

THE NEW
TOM MERRY'S
OWN



MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS

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FOREWORD

ALREADY our fifth issue of Tom Merry's Own.

Here are all our friends again: Harry Wharton and Co., of Greyfriars: with, needless to say, the one and only Bunter: Tom Merry and Co., of St. Jim's, and others whom we know and remember so well. They appear once more in modest but confident anticipation of the usual hearty greeting.

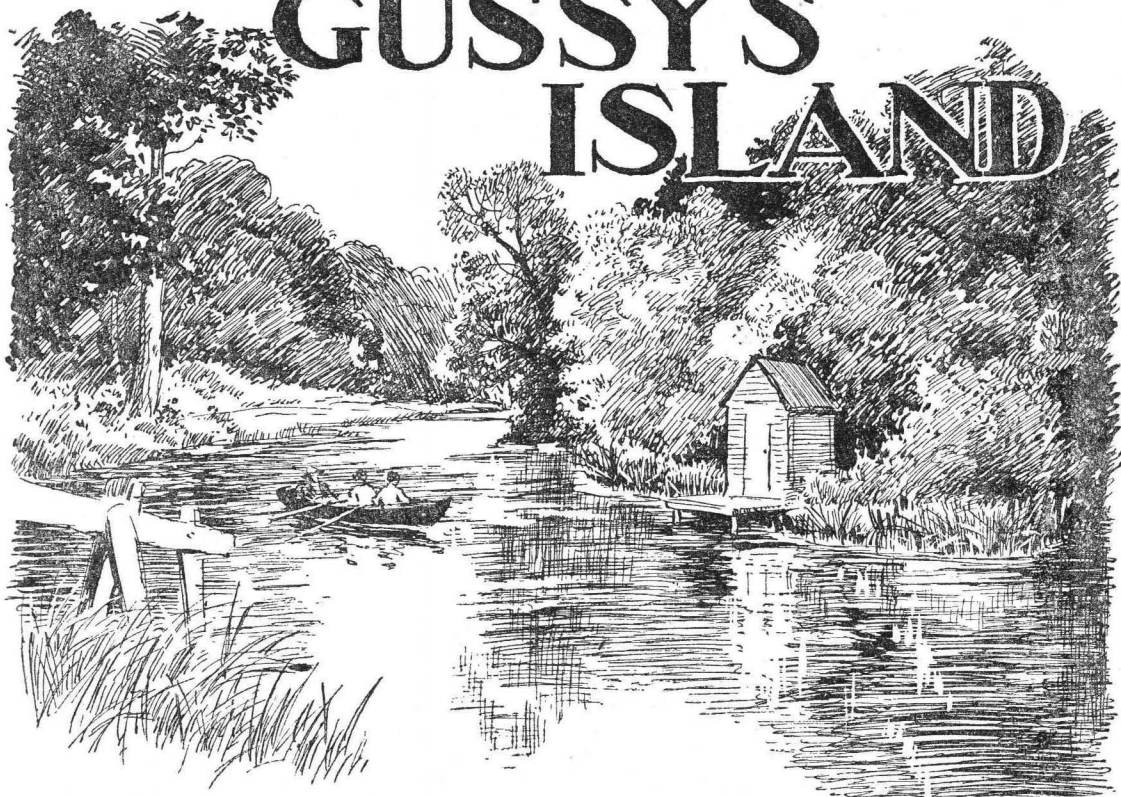
And this year, for the first time, Tom Merry's Own appears in company with a friendly rival: Billy Bunter's Own. Our readers seem to be of the opinion that one cannot have too much of a good thing: an opinion with which Frank Richards and Martin Clifford couldn't agree more!

Good luck, and—we hope!—good reading, to all of you.

MARTIN CLIFFORD

FRANK RICHARDS

GUSSY'S ISLAND



by *MARTIN CLIFFORD*

CHAPTER I

FIGGINS IN A FIX!

“**O**H, gum!” breathed George Figgins.

Figgins was dismayed.

He had cause for dismay.

Figgins, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, belonged to the New House. He was the great chief and leader of the New House juniors in their incessant alarms and excursions against the rival house. And he was, at the moment in Study No. 6 in the School House, engaged in the pleasant task of packing a bundle of over-ripe tomatoes into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's Sunday hat.

