named Tuck, is holding the line," he said. "You may take the call, but please be brief."

"Yaas, sir."

Arthur Augustus picked up the receiver. A bleating voice came through as he put it to his noble ear.

"I say! Ain't you there? If you're there, why don't you speak? I say, I can't hold this line for ever! I say—"

"I am heah," interrupted Arthur Augustus, "D'Arcy speakin'."

"Oh! Is that you, D'Arcy, old chap?" The fat bleat from Carcroft was quite affectionate in tone.

"It, is I," answered Arthur Augustus, not at all affectionately. "Pway who is speakin'?"

"Tuck speaking! You remember me, old fellow, what? We had a jolly talk here yesterday when you were over here with the football team."

Arthur Augustus frowned slightly. He had no recollection whatever of a jolly talk with Tuck at Carcroft. He remembered that a fat fellow with a squint in one eye had persisted in hooking on to him and talking nineteen to the dozen, that was all. The Carcroft junior's recollections seemed quite different from his own. And he was quite sure that he did not want to see Tuck again, or to hear from him. But politeness came before everything else with the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. So he answered politely.

"Yaas, I wemembah you, Twuck—."

"Not Truck—Tuck! James Smyth Tuck! My pals call me Turkey. I'd rather you called me Turkey, D'Arcy, old chap."

"Weally, Tuck, I could hardly do so, as I do not know you," said Arthur Augustus, frigidly. "Will you please tell me why you have wung me up, as I cannot stay vewy long on Mr. Wailton's telephone."

"Well, I've been hanging on long enough," said Turkey Tuck, "and a precious row I should get into if Roger came in."

"Bai Jove! Who is Wogah?"

"I mean my beak, old Ducas. I can tell you there would be a row if he caught a fellow using his telephone."

"I twust, Tuck, that you are not usin' your form-mastah's telephone without permission."

A fat chuckle came along the wires.

"That's all right, old chap—Roger's out. I say, I rang you up to tell you I can run across to see you to-morrow."

"Weally, Tuck—."

"You remember telling me you'd be glad if I gave you a look-in at your school—."

"I do not wemembah anythin' of the kind, Tuck. You seem to be quite undah a misappwehension—."

"I can find the time to-morrow," went on the fat bleat from Carcroft, Turkey Tuck apparently deaf to D'Arcy's voice. "I'll cut across by train. Let's see—Wayland is the station, isn't it? Can you meet the two-thirty there?"

"I am afwaid I cannot, Tuck—."

"Well, I'd rather you met the train: but if you can't you can't. O.K. I'll come by the two-thirty, anyway."

"But weally—."

"It's a half-holiday at your school, same as here, isn't it?"

"Yaas, But—."

"That's all right, then. We'll have another jolly talk, same as we had here yesterday. I shall be jolly glad to see you again, D'Arcy."

"That is vewy kind of you, Tuck. But weally—."

"And I say, D'Arcy—Oh, haddocks!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I—I say, sir, I—I wasn't using your telephone, sir! I—I just came to your

study to—to ask you a question about—about Virgil, sir! I—I never touched the telephone, and I wasn't speaking to a chap at St. Jim's—.”

Arthur Augustus gazed at the telephone, blankly. This was quite surprising. But it dawned upon his aristocratic intellect that these remarks from Turkey Tuck were not in continuance of their conversation. He realized that the form-master whom Tuck called “Roger” must have come into his study and caught Turkey using the telephone without leave. Turkey Tuck's remarks were addressed, not to Arthur Augustus, but to Roger! Arthur Augustus grinned.

He listened: but the telephone had gone dead. He put up the receiver, not at all sorry to have finished with Turkey Tuck of Carcroft.

“You have finished, D'Arcy?” asked Mr. Railton. He gave the swell of St. Jim's a rather curious glance.

“Yaas, sir! Thank you vewy much, sir.”

Arthur Augustus left the housemaster's study, rather wondering what was happening to Turkey Tuck in Roger Ducas's study, ten miles away at Carcroft. He was wondering, too, whether that fat fellow with the squint in his eye would really have the nerve to barge in at St. Jim's the following afternoon, after the discouragement he had administered. He doubted it—but he could not feel sure—and if he had been better acquainted with Turkey Tuck, of the Fourth Form at Carcroft, he would not have doubted at all.

Chapter Four

TURKEY'S TRIP.

“V.C., old chap!”

“Don't bother.”

“But I say—!”

“Can it!”

Dudley Vane-Carter, who was called “V.C.” for short, in the Carcroft Fourth, snapped. He was rather accustomed to snap when addressed by his fat study-mate, James Smyth Tuck. The delights of the fat Turkey's conversation, if any, had long since palled on the “Sportsman” of

Carcroft. Besides, Vane-Carter was reading, and when he was reading, he did not like to be interrupted.

So he snapped over his shoulder at Turkey, when he rolled into the study and opened his capacious mouth to talk.

“I say, it's a bit urgent, V.C.” persisted Turkey.

“Oh, rot.”

“I'm in a bit of a jam, old fellow.”

“Pack it up.”

“Look here, V.C., you might be a bit civil to a fellow who's coming home with you for Christmas,” bleated Turkey, indignantly. “If you can't be civil to a chap, a chap might change his mind about coming.”

“Do!” said Vane-Carter.

“If you don't want me for the Christmas hols, V.C.—!” began Turkey, with a great deal of dignity.

“Could anybody?”

“Well, you've asked me, haven't you?” hooted Turkey.

“No! You've asked me.”

Turkey Tuck breathed hard through his little pimple of a nose. This sort of thing was V.C. all over! The Sportsman of Carcroft was a hard nut to crack—he was a good deal of a scapegrace; he was regarded by his form-master with a doubting eye: he had a “juicy” reputation and was rather proud of it: but there was a spot of good nature in him, and his fat study-mate Turkey had the benefit of that spot. Perhaps it was because he was keen, and clever, and alert: and Turkey was every known kind of an ass, that the Sportsman tolerated him with a good nature that surprised many fellows in the Carcroft Fourth. But though he tolerated Turkey, even to the extent of letting him “hook on” for the holidays, he had no politeness to waste upon him. Turkey had nothing but the plainest of plain English to expect from V.C.

Turkey would have given much, at that moment, to tell Vane-Carter that he wouldn't be found dead with him in the Christmas holidays. But Christmas at a millionaire's home was very attractive: and nobody else at Carcroft wanted Turkey: so it was not practical politics. So, having breathed hard through his nose, Turkey resumed quite amicably.

"Of course, I wouldn't let you down for the hols., old fellow, so close on break-up."

"I know that!"

"Look here, V.C.—"

"Oh, do shut up, and let a fellow read," snapped Vane-Carter. "I've got to go and change for footer in ten minutes."

"Look here," exclaimed Turkey, goaded, as it were. "You're not the only pebble on the beach, V.C. I've got other friends, I can tell you."

Vane-Carter laughed, and laid down his book.

"Such as—?" he asked. "You fat fraud, you'd chuck me at a minute's notice if the Lizard would let you hook on to him."

"The Lizard ain't the only pebble on the beach, either," retorted Turkey. "The fact is, I'm going to see a friend this afternoon, and that's why I've come up to speak to you."

"Who's the happy man?"

"St. Jim's chap—rather a pal of mine named D'Arcy," said Turkey, breezily. "He ain't a lord like the Lizard, but he's the son of a lord, and we got very chummy when he was over here the other day with the soccer crowd."

"I remember him," said Vane-Carter, with a nod. "Soft sort of johnny with a window-pane in his eye. Not soft enough to let you land yourself on him, Turkey—you can wash that out, you fat fathead."

"That's all you know," retorted Turkey. "We're pally, I can tell you, and he's asked me to give him a look-in at his school."

"Gammon!"

"I phoned him yesterday, on Roger's phone, to fix it up. We had an awfully pleasant chat over the phone."

"Was that why Roger licked you yesterday—for bagging his phone?" grinned Vane-Carter.

"Blow Roger! I'm going over to St. Jim's this afternoon, and D'Arcy is meeting me at the station. If he asks me for Christmas," added Turkey, "I shan't let you down, old fellow."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Vane-Carter.

"Well, where does the cackle come in?" demanded Turkey, angrily.

"You benighted ass! D'Arcy may be soft enough to let you butt in on him, if

you've got the cheek to butt in where you're not wanted: but do you fancy he will ask a fellow for Christmas whom he doesn't know and doesn't want to know? Go to sleep and dream again."

"Well, you never can tell," said Turkey. "Not that I'm the fellow to fish for invitations, as you know, V.C."

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"But I'm in rather a jam," went on Turkey. "It's half-a-crown return to Wayland Junction, V.C., and—and I—I haven't half-a-crown."

Vane-Carter stared at him.

"You unlimited ass," he said. "Does all this gas mean that you want to borrow half-a-crown? Why couldn't you say so without wasting time? It's worth more than that not to see you again till roll-call. Here you are. Catch."

V.C. extracted a half-a-crown from his pocket, and tossed it to Turkey. He had told Turkey to "catch," but Turkey was no fieldsman. His fat hands came up too late to prevent the half-crown impinging upon his fat little nose.

"Wow!" roared Turkey.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Turkey rubbed a fat nose with one hand, and picked up the half-crown with the other. He gave the grinning Sportsman a glare, strongly tempted to hurl the half-crown back again at his grinning face. But again it was not practical politics. Turkey's trip to St. Jim's that afternoon depended on that half-crown. So he contented himself with glaring, slipped the coin into his pocket, and rolled out of the study. Vane-Carter resumed his book, and forgot his existence the next moment.

"Swob!" murmured Turkey, as he went down the passage, rubbing his nose. Turkey was annoyed.

But his fat face brightened as he rolled out of the gates of Carcroft, and headed for Ridgate Station. Turkey was looking forward to his visit to St. Jim's that afternoon. Turkey was very far from realising that he was the pushing "boulder" that other fellows thought him. Turkey was, in his own esteem, a very likeable fellow—indeed a fascinating sort of fellow, whom anyone might have been, and ought to have been, glad to know. It did not even occur to him that he had

bored and bothered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when that noble youth was at Carcroft. Arthur Augustus's unflinching politeness had been his undoing. Turkey did not, perhaps, feel sure that Arthur Augustus wanted to see him at St. Jim's. But he hoped so—and he even nourished a faint hope of more than that. How topping it would be if, when he came back to Carcroft, he could tell Vane-Carter to go and eat coke, mentioning casually that he had been asked for Christmas to Eastwood House! Turkey had a hopeful nature.

It was not a long run from Ridgate to Wayland. Turkey was feeling quite merry and bright when he stepped out of the train at Wayland Junction.

He looked up and down the platform for an elegant figure with an eyeglass gleaming in a noble eye.

But no such figure met his gooseberry eyes.

He walked up the platform. He walked down it. He squinted to and fro, here, there, and everywhere.

But he had to make up his fat mind, at last, that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not at Wayland Station.

Perhaps he had not been able to get away. Or perhaps the very sudden termination of that telephone talk had left him in doubt. Anyhow, he was not there: and James Smyth Tuck had to make up his mind to it.

So, having inquired his way of a porter, Turkey started to walk. He had to follow the Wayland road for some distance, pass the level-crossing, and then turn into the footpath through Rylcombe Wood. Turkey would have preferred to take a taxi: but his railway fare had disposed of Vane-Carter's half-crown: and his own personal resources were limited to one halfpenny—much too moderate a sum to be offered to the most obliging taxi-driver.

So Turkey walked.

It was a cold, clear December afternoon: just the weather for a walk. But Turkey Tuck was not keen on walking. His plump little legs were soon sagging. When he came in sight of the level-crossing, the gates were just closing, to allow the passage of a train, signalled in the distance.

They closed with a crash, as Turkey

arrived. But he was not sorry for the brief delay. He leaned on the gate to rest his tired fat limbs, and to pump in breath.

Then, as he squinted over the gate, Turkey gave a sudden jump, and ejaculated:

"Oh, haddocks!"

His eyes almost popped from his fat face, at the sight of a small—a very small—boy, sitting on the gleaming metals, deeply interested in a teddy bear. In a paralysed state, he stared at the little boy, sitting there unconscious of danger, while the shrieking whistle of the oncoming train rang in his fat ears.

Chapter Five

WILD ADVENTURES WITH A HAT!

"TOM MEWWY!"

"Yes, old top?"

"In a huwwy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Well, not exactly in a hurry," answered Tom. "But I've got a train to catch. Anything up?"

Tom Merry, in hat and overcoat, was leaving the School House, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up. Arthur Augustus had rather a worried expression on his noble visage. Something, it seemed was weighing a little on his aristocratic mind—which was perhaps the reason why he had not joined Blake and Herries and Dig in the changing-room. He glanced at the bag in Tom's hand.

"Catching a twain?" he asked. "You won't be playin' in the pick-up, then?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not quite—as I'm going home this afternoon," he said. "But why aren't you changing for footer, Gussy?"

"The fact is, deah boy, that I am wathah bothahed," said Arthur Augustus. "I would much wathah play football: but I am wathah bothahed about that Carcwoft chap."

"Forget him, and play footer," suggested Tom.

"Well, it won't mattah if I stand out, as it is only a pick-up game," said Arthur Augustus. "You see, that chap Twuck—"

I think his name is Twuck or somethin'—told me on Wailton's phone yestahday that he was comin' ovah to see me this aftahnoon. I have no wecollection what-evah of askin' him to do so, but he seems to think that I did. So he may blow in."

"If he does, let him blow out again!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"It seems to have been a misunderstanding, and a fellow wouldn't like to be wude," he said. "I hardly wemembah the chap, weally, except that he was vevy fat and had a wathah queeah eye. I should vevy much like to play in the pick-up—but pewwaps I ought not to be playin' footah when he blows in, if he does. What do you think, Tom Mewwy?"

That, apparently, was the problem on Gussy's noble mind.

"I think I'd play footer, and chance it," said Tom, laughing. "Now, I'd better cut. See you again at Christmas, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! Aren't you comin' back?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"No. You see, my old guardian, Miss Fawcett, is going abroad for Christmas," explained Tom Merry. "So the Head has given me leave to go home a few days before break-up. So I shall come on to your place from Huckleberry Heath. I'm walking to the station, so—." Tom Merry made a move.

"Well, if you're goin' to catch a twain, I won't delay you," said Arthur Augustus, always considerate. "If you're walkin' to Wayland, you will pwobably pass Twuck on the way, if he is comin'. Good-bye, Tom Mewwy—and pway wemembah me kindly to Miss Fawcett."

"O.K. Ta-ta, Gustavus."

Tom Merry walked out: but he had not gone more than three or four yards, when Arthur Augustus hurried after him.

"Hold on a minute, Tom Mewwy," he called out.

Tom Merry held on.

"Mannahs or Lowthah not goin' to the station with you?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"No: they're playing footer. Ta-ta."

"If you would like my company, Tom Mewwy, I will walk to the station with you," said Arthur Augustus. "I am wathah wowwied about that chap Twuck,—I am afwaid he expected me to meet his twain—and if he does turn up, we shall meet him

on the way. Shall I twot along, deah boy?"

"Do!" said Tom. "Come on, old tulip."

"Pway wait a minute while I get my coat."

"Buck up, then, old chap."

"I will dash like anythin', deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, reassuringly, and he went into the House.

Tom Merry waited. He had allowed himself plenty of time for the train at Wayland Junction: but he did not want to risk missing it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a leisurely youth, and selecting an overcoat, and donning the same, was not a rapid process with him. Although he had undertaken to dash like anything, minute followed minute, and his elegant figure did not emerge from the House.

Tom Merry looked at his watch. He looked up at the clock-tower. He was quite pleased to have Gussy's company on the walk to Wayland: but he did want to catch his train. He was debating in his mind whether he had better cut, without waiting longer, when the swell of St. Jim's emerged at last from the School House—a thing of beauty and a joy for ever in the best-cut overcoat at St. Jim's, and a topper that reflected the winter sunshine.

"Come on, Gussy," called out Tom.

"Have I kept you waitin', deah boy?"

"Yes: get a move on, old chap, or I shall never get that train now."

"Bai Jove! I mustn't let you lose your twain, Tom Mewwy. Bai Jove! I have forgotten my handkerchief, huwwyin' like that. Wait a minute while I cut in and get a hanky—pway don't gwab my arm like that, Tom Mewwy—pewwaps I can go without the hanky—no need to wush a fellow off his feet!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

They emerged from the gates of St. Jim's at a trot.

"Is it weally necessawy to wush like this, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus, rather breathlessly.

"Yes: put it on."

"Oh, vevy well! I am afwaid my hat may blow off in this wind, if I wush. But you mustn't lose your twain, of course. Dash, deah boy."

They trotted down Rylcombe Lane, to

the stile that gave access to the footpath through the wood. It was a little awkward for Gussy, who had to hold on his hat in the December wind: and though Gussy liked to take his topper for a walk, he rather regretted that he had not been content with a cap for a walk on a windy winter's day.

However, it was too late to think of that now. Five or six times that silk topper nearly sailed away, but he clutched it in time.

As he clambered over the stile after Tom Merry, it blew off at last, and landed in a pile of snow that remained from the last snow-fall, under the trees.

"Oh, cwikey! My hat's gone!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Hold on a minute, Tom Mewwy."

He dashed for the hat.

But a playful gust of the winter wind caught it before he could reach it, and danced it along the footpath.

"Stop that hat, Tom Mewwy!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry rushed at the whirling topper in time, and stopped it. He clutched it up and handed it to Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, cwumbs!" said Gussy, as he took it, "Thank you vewy much, deah boy, but you have wuffed it feahfully. Wait a few minutes while I bwush it, will you?"

"Catching a train, old man."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Time, tide, and trains wait for no man, Gussy! Put it on."

Tom Merry went on at a trot. Arthur Augustus, with rather deep feelings, jammed the ruffled topper on his noble head, and trotted after him. To wear a ruffled topper, almost resembling a busby, was painful to the swell of St. Jim's: but he braced himself to bear it, and trotted on after the captain of the Shell.

Luckily, the trees by the footpath kept off a good deal of the wind, and Gussy's topper was still safe on his head when they came out at the other end, on the Wayland road.

"All wight for the twain, Tom Mewwy?" gasped Arthur Augustus, as they emerged from the footpath upon the King's highway.

"Just about," said Tom, "but we've got to push. Come on."

"Yaas, wathah! Oh, cwikey!"

A fierce gust of wind swept down the road from Wayland. It lifted the topper from Gussy's head, and fairly whizzed it away.

"Hold on, Tom Mewwy! My hat's gone—"

This time Tom Merry did not hold on. Gussy's topper was sailing away in the wrong direction, behind him. To stop and chase that topper meant losing the train at Wayland Junction. Tom turned his head without stopping in his trot.

"Go after it, Gussy—I must cut on."

"But weally—"

"Cheerio, old top!"

Tom Merry cut on.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood in the road, hatless, his hair blowing out in the wind. He stared after Tom Merry—then he looked round at his hat, bowling along the high road in the other direction.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He wanted to hurry on and rejoin Tom. He wanted to chase down the road after that elusive hat. Like Desdemona, he did perceive here a divided duty.

Had that topper been safe in its hat-box at St. Jim's, it would have been all right—Gussy would not have minded going on without a hat: St. Jim's fellows very often took their walks abroad hatless. But the topper was bowling along that road before the wind: and it was fairly certain that if Arthur Augustus turned his back on it, he would never behold that topper again. To abandon it to its fate was scarcely possible.

"All wight, deah boy—I'll follow on!" called out Gussy. "I'll catch you up at the level cwossin'. But don't wait for me, deah boy—you must catch your twain."

Not a word of which reached Tom Merry, already out of hearing.

Arthur Augustus, having made up his noble mind, chased down the road after the hat. It was bowling merrily along, and it was rather a race for the swell of St. Jim's but luckily it blew into a hedge and lodged there.

That gave Gussy a chance. He came up with a breathless rush, and grabbed at the hat. At that precise moment, the playful wind lifted it again, and, almost

touching his finger-tips, it sailed away once more.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bothah the thing! Oh, cwumbs."

He dashed in pursuit again.

Twice the hat settled down, and he almost reached it. Twice it was whirled on again by the wind, barely escaping his clutch.

Breathless, with a pink face, his eyeglass streaming at the end of its cord, his carefully-brushed hair sticking up like quills upon the fretful porcupine, Arthur Augustus dashed after the hat.

At last—at long last—he had it! It dropped in the grass on the verge by the road, and Arthur Augustus fairly hurled himself at it before it could whirl on the wind again. He grabbed it just in time.

Having recaptured it, he gazed at it in dismay. It was more like a busby than ever, and there was mud on it. He brushed it carefully with his sleeve, restoring it to something like order, and jammed it once more upon his head—holding it there to make sure.

Then he started to follow Tom Merry—far out of sight now. He went at a trot: but it was borne in upon his noble mind that he was not likely to see Tom Merry again before the Christmas holidays at Eastwood House.

Chapter Six

ALL RIGHT FOR TURKEY!

"BOTHER!" breathed Tom Merry.

He came to a rather breathless halt at the gates of the level crossing on the Wayland road. He had seen them closing, from the distance, and put on a spurt. But they crashed shut before he could arrive: and now they barred his way. Which was somewhat exasperating to a fellow in a hurry.

Tom was a careful fellow, and he had given himself ample time to catch his train. But Arthur Augustus, with his leisurely manners and customs, had changed all that. Now Tom had just about time to get to the station before the train went, if he kept on the trot. So it

was distinctly exasperating when the gates of the level crossing slammed fairly in his face.

He came to a halt, having no choice about it, and waited. It was only a matter of minutes, after all, and he could make up for it by putting on speed when the gates opened and allowed him to pass on his way. The shriek of the locomotive could already be heard, as it rounded a curve at a little distance.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom, suddenly, as he looked across the gates. And he grinned.

On the other side, at the opposite gate, a fat face was staring across, and Tom recognized that fat face. He had seen it at Carcroft School a couple of days ago. Probably he would never have remembered Turkey Tuck's fat existence, but for what Arthur Augustus had told him. Now he was reminded of him, as he looked across the gates at that plump countenance and squinting eye. Evidently, Arthur Augustus was going to get that visitor from Carcroft that afternoon—for here he was, stopped on the road by the level-crossing gates, on one side of the railway, while Tom Merry was stopped on the other.

The sight of James Smyth Tuck brought a grin to Tom Merry's face. But a moment later, he stared, curious and startled, at the fat fellow from Carcroft, as he saw him jump, and stare at the railway metals with a startled and horrified stare.

Tom looked round, following the direction of Turkey's gaze, wondering what had so startled the Carcroft junior.

Then he, in his turn, jumped, and his face went white.

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

A little to the left of the level crossing, he saw what Turkey Tuck had seen—the little boy with the teddy bear sitting on the metals.

He gazed at the child in utter horror.

He knew the little fellow by sight: it was the signalman's little son, who evidently had escaped his mother's eye, and strayed unnoticed on the railway line, from the signalman's cottage at a short distance. The child had strayed as far as the gate, and then sat down, unseen by any eye until the gates moved out to close the road.

Tom Merry stared at him, paralysed, like Turkey Tuck. Already the locomotive could be seen round the curve, and the engine's whistle was shrieking. But Tom Merry did not, like Turkey, remain paralysed by what he saw. Only for a split second he stared at the child, unconscious of danger with death rushing down upon him. Then his bag dropped into the road, and he leaped at the gate, vaulting over it with lightning speed.

His feet hardly touched the ground as he rushed on. Well he knew what he was risking, with the train rushing down upon him. But he had to take the risk or leave the child to death—and of that he did not even think. Almost in a second he reached the boy, who stared up at him. He clutched him up and raced on across the line.

The roar of the oncoming train was like thunder in his ears. Swift as he was, it seemed hardly possible that he could get clear: that he would not be crushed down under the rush of the whirling wheels. But a last frantic leap carried him to safety as the engine roared by.

He staggered against the gate, the child in his arms. He leaned there, panting, dizzy from his narrow escape, the frightened child screaming, while the long train rushed by, passengers staring at him from the windows.

"Oh, haddocks!" gasped Turkey Tuck.

Turkey stared blankly at Tom Merry.

Turkey, certainly, would have been glad to do what Tom had done. But it had not even occurred to his fat brain to make the attempt. Neither, indeed, could the fat Turkey have made it successfully: for most assuredly he could not have carried his weight with the lightning speed with which the St. Jim's junior had moved.

"Oh, haddocks! You—you've got him!" gasped Turkey. "I say, I wonder you weren't run over—oh haddocks!"

"Take the kid," said Tom.

"Eh! What? Oh, all right."

Tom Merry lifted the child over the gate, and Turkey Tuck received him in his fat arms. Turkey was willing to help all he could.

Tom leaned on the gate a moment or two, to recover his breath. Tom was a sturdy fellow, and he had plenty of nerve:

but he was a little shaken by that desperate rush across the line in the face of death.

But it was over, the train had gone by, and in a minute or so the gates would be opening. He remembered that he had his train to catch at Wayland Junction: and leaving the gate, he cut back across the line, for his bag. Turkey, with the child in his fat arms, squinted after him.

"I say, Tom Merry," he bleated. Turkey had recognized the captain of the St. Jim's junior eleven that had played soccer at Carcroft. "I say, Merry, what about this kid?"

Tom did not heed him. He clambered over the gate, and picked up his bag. Then he waited for the gates to swing open: and when they opened, walked across the line and rejoined Turkey.

"Look here, Tuck," he said. "That kid belongs to the signalman—his cottage is down that lane, just down the line. Be a good chap and take him there—I've got a train to catch at Wayland, and I've got to run."

"But I say—!" bleated Turkey.

"It won't take you a few minutes," said Tom, impatiently.

"Yes, that's all right—I don't mind—but I say, you said you've got a train to catch—"

"Yes, yes."

"Your school ain't breaking up yet, is it?" asked Turkey, anxiously. "You see, I'm going over to see D'Arcy—rather a pal of mine—I say, is St. Jim's breaking up early or anything—?"

Tom laughed breathlessly.

"No! That's all right! I'm going home a few days before break-up, that's all. You'll find D'Arcy on the road when you go on—he was coming to the station with me, but he dropped behind. You'll take that kid back to the cottage?"

"O.K." said Turkey.

"Thanks."

Tom waited for no more. He started off at a run for Wayland, and the ground flew under his feet. He could catch that train yet, but he had to go all out—and he went all out. Turkey was left staring after him, but in a moment or two Tom Merry was out of sight.

"Oh, haddocks!" said Turkey.

He squinted at the little boy in his fat

arms. Little Georgie had ceased to scream, which was a relief to Turkey: he had no idea whatever what to do with a screaming child of three. He squinted round in search of the way to the signalman's cottage. It was a little lane that ran beside the railway track: and, as Turkey discerned it, a young woman in a shawl came panting out of the lane. Turkey squinted at her, wondering whether this was the child's mother.

"I say—!" he began.

He was interrupted. The young woman rushed at him, and clutched the child from his arms, so suddenly that Turkey staggered.

"Oh, haddocks! I—I say—!" he stammered.

She did not heed him. She was crying over the child and caressing him, in a state bordering on hysterics. There could be no doubt that this was the little boy's mother: and Turkey, feeling that the responsibility was now taken off his fat hands, prepared to resume his way. But immediately he made a step to go on, the young woman called to him.

"Stop, oh, stop."

Turkey stopped.

"I must thank you," she panted. "Oh, I must thank you for what you have done, you brave, kind, good boy."

Turkey squinted at her. Turkey Tuck was never a man to disclaim credit, on the rare occasions when it came his way. But even Turkey could not quite see what there was, in what he had done, to evoke all this praise and gratitude.

"I—I say, I—I haven't done anything much, ma'am," he stammered.

"You brave, brave boy! You might have been killed!" She shuddered, "Both of you might have been killed: but you saved him—you saved my boy."

"Oh, haddocks!" ejaculated Turkey, blankly.

"I saw him from a window," she went on, "he must have strayed on the line—I saw him from the window, when I heard the train whistle—and oh! Oh! I came as fast as I could, but I knew I should be too late—I—I dreaded that the train had gone over my little boy, and—and you had him safe—you saved him!"

"Oh!" gasped Turkey.

He understood now.

The signalman's wife had seen the child on the line: but she had seen no more, while running up the lane to the level crossing. Finding the child safe in Turkey's arms, and no one else on the spot, her mistake was natural. Someone must have rushed on the line, in the face of the oncoming train, risking his life to save the child: and there was Turkey, alone on the road with the child in his arms.

"But—but I say—!" stammered Turkey.

"You saved him! You brave, brave boy."

"But I say—." Turkey liked being called a brave boy. Nobody had ever called Turkey that before! Nevertheless, he was about to explain the mistake, when another voice chimed in:

"Bai Jove! Is that you, Twuck! What's goin' on, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had arrived.

Turkey squinted round at the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus, holding his hat on with one hand, adjusted his eyeglass with the other, gazing alternately at Turkey, the signalman's wife, and little Georgie: considerably puzzled by the scene that greeted his eyes as he came up.

"Oh! Here you are, D'Arcy, old chap!" bleated Turkey. "Jolly glad to see you, old fellow. I say—."

"But what's happened?" asked Arthur Augustus. "A twain went by a few minutes ago—has anythin' happened?"

"You see, that kid was on the line—."

The signalman's wife interrupted him.

"My little boy Georgie, Master D'Arcy. He was on the line, and would have been run over by the train, but this brave, kind, good boy risked his life to save him—."

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I say—!" stuttered Turkey.

"Thank you, thank you, and thank you again."

"Yes, but—."

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "That was wippin', Twuck. It was wathah a splendid thing to do. You must have tons of pluck, Twuck."

Turkey opened his lips—and closed them again.

Turkey, to do him justice, had fully intended to explain the mistake. Had only the signalman's wife been concerned,

certainly Turkey would have done so. But those words from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sealed his lips. For a moment or two his fat conscience pricked him—then he put his conscience in his pocket, as it were, and accepted the glory that fortune had so unexpectedly dropped in his lap.

"Well, a chap couldn't just stand by, and do nothing, could he?" said Turkey. And that was that!

Chapter Seven.

IN BORROWED PLUMES!

"THAT fat bounder!"

"That chunk of tallow!"

"That pop-eyed piffler!"

Blake and Herries and Digby made those remarks, all together, as they beheld two figures coming up to the House—one of them the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the other the far from elegant figure of James Smyth Tuck, of the Fourth Form at Carcroft.

D'Arcy and Turkey came in at the gates together and walked up together to the House, evidently on the best of terms: not like fellows who hardly knew one another, but really like old pals.

It was rather a surprise to Blake and Co., and not a particularly pleasant one. They had seen Turkey Tuck at Carcroft, and noticed that he had "hooked" himself on to their noble chum there: owing to Gussy's long-suffering politeness, and his utter inability to keep pushing bounders at arm's length. But they had hardly expected the fat fellow to have the nerve to barge in at St. Jim's on the strength of so very slim an acquaintance. When Arthur Augustus stood out of the pick-up because of the possibility that Turkey Tuck might blow in, Blake and Co. had told him that he was an ass, and left it at that. Really they had not expected to see the fat Turkey at St. Jim's that afternoon!

And here he was!

Here he was, walking across the quad with Arthur Augustus, a fat and cheerful grin on his plump face, evidently quite happy and satisfied with himself.

"My only hat!" said Jack Blake. "He's

turned up! Gussy doesn't know him from Adam, and doesn't want to—jevver hear of such a nerve!"

"I'd tell him fast enough where he gets off!" grunted Herries.

"Gussy won't, though," grinned Dig.

"No!" Jack Blake snorted. "Gussy won't. But I've a jolly good mind to." He stared at the two, as they came, puzzled. "They seem jolly pally," he growled.

It was not surprising that Arthur Augustus should be polite, even to a fellow whom he did not know and did not want to know. But Gussy's chums could see that he was not merely being polite to Turkey Tuck. He was being friendly—distinctly friendly. It was as if he had discovered, somehow, that the fat Turkey was not, after all, a boresome bounder, but a very good fellow indeed—in fact one of the best! He actually seemed to like him!

"Bai Jove! Heah you are, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, cheerily, as he met his chums near the House. "How did the pick-up go?"

"The New House got the odd goal!" grunted Blake.

"Sowwy, deah boy, that I couldn't play," said Arthur Augustus, innocently. "It's wathah wotten to let Figgins and Co. get away with a win, even in a pick-up. Wathah a pity I wasn't there, aftah all."

"Think it would have made any difference?" snorted Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bow-wow!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"I expect they'd have beaten us by three or four goals if you'd played," remarked Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies.—"

"Well, what about tea?" said Blake. "We've been waiting for you to come in. Tompkins told us you'd gone off with Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah! I thought I would walk to the station with him, but as it happens, my hat blew off, and I was left behind, so I nevah saw him off aftah all. But I met Twuck on the woad—"

"Tuck!" said Turkey.

"I mean Tuck, deah boy—I met Tuck on the woad, Blake. You wemembah

him, pwobably, at Carcroft the othah day."

"I remember you chaps," said Turkey, cheerily. "Jolly good game of soccer you put up, too."

So far, Blake and Co. had taken no heed at all of Turkey Tuck. If the fat bounder hooked on to Gussy, he was not going to hook on to them. But that remark from the fat Turkey thawed them a little. It seemed that he knew good footballers when he saw them!

"It was feahfully lucky that Twuck—I mean Tuck—came ovah to see me this aftahnoon," continued Arthur Augustus.

"Where does the luck come in?" asked Blake.

"I will tell you, Blake! You know the level-cwossin' on the Wayland woad—"

"I say, I don't want to talk about that, D'Arcy," interrupted Turkey. "I say, a chap doesn't want to brag, you know."

"That is vevy wight and pwopah, Twuck," said Arthur Augustus, benevolently. "It is what one would expect of a weally bwave chap like you. But although you natuwally would not like to blow your own twumpet, I feel bound to tell my fwiends of the splendid plucky thing you did."

Turkey had the grace to blush.

Blake and Herries and Dig stared at Gussy, and then eyed Turkey, curiously. If Turkey Tuck had done a splendid plucky thing, they were prepared to revise their estimate of him upward. He did not look like a fellow who did splendid plucky things, that was true. Still, appearances might be deceptive. They were certainly curious to hear what Turkey had done.

"Anything happened while you've been wandering about instead of playing football, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, I was left behind, owin' to my hat blowin' off, and I did not see Tom Mewwy again aftahwards, as he wan on to catch his twain, but I followed on as fah as the level-cwossin'," explained Arthur Augustus. "It was there I met Twuck—I mean Tuck—holdin' the signalman's little boy in his arms. He had saved him fwom a twain, and the signalman's wife was almost weepin' ovah him, and sayin' how bwave he was. And I can tell you, deah boys, that it wequiahed

some pluck to wush in fwont of a twain and pick up a little kid off the line. As Twuck vevy pwopahly said, a chap couldn't stand by and do nothin' in such circs—but it was feahfully plucky, all the same."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"The signalman's wife was sayin' that both of them might have been wun ovah by the twain," continued Arthur Augustus, "and, of course, so they might. Twuck wisked his life to save that little kid, and—," added Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner, "I honah him for it."

"Oh, draw it mild, you know," murmured Turkey.

"I wepeat, Twuck, that I honah you for it," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust that I should have done the same thing in your place—but you did it! So you see, deah boys, how vevy lucky it was that Twuck came ovah this aftahnoon—nobody else was on the spot, and if Twuck—I mean Tuck—hadn't been there, there would have been a twagedy."

"Oh!" repeated Blake.

The three juniors eyed Turkey.

Turkey looked as modest as he could. But there was a lurking smirk on his fat face. Turkey was enjoying this!

Nobody at Carcroft had ever taken Turkey for a hero. Anybody at Carcroft would have laughed at the idea. That made it all the pleasanter to shine in an heroic light at St. Jim's.

It was the first time Turkey had ever so shone! It was likely also to be the last! So the fat and fatheaded Turkey was going to make the most of it.

True, it was not he, it was Tom Merry, who had faced that sudden peril, and risked life and limb to save little Georgie from the train. Turkey preferred to relegate that circumstance to the back of his mind.

Tom Merry had gone home—he was not at St. Jim's to let in light on the subject. So Tom Merry did not matter.

Next term, no doubt, he would be back at school, but by that time the episode would be a thing of the past. Anyhow, next term was a long way ahead, and Turkey was not the man to bother much about the future.

The present was good enough for Turkey: and at present, he was a hero, and intended to remain one! He was going to bask in borrowed glory, like the jackdaw in the peacock's plumes.

"Oh, I say, D'Arcy, I wouldn't make so much of it, you know," bleated the happy Turkey. "Any fellow would have done it."

"I twust so, Twuck: but it was a wippin' thing all the same—a vewy wippin' thing indeed."

"I'd rather you said nothing about it, really!" murmured Turkey.

"I quite undahstand that, deah boy," assented Arthur Augustus, "but honah where honah is due. I wegard your action with vewy gweat admiwation, Twuck,—I mean Huck—that is, Tuck—and I am suah my fwiends heah do the same."

"Well, it was pretty decent," said Jack Blake, and his manner to the fat fellow from Carcroft was more cordial. "It needed some nerve."

"A fellow had to do something," murmured Turkey.

"Jolly decent, all the same," said Dig.

Herries did not speak: he was eyeing the fat Turkey dubiously. If Turkey had done what Arthur Augustus described, he didn't look as if he had: and George Herries was not wholly convinced.

"Our fwiend Twuck—I mean Tuck—will be joinin' us at Eastwood House for the Chwistmas hols," went on Arthur Augustus, cheerily.

"Oh!" said Blake, for the third time.

"Oh!" said Digby, like an echo.

Herries grunted.

"You see, Twuck happened to mention that his people are away for Chwistmas," explained Arthur Augustus, innocently, "so I thought of it at once, and Twuck has agweed to come, which will be wathah wippin' all wound, won't it?"

"Oh! Fine!" said Blake.

"Pewwaps you fellows will get tea weady in the study, while I take Twuck for a walk wound to see the school," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"O.K." said Blake.

Arthur Augustus walked his new friend away, to take him round St. Jim's, leaving his friends looking at one another. There was a silence.

"Must be a jolly plucky chap, if he did what Gussy thinks he did," said Jack Blake, at length.

"Did he?" grunted Herries.

"Gussy thinks he did," said Dig. "From what he says, it seems pretty clear. But—." Dig paused.

"But—!" murmured Blake.

"He seems to have hooked on to Gussy for the hols, on the strength of it," remarked Herries, sarcastically. "If he did it, he's a plucky chap, but—. Well, has Gussy got it right?"

Blake rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I don't see how even Gussy could get it wrong, from what he's told us," he said. "Look here, if that chap risked his life to save a little kid, he must be pretty decent, even if he does look a bit like a bloater. We'll scrounge a decent spread for him in the study, anyhow—he looks as if he could eat! Come on."

Blake and Dig had lingering doubts. Herries had very strong ones. But they agreed that Turkey Tuck was, at least, entitled to the benefit of the doubt: and they did "scrounge" quite a decent spread in Study No. 6 for Gussy's guest. All was ready when Gussy walked him in to tea: and Turkey's fat face beamed over the festive board.

Turkey's visit to St. Jim's that afternoon had turned out a success beyond his happiest anticipations. What had been the faintest of faint hopes, was now a settled thing. He was going to Eastwood House for Christmas. As a fisher for invitations, Turkey had few equals: but his skill had hardly been needed in dealing with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. In his admiration of what Turkey had done—or rather, what he had not done—Gussy had fallen at the first hint. Had Gussy known the facts, it would of course have been quite different, as Turkey was well aware. But Gussy did not know the facts: so, from Turkey's point of view, that was all right!

But as he sat in Study No. 6, scoffing the best that that study could provide, with Arthur Augustus's aristocratic face beaming on him, and Blake and Herries and Digby civil and polite, if not exactly enthusiastic, Turkey could hardly believe in his good luck.

Tom Merry's heroism had been a wonderful windfall for Turkey: and he was less disposed than ever to part with his borrowed plumes.

Turkey enjoyed that tea more than he had enjoyed any of the many spreads he had scrounged in his podgy career. And when the time came to depart, it was a happy Turkey who sat in the train on the homeward journey to Carcroft.

TURKEY TUCK rolled in at Carcroft as the bell was ringing for calling-over. He joined the crowd heading for hall, and Dudley Vane-Carter glanced round as a fat thumb poked in his ribs.

"Oh! You!" said V.C. "Did you have the cheek to butt in at St. Jim's, you fat frog, or was it only gammon?"

Turkey sniffed.

"I called to see my friend D'Arcy at St. Jim's this afternoon, if that's what you mean, V.C.," he answered, with dignity.

"Didn't he boot you out?"

"Never saw a fellow so glad to see me," retorted Turkey. "We got quite pally the day he was here playing soccer, you know—."

"I don't know."

"Well, you know now I've told you," yapped Turkey.

"Not at all."

"Well, perhaps you'll believe we're jolly good pals, when I tell you that he's asked me home to his place for the Christmas holidays!"

"Less than ever," said Vane-Carter.

"Well, he has!" hooted Turkey.

"Gammon."

"And look here, I shan't be able to come home with you for the hols, after all, V.C. Sorry, and all that but there it is."

"You won't? What a spot of luck for me!"

"Look here, you swob—."

"If you mean it—."

"I jolly well do!" declared Turkey. "I have enough of you at school, V.C., and I don't think that I could stand you in the holidays as well!" said Turkey. "In fact, I know I couldn't."

"Wha-a-at?" ejaculated Vane-Carter.

"You see, you're not the only pebble on the beach, as I told you," grinned Turkey.

"As my pal D'Arcy has asked me home for Christmas, I shall be going to Eastwood House, and I simply couldn't find time for you these hols."

Vane-Carter stared at him.

"I'm going on to Eastwood House, in Hampshire, when we break up here," continued Turkey, greatly enjoying the expression on Vane-Carter's face. "And I don't mind telling you," added Turkey, by way of rubbing it in, "that I wouldn't be found dead at your show, Dudley Vane-Carter, you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

And Turkey rolled on triumphantly into the hall, leaving Dudley Vane-Carter staring after him quite blankly.

Chapter Eight

SOLD AGAIN!

"WHAT about giving the jolly old haunted turret the once over?"

"Yaas, wathah, if you like, deah boy."

It was a cold and frosty morning.

Breakfast was over at Eastwood House. Seven St. Jim's juniors, and one fat Carcroft junior, were on the terrace, looking out over the snow-sprinkled lawns and frosty woodlands of Eastwood.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's home was on somewhat magnificent lines. Turkey Tuck, on his arrival the previous day, had been considerably impressed. Indeed, he had been almost overcome by Gussy's noble pater, Lord Eastwood. But he had quite recovered his fat confidence in the morning.

All the juniors on the terrace looked merry and bright: Turkey merriest and brightest of all. He wished that Dudley Vane-Carter, or Harry Compton and Co. of Carcroft, could have seen him now, strolling on the terrace, an honoured guest at one of the stately homes of England!

All the members of Arthur Augustus's Christmas party were present, with the exception of Tom Merry. Tom was coming on later from Huckleberry Heath.

Turkey, so far, was happily unaware of that circumstance.

Probably his fat face would not have been shining with so much satisfaction,

had he been aware that the genuine rescuer of little Georgie was booked to arrive shortly at Eastwood House. It was a case where ignorance was bliss.

It was Monty Lowther who suggested giving the haunted turret the once-over. There was a general nod of assent. All the juniors were rather curious to explore that ancient turret, about which Arthur Augustus had told them the ghost story in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

It was the first Turkey had heard of it, and he squinted inquiringly at Arthur Augustus.

"A haunted turret?" he asked. "What's that?"

"It is the oldest part of the house," explained Arthur Augustus, "a wemnant of the castle that stood heah in vewy ancient times. It is said to be haunted by the phantom of a dwarf—."

"Who was imprisoned in the turret-room by one of D'Arcy's aunt's sisters," further explained Monty Lowther.

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah. Accordin' to the legend, Twuck—I mean Tuck—the ghost is heard to gwoan aroud the tuwwet in wild weathah at Chwistmas time—."

"And fellows got awfully scared when they heard the groan, even if it's in a study at St. Jim's!" remarked Wally of the Third.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass on his minor with a withering look.

"You are a young ass, Wally! Nobody was scared—."

"You looked it!" grinned Wally.

Four Fourth-formers, and two Shell fellows, gave Walter Adolphus D'Arcy expressive looks. It was true that they had been somewhat startled, on that occasion in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's, when the playful Wally had groaned at the door. But no fellow was prepared to admit that he had been in the smallest degree scared.

"I suppose," said Jack Blake, slowly, "that a man mustn't kick a cheeky Third-Form fag here."

"Pity!" remarked Manners.

"Fags want kicking," said Herries. "They can do with a lot of it."

"Bow-wow!" said Wally, cheerfully, He whistled shrilly to his rough-haired terrier,

Pongo, who was prancing on the terrace. "Come on, Pongo! Race you, old man! Come on, Gussy—let's race Pongo!"

D'Arcy minor scampered off with Pongo: his major's eye, and eyeglass, following him with another withering look: which produced no effect whatever on Wally's back as he scampered.

"Would you like to see the haunted tuwwet, Twuck?" asked Arthur Augustus. Gussy was very specially attentive to his Carcroft guest: all the more because he had a feeling that Turkey had not won golden opinions from the other fellows.

"Oh, yes, let's see it," said Turkey. "Where is it?"

"This way, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus led the way along the terrace, to a corner where an old iron stair led up to a balcony on the first floor. They ascended to the balcony, and passed through a french window, which gave on to the end of a wide old corridor with walls of dark oak. This was already familiar ground to Turkey, the rooms occupied by the schoolboy guests at Eastwood being on that corridor.

Turkey rolled cheerfully along with the St. Jim's juniors. Turkey was not afraid of ghosts: in the daytime, at least.

"Heah we are," said Arthur Augustus, as they reached the upper end of the oak corridor. It ended in a flight of stone steps, curving upward in a spiral into the turret.

Up the spiral stair went the juniors, in twos: the stairway being too narrow for more. They reached a stone landing, dimly lighted by a small barred window, where they were faced by a massive iron-studded oaken door.

Turkey Tuck leaned on that door and breathed hard. Turkey was always a little short of wind, and the spiral stair had taken toll of the little he had.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, suddenly, as he stopped at the oaken door.

"What's up?" yawned Blake. "Ghosts around?"

"Wats! The tuwwet door is always kept locked," explained Arthur Augustus, "and I have forgotten to bwing up the key."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy all over!" remarked Digby.

"Weally, Dig—."

"Just Gussy!" agreed Blake.

"Weally, Blake—."

"We've clambered up about a thousand steps, and now Gussy tells us we can't get in!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Good old Gussy!"

"Pewwaps you would like to go down and fetch the key, Blake!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "It is kept in the top drawer of the tallboy in the libwawy."

"Perhaps I should," assented Blake, "but more likely not."

"Pewwaps you would like to go, Hewwies."

"And perhaps not!" remarked Herries.

"What about you, Dig?"

"Nothing about me," grinned Dig.

"What about you, Lowthah?"

"Less than nothing about me."

"Pewwaps you would like to wun down for the key, Mannahs?"

"As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, the perhapsfulness is terrific," smiled Manners.

Nobody seemed anxious to negotiate that long and steep spiral stair a second time. Turkey Tuck leaned on the oaken door of the turret-room, and breathed hard: five fellows leaned on the ancient stone walls, and grinned. Apparently the general opinion was that, as Arthur Augustus had forgotten the key, it was up to Arthur Augustus to fetch the same from the top drawer in the tallboy in the library.

"Bai Jove! You seem wathah a lazy lot," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps I had bettah go."

"No perhaps about that!" said Blake.

"Weally, you know—Oh! Bai Jove! What's that?"

Arthur Augustus gave quite a jump. Five other fellows started. Turkey Tuck uttered a startled squeak. From the winding stair below, dim and shadowy, a strange sound came echoing up:

Groan!

"Oh, haddocks!" squeaked Turkey. "Wha-a-a-at's that?"

The iron-barred window let in little of the wintry sunlight on to the stone landing. The stair was in gloom. With startled faces, the juniors stared down into the gloomy depth.

"What on earth—!" muttered Blake.

"That wasn't the wind," said Manners.

"Oh! Listen!"

Groan!

It came again—a deep, hair-raising, harrowing groan. It echoed eerily up the narrow stair.

"Bai Jove! It must be somebody playin' twicks—."

"There was nobody about when we came up—."

"What the thump—!"

"Hark!"

Another sound came from the gloom below. But this time it was not a hair-raising groan. It was a yell of impish laughter. And the next moment a chubby grinning face appeared on the stair.

"Bai Jove! Wally—."

"That young villain—."

"Might have guessed—."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally. He tossed a long iron key on the landing, where it clanged on the stone. "You forgot the key, Gussy—I thought I'd bring it up for you. I say, was anybody scared? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I'm jolly well going to boot him!" exclaimed Blake, wrathfully.

"Sold again!" chuckled Wally.

"Scrag him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally. "Sold again! Easy to sell you fellows, ain't it? Ha, ha, ha."

And Wally of the Third scampered down the spiral stair and vanished, his merry yell floating back as he went.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard through his noble nose. "I have a gweat mind to go aftah that young wapscaillon, and give him a feahful thwashin'. Howevah, heah is the key."

And Arthur Augustus picked up the key, inserted it into the ancient lock of the turret door, and turned it. The heavy oaken door swung open, and the juniors crowded into the haunted turret.

Chapter Nine

STARTLING!

"CHEERY sort of show!" remarked Blake.

"Jolly cold!" said Turkey.

"Yaas, wathah! There is a feahful dwaught blows up that spiwal stair," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I will shut the door."

Arthur Augustus pulled shut the heavy oaken door of the turret-room. It closed with a dull thud, that sounded bodeful in the ears of the schoolboys. They could not help thinking of the prisoner of the turret, in days long gone by, who must have heard that heavy thud of the closing door, many times, with despair in his heart.

Cheery faces became serious as they looked round the turret-room. Floor and walls were of solid stone blocks, and the light came in through loopholes pierced in the massive stone. Outside, the winter sunshine was bright: but in the dim old turret-room a perpetual twilight reigned.

In one corner, several ancient oaken planks lay on trestles. That, apparently, had formed the bed of the hapless prisoner of the turret. Except for an old oaken bench, there was no other furniture.

"Tough old times, when they shut a man up in a place like this," remarked Monty Lowther. "Your aunt's sister must have been a tough old dame, Gussy."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Jolly good view, at least," said Manners, looking from one of the loopholes. "You can see miles and miles of Hampshire from here."

"Yaas. You can see Easthowpe in one diwection and the railway station," said Arthur Augustus, "The railway station wathah spoils the view: but aftah all," added Arthur Augustus, considerately, "there must be railway stations! If Tom Mewwy was comin' along now we could see him fwom heah."

Turkey Tuck had seated himself on the oaken bench. Sitting down was one of Turkey's favourite occupations, especially after climbing stairs. But as Arthur Augustus spoke, Turkey jumped up quite suddenly, his gooseberry eyes fixing on the swell of St. Jim's with a startled squint.

"Did—did you say Tom Merry?" he ejaculated.

Arthur Augustus glanced at him.

"Yaah—pwobably you wemembah Tom Mewwy, Twuck—he captained our side in the soccah match at Carcroft—"

"Oh, haddock!" said Turkey, blankly.

He did remember Tom Merry, very well indeed. But he remembered him on a later date than that of the soccer match at Carcroft. He remembered him at a level crossing on the Wayland road a few miles from St. Jim's.

"I—I say, is—is he coming here?" stammered Turkey.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Oh, haddock!"

Turkey squinted at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in utter dismay.

Not for a moment had it occurred to his fat mind that Tom Merry would be joining Gussy's Christmas party at Eastwood House.

He was aware that Tom had gone home—he knew that from Tom. Naturally he had taken it for granted that Tom was going to stay there for the Christmas vacation, so far as he had thought about him at all. Where Tom spent Christmas, Turkey did not care a bean, so long as it was not at Eastwood House. This was a very startling discovery for Turkey.

Turkey was so startled, and so dismayed, that all the fellows in the turret-room noticed it—they could not help noticing it. They all looked curiously at Turkey. Why Turkey should be concerned, was a mystery to them. So far as they knew, he had never even seen Tom Merry, except when he was playing football on the Carcroft ground.

"I—I say, you—you never told me," stammered Turkey.

Arthur Augustus raised his noble eyebrows a little.

"Weally, Twuck, it nevah occurred to me to mention it. What does it mattah?"

"Oh! Nothing," stammered Turkey.

"Tom Mewwy is a very nice chap, Twuck, and you will like him when you see him," said Arthur Augustus. "Everybody likes Tom Mewwy."

"Oh! Yes! But—"

"But what, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, in wonder.

"Oh! Nothing! I—I say, when is he coming?" stammered Turkey. "Not to-day?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Oh, haddock!"

"He may dwop in early, or he may dwop in late," explained Arthur Augustus. "It

depends wathah on the twains, which are wathah uncertain at Chwistmas time. I have heard that there has been a vewy heavy snowfall on the line, and the twains may be delayed. But he will blow in all wight some time to-day or this evenin'."

"Oh, lor'!"

"Is anythin' the mattah, Twuck?"

"Oh! No! It—it's jolly cold here, that's all," stammered Turkey. "Nothing's the matter—absolutely nothing at all—of course I don't mind Tom Merry coming—I—I—I shall be jolly glad to see him again—."

Every fellow in the turret-room was gazing at Turkey.

That he was not only dismayed, but actually alarmed, by the news that Tom Merry was coming to Eastwood House, was written all over his fat face. That news had, for some mysterious and inexplicable reason, completely knocked James Smyth Tuck off his balance. Never had a fellow looked quite so flabbergasted. Even the unobservant Arthur Augustus could see that something was amiss.

"What on earth's the matter with that fat frog?" Monty Lowther whispered in Manner's ear.

Manners shook his head.

"Give it up! He doesn't know Tom—I don't see why he should care a boiled bean whether he comes here or not."

"But he does!"

"Yes: he does."

"If you find it too cold heah, Twuck, we may as well go down," said Arthur Augustus. "Shall we twot, you fellows?"

"Well, we've seen everything except the ghost," said Blake, "and his ghost-ship doesn't seem to be at home. Let's cut."

Arthur Augustus pushed at the oaken door.

To his surprise, it did not open.

He pushed harder.

"Bai Jove! This beastly door seems to have jammed," he exclaimed. "It won't open when I push."

"Let me shove it," said Blake.

Jack Blake administered a hefty shove to the door. But it still remained immovable.

"What the dickens—!" exclaimed Blake.

"Did you lock it, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Of course I did not lock it, Lowthah! I left the key in the outside of the lock."

"Then what the jolly old dickens is the matter with it?"

"Weally, it is vewy wemarkable! I have been up in this tuwwet a good many times, and the door has never jammed befoah," said Arthur Augustus, puzzled. "Pewwaps we had bettah all push togethah, and that may do the twick."

"Line up!" said Herries.

The juniors crowded at the door. Turkey sat down again on the bench to watch them. Six sturdy St. Jim's fellows seemed numerous enough to shove the door open, if it was amenable to shoving, and the fat Turkey saw no reason for exerting himself.

But six fellows, shoving at the turret door, produced not the slightest impression upon it. It remained as firm as the old stone walls round it.

"Bai Jove! That is wathah wotten!" said Arthur Augustus. "We seem to be impwisoned like that dwawf chap who pewished here in the weign of King Thingummy."

"Well, we're jolly well not going to perish here in the reign of George the Sixth," growled Blake. "We've got to get that dashed door open."

"Yaas, but it won't open, deah boy."

"Well, this is a go!" said Digby. "I suppose if we shout for help, somebody will come up the turret stair and let us out."

"I am afwaid that that is wathah impwobable, Dig."

"What?"

"You see, this tuwwet is so high up, and so wemote fwom the othah parts of the house, that I doubt vewy much whethah shouts would be heard fwom it."

"You silly ass!" roared Dig. "Mean to say that we're shut up here and can't get out?"

"Pway do not get excited about it, deah boy. It is no good slangin' a fellow. The door has nevah jammed befoah, that I know of. It is a vewy unforeseen occuwrence. I weally do not know what can be done."

The juniors looked at one another, and looked at Arthur Augustus. How the turret door could have jammed in that

inexplicable way, they could not imagine, But it had! They had no more chance of getting through that oaken door, than of getting through the solid stone walls. They were prisoners in the turret-room, immured as safe and sound as the old earl's jester who had perished there in the days when knights were bold!

"Look here," said Blake. "Didn't you tell us that that jolly old prisoner was heard groaning from the turret?"

"Yaas, wathah! But the earl's wetainahs were on the tuwwet stair," explained Arthur Augustus, "he could not have been heard othahwise."

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther. "So we're prisoners here, like that jolly old dwarf!"

"It looks like it, deah boy. But we shall be missed soonah or latah," said Arthur Augustus, encouragingly. "If nobody knew we were heah, we might have to wemain a vewy long time befoah they thought of lookin' in the tuwwet for us—but Wally knows we are heah—."

Blake gave a yell.

"Wally! That young villain—!"

"Weally, Blake—."

"Wally, of course!" roared Blake. "The door hasn't jammed—it's that cheeky fag at his tricks again—."

"Wally!" gasped Herries.

"By gum! We'll scrag that fag bald-headed!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Do you weally think—?"

"Fathead! Isn't it as clear as noonday!" hooted Blake. "I'll bet that young villain tiptoed up the stair and turned the key—."

"What a brain!" came a cheery voice through the keyhole of the turret door. "You learn to be jolly bright in the Fourth, Blake."

"You young villain, unlock that door!" roared Blake.

"Say 'please pretty'!"

"What?"

"Please pretty!"

"By gum! If I could reach you—!"

"But you can't!" chuckled Wally through the keyhole. "I say, I'm going out with Pongo, and shan't be back till lunch. If you'd like me to let you out before I go, say 'please pretty'."

"Bai Jove! If you are askin' for a feahful thwashin', Wally—."

"Bow-wow!"

"Unlock that door at once, you young wapsallion."

"You haven't said 'please pretty' yet."

The juniors imprisoned in the turret-room looked at one another. But for the oaken door between, Wally of the Third would have been booked for the ragging of his young life. But the door was between, and Wally, on the safe side of it, chuckled.

There was a long, long, pause, and then Blake, with deep feelings, said "Please pretty" through the keyhole!

There was another chuckle, followed by the turn of the key in the lock. That was followed, promptly, by the sound of scampering feet on the turret stair. Wally of the Third did not wait for the prisoners of the turret to emerge.

Blake shoved the door open, and rushed out. Wally was gone, doing the turret steps three at a jump. The St. Jim's juniors descended the stair in haste, only Arthur Augustus lingering to lock the door, and withdraw the old iron key, to be restored to its customary place in the top drawer of the tallboy in the library. The other fellows went to look for Wally: luckily—for the scamp of the Third—without finding him. They quite forgot Turkey Tuck and his strange and mysterious alarm at the news that Tom Merry was coming.

But Turkey could not forget his alarm: and it was a thoughtful and worried Turkey who sat at lunch that day at Lord Eastwood's hospitable board.

Chapter Ten

THE TRACK IN THE SNOW

TOM MERRY whistled.

It was a whistle indicative of dismay.

Snow, in whirling flakes, was falling, through misty midnight gloom. Tom came out of Easthorpe Station into a world of darkness and glimmering snow, as silent and solitary as a desert.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

The snowfall on the railway had, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sagely foresaw, delayed the trains. But the delays had

been much more extensive than Arthur Augustus had imagined. Hours and hours had been lost on lines blocked by snow, and Tom Merry had begun to wonder whether he ever would arrive at Easthorpe at all! But at long last, a slow train had crawled in, landing him there at midnight—long after everyone at Eastwood House must have given up expecting him till the morrow. And there he made the happy discovery that the telephone lines were down, and that he could not get through to Eastwood House to apprise the residents therein of his late arrival.

Not that that mattered a great deal, for the snow piled on the roads was too thick and deep for a car to get through. If he was going on from Easthorpe village to Eastwood House, he had to walk in any case. So, having made up his mind to it, he left his bag at the station, to be sent on next day, and started out. But he gave a whistle of dismay as he came out of the station.

Not a single light glimmered in any window in the village. Roofs and walls and fences were thick with snow. A spotless sheet stretched before him, without a single foot-print in to tell that anyone was abroad at that late hour. It was a world of shadows and snow, which Tom Merry had all to himself.

However, it was useless to grouse about what could not be helped. After that prolonged whistle, Tom set out, as cheerfully as he could, to tramp through the mile of snow to Eastwood House.

The sleeping village was left behind. He tramped by a snow-covered road, between tall leafless trees, whose gaunt branches glimmered in the gloom. A keen wind whirled snow-flakes about his ears.

It was only a mile. But the going was slow, and it seemed to Tom that he had covered two or three, at least, by the time the park walls of Eastwood came in sight.

The great bronze gates stood open, with snow banked against them. There was no glimmer of light from the lodge-keeper's windows. Everyone at Eastwood, he had no doubt, was long since in bed and fast asleep: he would have to awaken somebody to let him in, when he reached the house. He turned in at the gates he tramped up the long drive between leafless

trees, his tramping footsteps leaving a deep trail in the snow behind him.

He wondered whether perhaps D'Arcy, or Manners and Lowther, might have stayed up late, in case he came. But it was not likely. His friends would conclude that he had put off coming till the morrow—as indeed he wished that he had done. In the distance, he could see dimly the great facade of Eastwood House, but he could discern no gleam of light, save the glimmer of wintry starlight on the windows, through the snow-flakes.

But suddenly Tom came to a stop, staring at the thick snow through which he was tramping. In the snow were deep footprints.

All the way from Easthorpe, he had not seen a single track in the snow, and had had a feeling of being the only person left in a deserted world. It was surprising to pick up tracks on the drive at Eastwood House. Somebody, after all, was up: and his first thought was that some of his friends might have come out to look for him.

But that was only for a moment. The tracks he saw did not come from the house, but led towards it. In the thick, soft snow, every mark was plain and clear, even in the dimness of the stars. Tom knitted his brows. The track did not come up from the gates: his own trail was the only one there. This new track came out of the trees at the side of the drive, as if someone had climbed over the park wall and crossed the grounds instead of coming in at the gates. And from the point where he came on it, it led directly up the drive towards the house—and it was fresh. New snow-flakes were falling, but had not yet obliterated it.

"By gum!" breathed Tom.

It was strange and startling to discover that trail in the snow, nearly an hour after midnight. It could hardly have been made by anyone belonging to Eastwood House. But who else?

And its freshness struck Tom. Already, under his eyes, the fast-falling flakes were covering the track. In a few minutes it would be lost to sight. That meant that the unknown person who had trodden there was only a few minutes ahead of him—ten minutes at the most.

For a long minute, Tom Merry stood in deep thought, wondering. Then he started on again up the drive, treading in the tracks that stretched before him, like the page of Good King Wenceslaus.

His eyes, and his ears, were on the alert. Some tramp, perhaps, might have entered the grounds of Eastwood by clambering over the park wall, seeking shelter for the night in some out-building. Or it might possibly be some more desperate character, seeking entrance into a sleeping house, where there was ample plunder in Lord Eastwood's safe in the library to reward a cracksman. If that was so, Tom's late arrival had happened fortunately for his lordship—for he was certainly going to learn who had made those tracks in the snow.

He followed the track to the broad terrace that stretched along the front of Eastwood House. The terrace was carpeted with snow: and in that white carpet, the track led plainly on.

It did not lead to the door. It went along the terrace, and Tom followed it, as far as an old iron stair that led up to a balcony. Tom had stayed at Eastwood House before, and he knew that iron stair: it gave access to a balcony on which there was a french window, opening on the corridor where Gussy's guests had their rooms—his own room, all ready for him, among them. Whoever had left that trail had gone up the iron stair—every step showed a track.

Tom paused.

It was possible, after all, that it was one of his friends: they would naturally use that way in and out of the house, close by their own quarters. If one of them had come out to look for him—

But he realised that it was very unlikely. There would be a light, if anyone was up: and there was no light.

His heart beat faster, as he realised that someone, almost certainly some lawless prowler of the night, was now on the balcony above.

As he stood listening, there came a faint sound to his ears from above—a cracking sound. He did not need telling what it was. The lock on the french window had snapped open—under a surreptitious hand. It was not the sound of a key—it was the sound of a snap.

He delayed no longer.

Silently, he ascended the iron stair, in the track of the man who had gone before him. It was a cracksman who had snapped the lock on the french window—no doubt having selected it as the easiest point of ingress. Tom Merry knew it now, as surely as if he had seen the thievish fingers at work.

Watchful and alert, he reached the balcony. The french window stood wide open. All was dark within, dark and silent: but it seemed to him that in the silence, he detected a faint stealthy footfall.

His heart beat fast. But his nerve did not fail him. There was a thief of the night inside Eastwood House, and he had to give the alarm, whatever the risk to himself. Silently, he stepped in at the open window, and groped for the electric light switch, he remembered within.

Click!

Sudden light flooded the corridor.

A sharp, startled exclamation reached his ears. The next moment, he saw the man, blinking and staring like a startled owl on the sudden light—a man in dark clothes, sprinkled here and there with clinging snow-flakes—a man whose startled face was a mingling of fear and fury: a face with a gash of a mouth, and close-set eyes that gleamed and glittered like a rat's.

For a split second, the schoolboy and the cracksman stared at one another: the midnight prowler much the more startled of the two. Then Tom Merry's voice rang through the sleeping house, with all the force of his lungs.

"Help! Burglars! Help!"

He had time for only that one shout. The next instant, the man was upon him, with the spring of a tiger, and he was struggling desperately in grasping hands.

Chapter Eleven

ALARM IN THE NIGHT!

"BAI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up suddenly in bed.

In the mists and shadows of sleep, it

seemed to Arthur Augustus that he had heard a shout: and, as he sat up half-awake, a sound of struggling.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

He jumped out of bed.

What was going on, he could not guess. The thought of burglars did not dawn upon his noble mind. But there was an unmistakable sound of struggling, trampling, and panting breath in the corridor: and Arthur Augustus, in his elegant pyjamas, ran to the door and opened it and looked out.

The light was on in the corridor. Arthur Augustus stared in blank amazement at two figures, locked in a grapple, that struggled and rocked and panted, close by the open french window.

"Oh, cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, blankly. "What the dooce—!"

Other doors flew open. Manners and Lowther came out of their rooms: Blake and Herries and Digby emerged. Another door opened a few inches, and a fat face and a startled squinting eye looked out—but Turkey Tuck did not emerge. Turkey was satisfied to be a looker-on.

"Who—?"

"What—?"

"What's up?"

"What the dickens—"

"Oh! Look!"

"Help!" came a panting cry from one of the struggling figures. The next moment, Tom Merry was flung to the floor with stunning force: and the cracksman was leaping for the window. Tom lay face down, dizzy from the crash.

"Burglars!" gasped Blake.

"Oh, cwikey!"

"Collar him!" shouted Lowther.

But it was too late to collar the cracksman. The moment he had flung off Tom Merry, he leaped through the open french window to the balcony.

Monty Lowther rushed to the window. He had a momentary glimpse of a dark figure leaping down the iron stair. Then, it vanished into the snowy night.

The cracksman was gone.

"Burglars!" gasped Herries. "The window's open—it was locked last night—"

"He's gone!" said Lowther.

"There is one of the wottahs, deah

boys," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Gwab him befoah he gets away too."

And Arthur Augustus rushed valiantly at the overcoated figure that sprawled panting on the floor. His aristocratic hands grasped that sprawling, panting figure, pinning it to the floor, in a gasping state.

"Got him! Wally wound, deah boys," shouted Arthur Augustus, in great excitement. "I've got the villain—help!"

"You howling ass!" came a gasp from the overcoated figure. "Leggo!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You thumping chump, I'm not a burglar! Leggo, or I'll dot you in the eye, you dithering fathead."

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus released his grasp on his prisoner, in blank astonishment. Tom Merry sat up, gasping. "Bai Jove! Am I dweamin'? Is—is—is that Tom Mewwy?" Arthur Augustus fairly stuttered.

"Tom!" exclaimed Manners and Lowther together.

"Tom Merry!" ejaculated Blake.

"Sort of!" gasped Tom. "And I had enough from that burglar, Gussy, without you piling in, you ass!"

"Oh, cwikey! I did not see your face, deah boy—I took you for anotheah burglah!" stuttered Arthur Augustus. "Howevah did you come heah in the middle of the night? Bai Jove!"

"Tom, old man, are you hurt?" exclaimed Manners. Many hands helped Tom Merry to his feet, and he stood gasping for breath.

Up the corridor, a door closed quickly. The burglar was gone—Turkey Tuck was not thinking of him. But Tom Merry was really more alarming to the fat Turkey than a burglar! One glimpse of Tom was enough for James Smyth Tuck—he closed his door promptly. All through the evening Turkey had been dreading that arrival: but when Tom did not arrive, the fat Carcroft junior had hoped that he was safe for one more day. And now Tom had turned up in the middle of the night: and Turkey, as he crawled back to his warm bed, wondered dismally whether it was the last time that he would sleep in a bed at Eastwood House.

But nobody heeded Turkey, or thought

of him. All the St. Jim's juniors were staring at Tom Merry, in amazement at seeing him there.

"Hurt, old man?" asked Lowther.

"No—only a bit shaken, and out of breath," gasped Tom. "The blighter was too strong for me. I tried to hold him—."

"Never mind that, so long as you're not damaged," said Manners. "But how the jolly old thump did you turn up here?"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally thought I must be dweamin', deah boy. We gave you up, you know, as you did not awwive—."

"What is all this? Arthur, what has happened?" A tall lean figure, in dressing-gown and slippers, came up the passage from the gallery over the hall, Lord Eastwood gazed in astonishment at the crowd of schoolboys in pyjamas, gathered round Tom Merry. "Arthur! What—."

"It's Tom Mewwy, fathah," explained Arthur Augustus. "He seems to have awwived aftah all—."

"Sorry to butt in so late, sir," said Tom. "The trains were late, as the line was blocked with snow: but it's lucky I did, really, as I followed the track of that burglar to the house, and came up in time to give the alarm."

"A burglar!" exclaimed Lord Eastwood.

Wilkinson, the butler, and five or six servants, appeared behind his lordship. The alarm had spread through the house.

"Please tell me what has happened, Merry," exclaimed Lord Eastwood. There was a somewhat dubious expression on his face. Perhaps his lordship had a faint suspicion that the schoolboys had been larking in the middle of the night.

Tom Merry proceeded to explain.

Lord Eastwood's face became very serious as he listened. When Tom had finished, he stepped to the french window and examined the lock. A glance was sufficient to show that it had been cracked from without. The cracksman was long gone—probably a mile away by that time: but that Tom Merry's late arrival had prevented a burglary at Eastwood House was clear.

"My dear boy," said Lord Eastwood, "I am sorry you have had such an experience—but really, it has turned out very

fortunately. Some of you, no doubt, saw the burglar—."

"We all saw him, sir," said Manners.

"Then you will be able to give his description to the police. I will telephone to the police station at once—."

"The line's down, sir," said Tom, "that's why I couldn't get through from the railway station."

"Then it must wait till morning. But you must be in want of supper, my dear boy, after your journey; Wilkinson, please see to it."

"Very good, my lord."

Tom Merry was undoubtedly in want of his supper. Even Turkey Tuck had never been readier for a meal. He sat down to it cheerfully, under the kindly eye of Wilkinson: his chums, in coats or dressing-gowns, gathered round him while he ate, to hear over again, in fuller detail, the story of his startling adventure.

And when he had finished his supper, Tom was more than ready for bed. Arthur Augustus, as he said good night to him at the door of his room, added a spot of news.

"By the way, there's a chap heah you haven't seen—I suppose the wow did not wake him up," said Gussy. "Do you wemembah Twuck?"

"Truck!" repeated Tom, blankly.

"I mean Tuck—I nevah seem to wemembah the chap's name wight—but I think it is Tuck, not Twuck—."

"That fat chap at Carcroft?" asked Tom.

"Yes, I remember him."

"He is heah, deah boy: you will see him in the mornin'."

"Oh!" said Tom. Certainly he remembered Turkey Tuck, to whom he had handed little Georgie at the Wayland level-crossing: but he was not particularly keen to see that fat youth again.

"He is wathah a splendid chap, Tom Mewwy."

"Is he?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! Bwave as a lion, uttahly weckless of dangah, and weady to wisk his life for anybody."

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom. "That sounds good, Gussy! I shouldn't have thought it, on his looks."

"Pewwaps I shouldn't, eithah," confessed Arthur Augustus. "But, appeawances

may be vewy deceptive, old chap. One of the bwavest chaps I evah came acwoss! Howevah, you are sleepy, deah boy—I will tell you all about it in the mornin', Good night, Tom Mewwy."

"Good night, Gussy."

And Tom Merry turned in, and forgot Turkey Tuck and everything else as soon as his head lay on the pillow.

Chapter Twelve

SOMETHING LIKE A SURPRISE!

TOM MERRY opened his eyes wide.

He gazed at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was too astonished to speak. He just gazed.

It was a wintry morning. The St. Jim's juniors had been snowballing one another in the keen, frosty air, and had come in for breakfast with very healthy appetites. One member of Arthur Augustus's Christmas party was absent from the breakfast-table. Turkey Tuck had not materialised. Inquiry elicited from Wilkinson the information that Master Tuck was breakfasting in bed that morning, and the other fellows did not, perhaps, miss him unduly. After breakfast, the juniors gathered about the log fire in the old oak-panelled hall of Eastwood House: and it was there that Arthur Augustus proceeded to relate to Tom Merry that heroic exploit at Wayland level-crossing, which had so raised James Smyth Tuck in his noble estimation, and caused him to add the "Cormorant" of Carcroft to the party at Eastwood House.

It was no wonder that Tom opened his eyes wide as he listened. Indeed, he could hardly believe his ears.

The blank astonishment in his face caused all the other fellows to look at him. True, every fellow, excepting Arthur Augustus, had some lingering doubts about the heroism of Turkey Tuck. But Tom Merry's speechless amazement was rather a surprise to them.

"So you see, Tom Mewwy, I was vewy glad to get Twuck—I mean Tuck—to join us heah," went on Arthur Augustus, "I wegard him with vewy gweat admiwation,

which I am suah you will share, deah boy. A chap who would wun such feahful wisks to save a little kid—"

"Tuck did?" gasped Tom, finding his voice at last.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Pulling my leg?" asked Tom.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, if you're not pulling my leg, Tuck must have been pulling yours," said Tom. "But let's have it clear. You say that it happened on the day I left to go home, when I left you behind chasing your hat—"

"That's wight! I came aftah you, but you were out of sight, and I found Tuck at the level-cwossin', holdin' the little kid he had wescued fwom the wushin' twain—"

"The signalman's kid—Georgie, I think they call him."

"Yaas, wathah. And Mrs. Signalman—I don't know her name—was almost weepin' over him, and pwaisin' him for what he had done—"

"Oh, my hat! And what had he done?"

"Wushed on the line and wescued the kid at the wisk of his life, deah boy. It was weally hewoic."

"Rubbish!"

"Bai Jove! What did you say, Tom Mewwy?"

"I said rubbish."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it is not like you to detwact fwom a fellow who has done a vewy bwave and splendid thing—"

"Tom, old man," murmured Lowther, "if Tuck did it, it was pretty plucky. And Gussy thinks that he did."

"Rot!" said Tom. "Is there any fellow here who would stand by and see a little kid run over by a train? Any fellow here would have done it, and any fellow anywhere else, for that matter."

"Let's hope so," said Blake, "but Tuck did it—"

"Bosh! The signalman's wife couldn't have seen what happened, if she thought that Tuck did it. I suppose she lost sight of the kid, and found Tuck carrying him, and so got it wrong."

"But he weally did it, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, warmly. "And I weally think, deah boy, that you might give honah where honah is due."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Look here, Tom," said Manners, with a very keen look at his chum, "do you know anything about it? You must have passed the level-crossing about that time—did you see anything of Tuck there?"

"Sort of," said Tom. "Look here, Gussy, Tuck can't have told you this—you've got it all wrong, but the fellow wouldn't—he couldn't—"

"Wash that out," said Lowther. "Tuck did it, according to his own account. If you saw anything of what happened, Tom, cough it up."

"Well, I saw a little," said Tom, laughing. "Tuck was on one side of the level-crossing gates, when I came up on the other. He was squinting at the kid on the line, looking as paralysed as a stuffed dummy."

"Bai Jove! Then you were there when it happened, Tom Mewwy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "It is wathah wemarkable that Twuck has nevah mentioned that you were there."

"Very!" said Tom, drily.

"And you saw him pick up the kid off the line, Tom Mewwy?"

"Hardly."

"But you must have seen him, if you were at the level-cwossin' gates," said Arthur Augustus, puzzled.

"Well, I didn't."

"Then what did you see, Tom Mewwy?"

"I've told you—I saw Tuck standing there like a stuffed dummy."

"But somebody picked the kid off the line, deah boy," said the perplexed Gussy. "You must have seen who it was."

"Oh!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. He gave Tom Merry a smack on the shoulder. "You were there—You!"

"Tom, old man!" exclaimed Manners.

"Oh, my hat!" yelled Blake. "That's why Tuck was knocked side-ways yesterday when Gussy told him you were coming here."

"That's why!" grinned Herries.

"He didn't know Tommy was one of the party," exclaimed Dig. "Gussy, old man, I jolly well knew you'd got it wrong—you, all over."

"But I don't undahstand," said Arthur Augustus, blankly, "I wepeat that Mrs.

Signalman was sayin' 'You saved him, you bwave, bwave boy,' and things of that sort, when I came up. Look heah, Tom Mewwy, if Tuck did not do it, who did?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

The truth had dawned on all the party by this time, with the exception of Arthur Augustus. It had not yet penetrated the aristocratic brain of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Guess!" said Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You howling, ass, Gussy," exclaimed Blake. "Can't you see that it was Tommy that did it, and that that fat Carcroft spoofer has been pulling your leg? He didn't know Tom was coming here, so he chanced it, see?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Tom's the giddy hero!" grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry reddened.

"Chuck that, you ass!" he exclaimed. "It was nothing, as Tuck could have told you if he liked. Any fellow would have done the same thing."

"Not Tuck!" chuckled Lowther.

"Well, it was rather sudden, and he hadn't time to think—he doesn't look as if he's quick on the uptake," said Tom. "Can't blame any chap for not being ready to act in a sudden emergency—we're not all built the same way. It was only a matter of seconds."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble face had become very stern.

"I should not blame Tuck, or any othah fellow, for failin' to wise to such an occasion," he said. "It wequiahed vewy quick decision, as well as tons of pluck, and some fellows' minds don't work quickly. I can quite understand a fellow bein' too flabbahgasted to act till it was too late. But I cannot undahstand any fellow pwetendin' to have done a thing he hadn't done, and claimin' the cwedit due to anothah chap. Pway excuse me, deah boys—I must go up and speak to Twuck."

Arthur Augustus walked away to the staircase. And the group of juniors round the fire in the hall did not envy James Smyth Tuck his coming interview with Arthur Augustus.

Chapter Thirteen

ANY PORT IN A STORM!

TURKEY TUCK sat up in bed.

His fat face wore a worried look.

Turkey was worried that frosty morning. He had reason to be worried. Tom Merry's arrival at Eastwood House was a knock-out for Turkey.

It looked like putting paid to all his plans for the festive season. As soon as Tom Merry met him, his game was up. It was on the strength of that heroic rescue at the level-crossing, that Turkey had landed himself on Arthur Augustus for the "hols." Arthur Augustus had been pleased, indeed proud, to have him, in his generous admiration for Turkey's heroic action. What was Arthur Augustus likely to do when the truth came to light?

And it was bound to come out. Tom Merry, very likely, might never think of mentioning the episode at the Wayland level-crossing. But Arthur Augustus was sure to mention it. And as soon as it was mentioned, the facts would become known.

Turkey had put off the evil hour by breakfasting in bed. That postponed the inevitable. But it was only a respite.

Turkey had made a very good breakfast: wondering whether it would be his last at Eastwood House. There was nothing but crockery left on the tray when it was removed by one of Wilkinson's myrmidons. But even an ample breakfast did not make Turkey happy that frosty morning. He had spoofed Arthur Augustus: and though that did not weigh very heavily on his fat conscience, he had a well-founded apprehension of what would follow when Arthur Augustus discovered that he had been spoofed.

He sat in bed, waiting for the blow to fall, as it were. Very likely it had all come out already! If not, it must come out soon.

"Oh, haddocks!" breathed Turkey, as a footstep stopped at his door.

Had it come out?

He soon knew that it had!

There was a tap at his door: it opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in. The grim expression on the face of the swell of St. Jim's, so different from his

usual benignant look, warned Turkey that he knew.

"Oh! Goo — goo — good-morning, Gussy!" stammered Turkey.

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and gave Turkey a glance like cold steel.

"Kindly do not address me in that mannah, Twuck," he said, icily, "I am Gussy only to my fwiends."

"Oh! I—I say—."

"I have a few words to say to you, Twuck, befoah you leave," said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"I have been talkin' to Tom Mewwy—."

"Oh, lor'!"

"And I have now learned the twuth," said Arthur Augustus, sternly. "Now that I know the twuth, Twuck, do you venchah to maintain that it was you who wescued the little kid at Wayland level-cwossin'?"

Turkey blinked at him.

A wild idea floated for a moment in his fat brain, of maintaining that very thing, and contesting the point with Tom Merry! But the hapless Turkey realized that that was a chicken that would not fight.

"You—you see—!" he stammered.

"Well?"

"I—I—I—I—I never knew Tom Merry was coming here—I—I mean—I—I—I—oh, haddocks!"

"You have deceived me, Twuck."

"You see, I—I."

"I wegard you as a bwaggin' ass—."

"Look here—."

"And a lyin' wottah—."

"I—I say—."

"And a wegulah wascal!" said Arthur Augustus, sternly. "I have told ewevybody what a bwave chap you are, and now it turns out that you are a bwaggin' ass, a lyin' wottah, and a wegulah wascal! I wegard you with contempt, Twuck."

"You see, I—I—."

"You need say no more, Twuck. I wegret vevy much that I evah wegarded you as a fwiend. I shall have to explain to my fathah, and to a lot of othah people, that I was taken in, and that instead of bein' the hewoic chap I wepresentsed you to be, you are a bwaggin' ass, a lyin' wottah, and a wegulah wascal. You have placed me in a vevy awkward position by

your lyin' and bwaggin'. Bai Jove! If you were not undah my fathah's woof at this moment, Twuck," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "I would give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Here, you keep off, you swob!" gasped Turkey, in alarm.

"Even undah my fathah's woof, I have a vevy gweat mind to kick you—."

"Look here—."

"Howevah, I will not kick you," resumed Arthur Augustus, much to Turkey's relief. "If evah a lyin' bwaggin' wottah deserved to be kicked, Twuck, you do: but I will not kick you undah my fathah's woof. I will only wequest you, Twuck, to lose no time in goin'."

"Oh, haddocks."

"I am goin' out this mornin' with my fwiends," continued Arthur Augustus. "We are goin' some distance, to meet my Cousin Ethel, who is comin' for Chwistmas. We shall not weturn till lunch. I shall expect you to be gone when I weturn, Twuck."

"But—I—I say—."

"That is all I have to say to you, Twuck."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned on his heel, and walked back to the door. Turkey squinted after him as he went, with a dismayed fat face.

He had known what to expect if Arthur Augustus found him out. Now it had happened!

"Oh, haddocks!" groaned Turkey.

It was a dismal Turkey that turned out of bed. It was a dismal fat face that looked from the window, a little later, and watched a cheery crowd of fellows tramp away in the snow.

Arthur Augustus and his friends were gone. It was time for Turkey to be gone also. He had to be gone when the party returned for lunch. But—.

Turkey had banked on the hols. at Eastwood House. He had, so to speak, burned his boats behind him.

He had turned down Dudley Fane-Carter: and after what he had said to V.C., it was only too certain that he could not turn him up again!

Even home, sweet home, was not a resource. For Turkey had told the people at home where he was going for Christmas,

and they naturally supposed him to be disposed of. The people at home had gone to spend Christmas with a relative—and it was a relative who, for some reason unknown to Turkey, did not like Turkey!

Never had a hapless spoofer's spoofer come home to him so overwhelmingly. Turkey had to go—and he had nowhere to go! When the door of Eastwood House closed behind him, no other door was open for Turkey Tuck!

"Oh, haddocks!" groaned Turkey again.

He could follow the family to Uncle George's—and meet Uncle George's unwelcoming glare. Was that the only resource?

Was it?

Turkey's fat brain was working now at full pressure. Under that pressure, a new and rather startling idea evolved in his fat mind.

He was not going!

True, if he was still at Eastwood House when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Co. returned, he would have no choice about that. Still, he was not going! He was going to stick on, at least till the Tuck family went home from Uncle George's. And Turkey fancied that he knew how!

There was a discreet tap at the door. Wilkinson looked in. Perhaps the butler knew, or suspected, something, for there was a glimmer in his eyes. Turkey gave him an inimical squint.

"Well?" he yapped.

Wilkinson coughed.

"I understand that you are leaving this morning, sir."

"What about it?"

"I am afraid that a car could not get through the snow, sir. Shall I instruct Thomas to carry your bag to the station?"

"No! I'll carry it myself."

"Very good, sir."

Wilkinson withdrew, and closed the door. Turkey proceeded to pack his bag. But when he quitted his room, he did not take the bag with him.

He went down the corridor, and descended the staircase into the hall, with a casual air. No one was there: and he stopped at the door of the library, listening with an intent fat ear. Then he opened the door, and squinted in. If no one was there—

The library was vacant. Turkey rolled in: and in less than a minute, he had secured an old iron key which was kept in the top drawer of the tallboy. That key was in his pocket when he rolled out again.

He was only just in time: for as he rolled back into the hall, he came face to face with Lord Eastwood, going to the library.

His lordship gave him a rather curious glance. He paused, as if to speak: but apparently deciding not to do so, went on, entered the library, and closed the door. Turkey could guess that he knew!

"Yah!" breathed Turkey, as he went up the stairs again.

He went into his room for his bag. He came out with it in his hand, and squinted up and down the corridor. It was deserted. And Turkey Tuck, with the iron key in his pocket, and the bag in his hand, rolled up the corridor to the turret stair at the end, and disappeared up the spiral stair.

Chapter Fourteen

A MYSTERY!

"GWEAT Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood in his room, gazing at his bed, with surprise in his noble countenance. For a long moment he gazed: then he adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and gazed again: as if he could really not trust his vision without the aid of his monocle. But the startling sight that met his gaze was just the same, with or without his eyeglass. And surprise gave place to something like wrath in Arthur Augustus's aristocratic visage.

A fellow home for the holidays, entertaining a party of friends, certainly did not expect to find himself the victim of practical jokes such as might have been played in the Fourth-form dormitory at St. Jim's. The last thing Arthur Augustus would have expected, under his noble pater's roof, was a "rag" in his room. And that, it seemed, was what had occurred.

Gussy's bed should have been in perfect

order. His beautiful pyjamas should have been neatly folded, ready to his hand.

Instead of which, the bed was a wreck, and the pyjamas lay on the floor, where they had been carelessly thrown. Sheets and blankets were gone, apparently taken away by the ragger.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, with a frown on his noble brow. "This is too bad! This is weally too bad! I wegard it as wathah wotten."

He made a movement towards the bell: but paused. The hour was late: and Arthur Augustus was always considerate to servants. The St. Jim's party had stayed up rather later than usual that evening. Cousin Ethel had joined the party at Eastwood House, and there had been a merry evening—during which nobody had missed Turkey Tuck or even remembered his fat existence. Turkey Tuck was gone—or at all events was believed to be gone—and he was forgotten as soon as gone. It had been quite a jolly evening, with everybody in the best of spirits: and it was prolonged to a rather late hour. But it was not only consideration for the staff of Eastwood House that caused Arthur Augustus to withdraw his finger-tip from the bell. It occurred to him that he did not want Wilkinson and Co. to behold the ragging in his room. A rag by guests upon their host was in the very worst of taste: not the sort of thing that Gussy wished to become the talk of the servants' hall.

He gazed at his bed again. Then he gazed round the room, wondering what the ragger had done with the sheets and blankets. This led to the discovery that the missing sheets and blankets were not in the room at all. They were not thrown under the bed, or stuffed into a wardrobe, or pitched into a corner—they were not to be seen anywhere. Neither were the pillows: Gussy noticed now that the pillows were also missing. And his frown deepened.

"Wotten!" he repeated.

Who had done this? Not Blake or Herries or Dig—they wouldn't! Not Tom Merry or Manners. But Monty Lowther was a youth with a misdirected sense of humour—he could not help being funny.

Arthur Augustus could hardly doubt that Monty was the culprit.

Arthur Augustus would have preferred to say nothing about the matter, but to preserve a lofty and dignified silence on the subject: leaving the person who had been guilty of such bad taste to his conscience as it were. But it was a cold December night: and he simply could not turn into a bed deprived of sheets and blankets. Either he had to ring for Wilkinson and a new supply of gear, or he had to recover the missing bedclothes.

He decided on the latter. He banished the frown from his face—a host could not frown at a guest. But his aristocratic features were somewhat severe, as he quitted his room, and walked along the corridor to Monty Lowther's.

Lowther's door was open. He was chatting in the doorway with Tom Merry and Manners, for a last few minutes before they separated for bed.

The "Terrible Three" all looked round as Arthur Augustus came up. Then they gave him a second look, as his unusually severe cast of countenance caught their attention. They realised that something was amiss.

"Anything up, Gussy?" asked Tom.

"Nothin' much, deah boy. I came along to speak to Lowthah."

"Fire away!" said Monty, cheerily.

"I shall be vewy glad to have my blankets, Lowthah, if you don't mind," said Arthur Augustus, very politely, but with a faint inflection of sarcasm.

The three Shell fellows blinked at him.

"Your blankets!" repeated Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! And my sheets as well, and the pillows, while you are about it, if you have no objection."

"Is that a joke?" asked Lowther, mystified, while Tom Merry and Manners stared.

"I pwesume you intended it as a joke, Lowthah, and I will say nothin' about that: but I cannot vewy well sleep without pillows or sheets or blankets on my bed."

"Has anything happened to your bed?" asked Lowther, blankly.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Look here, what's up, Gussy?" asked

Tom Merry. "We can see that you've got your back up about something."

"I twust, Tom Mewwy, that I should not be likely to get my back up, as you expwess it, with a guest undah my fathah's woof. I am simply askin' Lowthah to weturn the things that have been wemoved fwom my bed, as I cannot vewy well turn in without them."

"You silly ass!" said Monty Lowther, in measured tones. "If somebody has been ragging in your room, do you think I would?"

"Bai Jove! Didn't you, Lowthah?"

"Fathead!"

"Has somebody been ragging?" asked Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! My bed has been almost stwipped of bedclothes."

Monty Lowther gave the swell of St. Jim's a glare.

"And you fancy that I did it?" he hooted.

"If you tell me that you did not, Lowthah, of course I take your word," said Arthur Augustus. "But somebody did! Of course I thought of you, as you are such a silly pwactical jokin' ass, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, it wasn't Lowther, Gussy," he said.

"I am sowwy, Lowthah, if I was in ewwah—but you will wealise that a fellow would natuwally think of you first, you bein' a silly pwactical jokin' ass—"

"Idiot!"

"I wegard that as a vewy oppwobwious expwession, Lowthah: but I will ovahlook it in the cirms," said Arthur Augustus. He turned his eyeglass on the captain of the Shell. "Was it you, then, Tom Mewwy?"

"Not guilty, my lord."

"If it was you, Mannahs—"

"Don't be an ass," said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Better look among your pals in the Fourth," grunted Manners. "It wasn't one of us anyhow, as you'd know if you had the sense of a bunny rabbit."

Arthur Augustus breathed rather hard through his noble nose. He stood looking at the three Shell fellows, and they looked at him. All four faces were getting a little grim. For the first time, there was a

slight rift in the harmony in Arthur Augustus's Christmas party.

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus, at last. "If it wasn't one of you chaps, it must have been one of the othahs, I suppose. I will inquiah."

He moved away, and tapped at Blake's door and opened it. Blake, in shirt and trousers, was half-way to bed, and he stared round in surprise at Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! Walking round to see if the ghost's walking?" he asked.

"Not at all, Blake! Somebody has taken away most of the bedclothes fwom my bed. Was it you?"

"Chump!" said Blake, tersely.

"If that wathah wude wemark means that it was not you, Blake—."

"Ass!"

Arthur Augustus turned from the door. Jack Blake threw on his jacket, and followed him into the corridor. He looked at the group at Lowther's door.

"Any of you fellows been ragging Gussy's room?" he asked.

"No, you silly ass!" growled Lowther.

"Gussy says that somebody has," grunted Blake. "There's only one practical joker here who never knows when to stop, and his name's Lowther."

"Oh, go and eat coke," said Lowther.

"Look here, you Shell fathead—."

"Well, look here, you Fourth-form tick."

"Order!" said Tom Merry, hastily. "Don't rag. Ask Herries and Dig, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus was already tapping at Herries' door. Herries, with his collar and tie off, looked out.

"What's up?"

"Somebody's been waggin' my bed, Hewwies, and has taken away the bedclothes—."

"That ass Lowther, I expect," said Herries.

Arthur Augustus made no reply to that. He turned towards Digby's room. Dig, who had heard the voices in the corridor, opened his door and looked out.

"Anything up?" he asked. "Jolly old ghost walking?"

"Nothin' of the sort, Dig. Somebody has been waggin', and has taken away my bedclothes."

"Silly trick!" commented Dig. He looked up the corridor, and called, "Was it you, Lowther?"

"Find out!" snorted Lowther.

"Lowthah says that it was not he, Dig. Every fellow says that it was not he," said the perplexed Gussy. "But it weally must have been somebody."

"And I shouldn't wonder if that somebody was a cheeky fag in the Third!" grunted Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. He had not thought of Wally.

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed Manners. "That young scamp's as full of tricks as a monkey. Look at the trick he played on us up in the turret."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Wally is a cheeky young wascal," he said, "but he would not play an idiotic twick like that, Quite imposs."

"You fancied that I had!" hooted Lowther.

"Yaas: but you are such a pwactical jokin' ass, you know—."

"Perhaps the blankets walked away!" suggested Lowther, sarcastically. "Or perhaps the ghost walked, and carted them off. Might feel cold in this weather!"

"Weally, Lowthah—."

"Anyway, I'm fed up with your blankets," said Lowther: and he went into his room, closing the door after him with somewhat unnecessary emphasis.

"I twust Lowthah has not got his back up," said Arthur Augustus. "It is weally vevy mystewious. Somebody has walked off with my bedclothes. What do you think, Tom Mewwy?"

"I think I'll go to bed," answered Tom. And he went: his example promptly followed by Manners.

"What do you fellows think?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass on Blake and Herries and Dig.

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"I think you'd better let the subject drop, Gussy, if you don't want a row in your Christmas party," he answered.

"Oh, cwumbs! That would be wathah wotten, Blake! But what the dooce has become of my blankets!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

To that question there was no reply. Arthur Augustus was reduced to an

unwelcome necessity of ringing the bell, for a new supply of bedclothes. He was able to go to bed at last—leaving the mystery unsolved.

Seven fellows gave a good deal of thought to that strange mystery. But none of them was likely to guess, or dream, that a fat Carcroft junior, locked in the turret-room, was rolled up, cosy and comfortable, in the missing blankets. The turret-room was too distant for Turkey Tuck's snore to be heard!

Chapter Fifteen.

GHOST!

TOM MERRY awakened suddenly.

"What—!" he ejaculated.

"Don't make a row, Tom."

It was Monty Lowther's voice.

Tom Merry sat up in bed, in astonishment. He had been thinking of the mysterious "rag" in Gussy's room: and had fallen asleep over it. It was a surprise to be awakened by Monty Lowther's whispering voice in the dark.

"What on earth—?" he began.

"I'm going after those dashed blankets," muttered Lowther, "I know it was young Wally, of course, and Manners agrees with me. Don't you?"

"Well—!" said Tom, doubtfully.

"That ass D'Arcy thinks that I played that potty trick," said Lowther, savagely. "He can't take a fellow's word."

"He does take your word, Monty. Don't be an ass."

"Oh, yes: but he thinks it was I that did it, all the same. Couldn't be a D'Arcy, of course, playing tricks under the parental roof!" jeered Lowther.

Tom perred at him in the darkness. From Lowther's tone, it was evident that his back was very seriously up.

"Look here, Monty, it's no good getting shirty about it," said Tom, soothingly. "Somebody bagged Gussy's blankets—goodness knows who—."

"Well, I know!" said Lowther, "and I'm going along to Wally's room, on the next corridor, now D'Arcy's asleep and can't butt in. I'm going to get the silly

blankets, and march them back to Gussy's room, and chuck them at him, see?"

"But—."

"You can stick in bed if you like," snapped Lowther, "Manners is waiting in the passage. We're going, anyhow."

"Oh, I'll come," said Tom.

He turned out of bed, and hurried on his clothes. Monty Lowther waited impatiently. Obviously, Monty was feeling sore: and rather savagely anticipating Arthur Augustus's confusion, when the missing blankets were discovered in the ragger's room—for Monty had not the slightest doubt that Wally of the Third was the ragger. Who else could it have been?

"You fellows coming?" asked a whispering voice from the dark doorway. "It's a bit parky here, you know."

"Won't be a tick," answered Tom, "I hope Gussy won't wake up and hear us. He wouldn't like this, I'm afraid."

"We've given him plenty of time to go to sleep," grunted Lowther, "and he can like it, or lump it, when we march his dashed bedclothes back to his room, and he has to own up that it was his minor bagged them."

"I don't feel sure—."

"Well, I do! Buck up, and don't jaw, old man."

Tom Merry dressed as fast as he could. Lowther waited in the room—Manners in the dark corridor outside the door. It was an hour after midnight, and all was silent and still.

But the silence was suddenly broken, by a sound from Manners, in the corridor. It was a sudden, startled gasp.

"Good heavens!"

Tom Merry and Lowther spun round towards the door. That gasping exclamation from Harry Manners was startling.

"Manners—!" exclaimed Tom.

"What's up?" breathed Lowther.

They ran to the door, bumping against one another in the dark. Both of them bumped into Manners, as they emerged into the corridor. Manners, hardly visible in the dark, was standing as if rooted to the oak floor, staring blankly, with staring eyes, up the corridor.

"Manners!" Tom groped, and caught his arm. "What—."

"Look!" articulated Manners. "Look!

Up the corridor—by the turret-stair—in heaven's name, what is it?" His voice was almost husky.

In amazement, Tom and Monty stared up the dark corridor. They could scarcely believe what they saw.

The turret-stair, in the distance, could not be seen in the dark. But from that direction, a white ghostly form flitted. The three schoolboys gazed at it with bulging eyes.

Back into their minds came the ghost story Arthur Augustus had related in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's—the story of the dwarf who had perished in the old stone turret, and whose phantom walked the dim corridors when Christmastide came, and the snow was on the ground.

In spell-bound amazement they gazed.

From the turret-stair, in the dark, came that ghostly figure. It could not be clearly made out: but it was white, and it moved without a sound. And all three of them could see that it was short in stature—not so tall by inches as one of themselves. Was it—could it be—the ghost of the dwarf who had perished in the old turret?

As if frozen to the floor, they stood motionless, staring, feeling the blood thrill to their hearts.

"The—the ghost!" breathed Manners. "Good heavens! The ghost of the dwarf—but—but it can't be—"

"It can't!" muttered Lowther: but his teeth were chattering.

"It—it's coming this way—"

"Get out of this!"

The three juniors backed into Tom Merry's room. The sight of that ghostly figure, gliding down the dark corridor towards them, was unnerving. But Tom Merry pulled himself together.

He groped for the electric light switch inside the doorway.

"Keep cool!" he said, as steadily as he could. "I'm going to switch on the light—we shall see it as it passes the door—it must be a trick of some sort—it must be—"

"Oh!" gasped Lowther. "Young Wally—"

"What?"

"It's not a dwarf—it's a dashed fag—that's why he's small—don't you see?"

Lowther almost hissed with angry conviction. "That young rascal ragged Gussy's room—and now he's playing ghost—"

"Oh!" breathed Manners, in deep relief. "That's it! Couldn't be one of those Fourth-form men—it's not tall enough. Wally, for a cert.—that young monkey at his monkey-tricks again!"

"I—I can't believe—!" muttered Tom.

"Switch on the light!" snapped Lowther.

"Then you'll see that it's that young villain with a sheet over his head."

Tom Merry switched on the light. A sudden blaze of illumination streamed from the open doorway into the dark corridor.

The three Shell fellows stared out.

At a distance, not yet within the radius of the light from the doorway, the white ghostly figure had stopped. If it was someone playing ghost, evidently the sudden blaze of light from Tom Merry's open doorway had startled him, and brought him to a sudden halt.

As they stared, the ghostly figure flitted away up the corridor again, the way it had come. The phantom was in retreat!

That settled it for the St. Jim's juniors. It was a trick—it could only be a trick: and the trickster had taken the alarm. Tom Merry set his teeth.

"Come on!" he said, "we're going after it—whatever it is!" He stepped out into the corridor. "We've got him, whoever he is—he can't get away—there's only the turret-stair at the end of the corridor, and the turret's locked. We've got him cornered."

Manners and Lowther followed him.

They ran up the corridor. Ahead of them, in the deep gloom, the ghostly figure flitted swiftly, and vanished up the turret-stair. They ran on, and stopped at the foot of the stair, panting.

"We've got him!" said Lowther, grimly. "The young rascal can't get back to his room without passing us now."

"Yes, if it's Wally—"

"Oh, don't be an ass Tom. Couldn't you see that he was Wally's height? Nobody else here that fag's height, since that tubby Carcroft tick left."

"Well, we shall see!" said Tom.

"I know already," snapped Lowther, "but we shall see! He can't dodge us, and

he can't get through a locked door—unless he's a ghost! Think he is?"

"Oh, come on," said Tom.

He led the way up the spiral stair, with Manners and Lowther at his heels. Wally or not, the trickster was cornered now, there was no escape for him. The spiral stair had no outlet, except into the turret-room: and they knew that the door of the turret-room was kept locked, the key in the tallboy in the library. On the little stone landing above, they would find him—there could be no doubt about that: unless, indeed, it was the phantom of Eastwood House, and could vanish through stone walls!

They tramped up the stairs. It seemed to them that a sound reached their ears from above: but it might have been only the wild December wind, blowing hard round the old turret. They came up to the little stone landing at the top, at last, where a dim glimmer came in through the barred window.

"Now, you young rotter, where are you?" breathed Lowther, staring round in the dim shadows.

"Nobody here," muttered Tom.

"Don't be an ass! He must be here—skulking in a corner! Didn't we see him scud up the stairs?"

"Yes! But—he's not here," muttered Tom.

Manners struck a match. The flame was sufficient to light up the little landing outside the turret door. The three juniors stared round them, and Monty Lowther caught his breath. Save for themselves, the stone landing was untenanted. For a moment or two, they stood staring, their flesh almost creeping. The ghostly figure had vanished—how?

The match went out, leaving them in darkness.

"He must be in the turret-room." Lowther's voice was unsteady. "I—I tell you, the door must have been left unlocked—"

"It's locked!" said Tom, quietly. He was groping at the turret door. "It's as hard and fast as the stone walls."

Lowther groped over the oaken door. He had to admit that it was hard and fast.

"Let's get out of this!" muttered Manners. He was shivering.

He struck matches, as the three descended the spiral stair. In the corridor below, he switched on the light when they reached it. His face was pale.

"I don't get this!" he muttered.

"Well, I do!" said Lowther, savagely. "Now I've had time to think—I've got it! Young Wally could get the key of the turret whenever he liked—well, he's got it. The dashed ghost didn't vanish through the wall: that scamp had the key, and he went into the turret-room and locked the door after him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom.

"Oh!" breathed Manners. "That's it."

"And we'll jolly well make it clear," said Lowther. "We'll go straight to Wally's room now, and see whether he's there. I know that he isn't."

"We'd better, I think," said Tom.

The three juniors turned into the passage that led to the next corridor, where D'Arcy minor had his bedroom. Obviously, if Lowther's theory was correct, Wally of the Third would not be found in his room—and if he was absent from bed, after one o'clock in the morning, the case was clear.

Monty Lowther turned the door-handle, opened the door, and groped for the electric switch within. He flashed on the light.

"Now look—!" he snapped. "Oh! Great pip!"

Lowther's eyes almost popped at Wally's bed. He had been absolutely certain that that bed would be found vacant.

Instead of which, a chubby face was on the pillow: and Wally of the Third, awakened by the sound at his door, sat up, rubbed sleepy eyes, and stared at the three Shell fellows.

They gazed at him.

"Hallo! What's this game?" asked Wally. "What the dickens have you woke me up for in the middle of the night?"

"Oh!" gasped Lowther.

"He's here," said Tom. "You haven't been out of your room since you went to bed, Wally?"

"I don't generally go for walks after going to bed," retorted Wally. "It seems that you fellows do! What's the rumpus? Off your onions?"

"Somebody's been playing ghost," said Manners.

Wally chuckled.

"Poor little kids—frightened in the dark?" he asked, sympathetically. "You haven't much nerve, in the Shell, have you?"

The three Shell fellows did not answer that, except with expressive looks. Wally gave a prolonged yawn.

"Mind turning off that light, and mizzling?" he asked. "A fellow wants to go to sleep at night. Go and wake up Gussy and tell him about it."

"Come on," muttered Tom, "it wasn't Wally—that's clear enough."

"Hold on a minute." Monty Lowther had to admit that it could not have been Wally of the Third who had vanished up the turret-stair. But he was still convinced that it was the scamp of the Third who had ragged Arthur Augustus's bed. "Look here, Wally, you young ruffian—"

"Looking, you old ruffian!" said Wally, cheerily.

"Where are your major's blankets and things?"

Wally stared.

"Eh! On his bed, I suppose! What do you mean?"

"Somebody's been ragging in your brother's room, and taken away his blankets," said Tom Merry.

"Poor old Gussy!" sighed Wally. "Which of you did it?"

"You did it!" snapped Lowther. "You've got his blankets here, and I'm going to take them back and chuck them at his silly head."

"Oh, don't be a goat," said Wally, testily, "I wouldn't rag old Gus. You can look round if you like—but don't make a row and keep me awake. I'm going to sleep."

Walter Adolphus D'Arcy laid his head on the pillow again, and closed his eyes. He seemed to have had enough of Tom Merry and Co. Tom and Manners exchanged a glance, and stepped out. Lowther, obstinate to the last, did look round for the missing blankets: but found no sign of them. With compressed lips, he switched off the light, at last, and joined his friends, closing the door after him—a sleepy chuckle from Wally following him as he went.

The three Shell fellows returned, in silence, to their own quarters. There, at

the door of Tom Merry's room, they looked at one another.

"What on earth does it all mean?" asked Manners.

Tom shook his head.

"Goodness knows!"

"If it wasn't Wally—," muttered Lowther.

"We know now that it wasn't," said Tom, "It was somebody—goodness knows who! We can't do anything—let's get back to bed."

Which, as it was evidently the only thing to be done, they did!

Chapter Sixteen

TWO IN THE DARK!

TURKEY TUCK yawned.

He yawned and yawned. Turkey was sleepy. Turkey was often sleepy, even in the daytime. So it was natural that he should be very sleepy indeed at half-past two in the morning!

Sleepy as he was, he couldn't sleep. He was too hungry to sleep. The inner Turkey demanded provender: and that demand, like Macbeth, had murdered sleep!

James Smyth Tuck, had never felt so hungry in his life before. He was famished. He almost wished himself at Uncle George's, instead of camping in the turret-room at Eastwood House. Food was not too plentiful at Uncle George's: but here, in the turret-room, there was just nothing to eat!

Turkey was warm and comfortable, so far as that went. It had been quite easy to steal forth from the turret and secure bedclothes, while everybody was downstairs in the evening. Gussy's sheets and blankets and pillows made quite a good bed for Turkey.

But he had to eat!

No fellow could live without eating—least of all Turkey Tuck.

His plans were cut and dried: to go down after midnight, when everybody was in bed, and root in the regions below stairs for provender. He hoped to carry off enough to the turret to last him for days!

What they would think, in Eastwood House, when the comestibles were missed,

Turkey did not know, and did not care—any more than he knew or cared what Arthur Augustus thought about his missing bedclothes. It was fairly certain that nobody would think of looking for them in the turret-room, and that was all that Turkey cared about.

At midnight's stilly hour, Turkey was fast asleep in the turret-room, rolled in Gussy's blankets. But it was an empty Turkey: and towards one o'clock, he awakened—ravenous!

It was time to go foraging. By that time, surely all the inhabitants of Eastwood House must be buried in slumber! But it was a cunning Turkey. Before descending the turret-stair, he wound one of Gussy's sheets about his fat person—remembering the ghost story. If anyone chanced to be up, and encountered him in the gloomy corridors, that, the astute Turkey calculated, would be enough to scare him off, and give Turkey time to dodge back into cover.

That precaution stood Turkey in good stead: for three fellows, as it turned out, were unexpectedly up: and had not Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther been so startled by the white figure gliding down the corridor, Turkey would infallibly have walked into them in the dark.

As it was, Turkey had a rather narrow escape. The "Terrible Three" were on his track as he dodged back up the turret-stair: and he had no time to waste. A panting and breathless Turkey whizzed into the turret-room, shut and locked the door after him: and listened with thumping heart to the three Shell fellows on the stone landing outside.

It was a great relief to Turkey when they went. They were puzzled and perturbed, but they did not suspect that a fat Carcroft junior was lurking behind the locked door of the turret-room.

Why they had been up, Turkey did not know: but it had disarranged all his plans. He had to wait till the coast was clear again.

Turkey was hungry—fearfully hungry. He yearned for food. But he did not want another encounter like that again. He waited—yawning and yawning, almost yawning his head off: but too hungry to turn into Gussy's blankets and go to sleep again.

But at half-past two Turkey could stand it no longer. Surely by that time everybody must be asleep in bed! Anyhow, he had to chance it.

Once more he wound the sheet round him, unlocked the turret door, and crept out.

All was silent and still, when he emerged from the turret-stair into the corridor. Whatever had caused Tom Merry and Co. to turn out, they were safe in bed now.

On tiptoe, without a sound, Turkey crept down the corridor, a ghostly figure in the white sheet in the dark. Certainly anyone who had glimpsed him in the gloom might have been startled into thinking that it was the ghost of the haunted turret walking. But there was no eye to see him now: and Turkey tiptoed on, to the old gallery over the hall of Eastwood House.

There was a faint glimmer from high windows: but it was gloomy and shadowy, and Turkey squinted uneasily into gloomy shadows. Turkey did not like traversing a silent house in the dark: indeed, nothing but the lure of food could have impelled him to do so. And when a faint sound came from the dark hall below, he started like a scared rabbit, and listened. Back into his mind came the recollection of the prowler of the night before—suppose he had come back—the bare thought made James Smyth Tuck shiver from head to foot.

"Oh, haddocks!" breathed Turkey, inaudibly.

He peered over the oaken balustrade into the hall. Nothing was to be seen in the dark: and all was silent and still.

He crept on again, at last: and tiptoed down the wide staircase into the dark hall. He knew where the service door was—and that was his way to food! With an arm extended before him to grope his way, the sheet draping over the extended fat arm, Turkey crept across the hall.

"Gosh!"

That word, uttered in startled and terrified tones, came like a thunderclap to Turkey's startled ears.

He jumped.

He was not alone in the dark hall. Someone was there—someone quite close to him—someone he could not see, but who evidently had seen the white figure gliding in the dark.

Crash!

The startled ejaculation was followed by the sound of the fall of some heavy object on the floor.

Turkey stood transfixed.

He was too utterly scared to move: almost to breathe. He stood as if petrified, his fat arm still extended, motionless.

He could see nothing. He did not know that a dark figure, creeping from the library, where a safe had been "cracked," had glimpsed his white ghostly form in the darkness, and dropped a bag, packed with loot, in startled terror. He did not know that a mouth like a gash was wide open, gasping: or that a pair of eyes like a rat's were bulging at him from their sockets. Turkey knew nothing except that he was frightened out of his fat wits. He could not see the prowler in the dark backing away in terror, forgetful even of his loot. He did not know that the unseen man backed into an armoured figure in the hall, and sent it toppling over—but he heard the terrific crash as it clanged on the floor, waking every echo in the furthest corners of Eastwood House.

That terrific crash finished it, for Turkey Tuck! He did not see or hear a terrified burglar scrambling from a window. He did not see or hear anything. While a frightened cracksman fled into the winter night, a frightened Turkey collapsed in a faint: and that was the end of the night's wild adventures for Turkey Tuck!

Chapter Seventeen

TURKEY TOO!

"EXTWAORDINAWY!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's, standing before the log fire in the hall after breakfast in the morning, polished his eyeglass, adjusted it in his noble eye, glanced round at his friends, and repeated:

"Extwaordinawy!"

"Quite!" agreed Tom Merry.

"The jolly old limit!" said Blake.

"Tuck must be a very extraordinary boy!" said Cousin Ethel, with a smile.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Lucky for your pater, Gussy, as it

turned out," said Digby. "They say that the burglar had made a clean sweep of the safe—"

"And dropped his bag, with the loot in it, when he bolted," said Herries. "Spot of luck, and no mistake."

"Pwobably the same wascal that you wan into, Tom Mewwy, the night befoah," said Arthur Augustus. "Fancy his havin' the nerve to come back again the next night, you know."

"His nerve failed him when he saw Tuck!" remarked Monty Lowther. "I always thought that that chap's face would stop a clock. Fancy it stopping a burglar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, he must have taken Twuck for a ghost, as the howlin' ass seems to have been playin' ghost," said Arthur Augustus.

"Just as those Shell chaps did last night," chuckled Wally. "They came to my room, trembling from head to foot—"

"Mind if we boot your minor across the hall, Gussy?" asked Manners.

"But the extwaordinawy thing is, Tuck bein' still heah," resumed Arthur Augustus. "We all thought he had gone, you see, Ethel: and it twanspires that he did not go—he must have abstwacted the tuwwet key fwom the tallboy in the libwary, and parked himself in the tuwwet—which I wegard as a vewy extwaordinawy pwoceedin' indeed."

"Very," said Ethel, laughing.

"I am sowwy, Lowthah, that I suspected you of waggin' my bed," went on Arthur Augustus. "Of course I did not know that there was anoathah silly ass about—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That uttah ass carted off my blankets to the old tuwwet, and camped there—weally, it was most extwaordinawy. Did you fellows evah heah of anythin' of the kind befoah?"

"Never!" said Tom.

"Hardly ever!" grinned Lowther.

"So fah as I can make out, he came down in the night for food," said Arthur Augustus. "I believe he is wathah fond of food. But as Dig has wemarked, it was vewy lucky for my patah, as it intewwupted the burglar just as he was gettin' away with his plundah. Twuck's extwaordinawy pwoceedings have saved the

governah fwom losing an awful lot of money and valuables. And in the circs, deah boys, I weally do not quite know what to do about it."

Once more Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass thoughtfully, and restored it to his noble eye. He glanced round at a circle of smiling faces.

"Where is he now?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"He hasn't come down yet. The shock he weceived last night seems to have knocked him out wathah, and he is ill," said Arthur Augustus.

Monty Lowther closed one eye at the other fellows, and there was a chuckle round the circle. Monty's opinion—shared by the others—was that the ineffable Turkey, having fallen down, as it were, on his first scheme, was now trying on a second one, still hoping to remain an inmate of Eastwood House!

"I have been thinkin' ovah the mattah," went on Arthur Augustus. "Twuck certainly acted in a vevy wotten way in claimin' the cwedit for a vevy hewoic action performed by Tom Mewwy—."

"Can that!" said Tom.

"My deah chap, it was vevy hewoic indeed—."

"Fathead!"

"We all admire you vevy much for it Tom Mewwy—."

"You'll get your head punched at this rate, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—."

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not wegard that as a vevy intelligent wemark, Tom Mewwy. Howevah, to wesume—Twuck acted in a vevy wotten way, and I had no wesource but to wequest him to catch his twain. But in the circumstances, aftah he has saved the patah fwom a vevy gweat loss, you know, I wondah whethah it is up to me to ovahlook his conduct, and ask him to stay on, as he seems for some weason to desiah vevy much to do so. If you fellows think you could stand him, I will go and see him about it."

And as it seemed that there was general agreement that, in the circumstances, it was up to Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's proceeded upstairs to Turkey Truck's room.

He found Turkey in bed. An empty

tray was on the bedside table: Turkey, if he was ill, had not been too ill to travel through an ample breakfast. He gave Arthur Augustus a very uncertain squint as he came in.

"I twust you are feelin' bettah, Twuck!" said Arthur Augustus.

"No: worse," answered Turkey, promptly.

Arthur Augustus looked concerned.

"I am vevy sowwy for that, Twuck. Pewwaps you would like me to send for a doctah?"

"Oh! No! A doctor mightn't think there was anything the matter with me—I—I—I mean—."

"I was goin' to ask you, Twuck—."

"I simply can't catch a train to-day. I'm ill—."

"Yaas, but I was goin' to say—."

"Too ill to move!" said Turkey, firmly.

"I couldn't get out of this bed, at this moment, if the house was on fire."

"Bai Jove! That is vevy bad, deah boy," said the unsuspecting Gussy, "I twust you will be quite wecovahed, Twuck, befoah long—."

Turkey shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said, "I feel pretty bad! I simply can't get up—I can hardly stir a limb—."

"That is vevy wotten, old chap! It will be wathah beastly stickin' up heah in bed duwin' the Chwistmas festivities. I weally hope that you will wecovah in time to join us—."

"Eh?"

"I came up to ask you if you would care to stay ovah Chwistmas, Twuck—."

"Oh!"

"And if you feel so vevy ill, Twuck, I weally think that I had bettah send for a doctah—."

"I—I say, I—I'm better now—."

"Bai Jove!"

"Chuck over my trousers, will you?" said Turkey, quite briskly.

Turkey was better already! In fact, he seemed to be quite recovered. His fat face was beaming, and his appetite was excellent, when he joined the St. Jim's fellows at lunch—still, happily, a member of Arthur Augustus's Christmas Party!