Figgins had been grinning over that task, apparently finding it amusing—though it was quite certain that Arthur Augustus, when he found the tomatoes in his hat, would feel like the old Queen, distinctly “not amused”.

But Figgins ceased to grin, and his face registered dismay, at the sound of footsteps and voices in the passage outside.

Figgy had, as he fancied, chosen his time well for a raid on Study No. 6 in the School House. He had seen D'Arcy and his study-mates in the quad, talking to Tom Merry and Co. of the Shell. Why the whole crowd of them had come up to the study Figgins did not know—but he knew that they had, for he could hear them coming.

He dropped the last tomato into the top hat on the study table, and spun round towards the door.

St. Jim's was about to break up for the summer holidays. Figgy had been very keen to play a last jape on his old rivals, to give them something to remember him by till next term. Now he rather wished that he hadn't. He was fairly cornered. There he was, in the study, with six or seven School House men almost at the door. The least George Figgins had to expect was the cramming of his own juicy tomatoes down the back of his neck, if he was caught there. And there was no escape.

He gave one glance at the door. Then he gave another, hurriedly, round the study, with a faint hope of hunting cover and eluding discovery till the coast was clear again.

There was only one possible spot of cover—the study cupboard. Figgins shot across to it and tore open the door.

The cupboard was divided midway from the floor to the top by a large shelf. Above that shelf, the cupboard was a larder. Below, it was a lumber room. All sorts of odds and ends were pitched out of the way into the lower half of the study cupboard. There did not seem much room for Figgins who, though lean, was lengthy.

But it was a case of any port in a storm. Figgy had to evade detection or take the ragging of his life. He plunged in. He crammed and squeezed, and somehow curled up his long legs, and drew the cupboard door shut after him. It was a warm corner on a hot summer's day—and it was stuffy, and it was undoubtedly overcrowded now that Figgins was inside. But he had to make the best of it. Perspiration clotted his brow unheeded, and he tried to suppress his breathing as the study door opened and a crowd of juniors tramped in.

"Twot in, deah boys," He heard the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the elegant ornament of the Fourth. "Pewwaps you fellows would like a spot of lemonade in this wathah hot weathah, while I am telling you the news."

"No perhaps about it, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We would!"

"Gussy has good ideas sometimes," remarked Monty Lowther. "Rare but good."

"Very rare—but quite good," agreed Manners.

Seven fellows were in the study—without counting the hidden inhabitant of the cupboard. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked round for

the lemonade. Blake and Herries and Digby looked round for it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and looked round for it also. Then he ejaculated:

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins almost trembled. He had seen nothing of lemonade while he was busy in that study. So he concluded that it must be in the cupboard. If they came to the cupboard for lemonade Figgy's game was up. He could almost feel the tomatoes squeezing clammily down the back of his neck!

"Well, where's that lemonade, Gussy?" asked Jack Blake.

"O where and O where can it be?" sang Monty Lowther.

"In the cupboard, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry. "I'll get it out if you like."

Figgy almost ceased to breathe!

"No, deah boy! Now I wemembah, I forgot to bwing it across fwom the tuck-shop. I was goin—to—"

"Ass!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Fathead!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Blithering idiot!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"As guests in this study," remarked Monty Lowther, "we can't possibly call Gussy an ass, a fathead, or a blithering idiot. But be it clearly understood by all gentlemen present, that if we weren't guests in this study, we should call him an ass, fathead, a blithering idiot, and a burbling cuckoo."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry and Manners, heartily.

"Bai jove! I am weally vevy sowwy I forgot to wemembah—OH!" Arthur Augustus broke off as he noticed the top hat on the table. "Look heah, you fellows, I don't want to be watty, but you know vevy well that I stwongly object to fellows messin' about with my hats. I am wathah particulah about my hats, as you are vevy well awah. I would like to know who has taken my toppah out of the hat-box."

"Oh! My hat!" ejaculated Blake, staring at the topper on the table.

"It is my hat, Blake, not yours—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Blake gave a yell. "Look here, Gussy, you've always refused to let me use your topper for a coal scoop—"

"You uttah ass!"

"And now you're using it yourself to carry tomatoes in—"

"What?"

Arthur Augustus made a bound towards the study table. He had not yet looked into the hat. Now he did—and the expression on his aristocratic face, as he looked, was inexpressible. King Priam of Troy, when a dread figure drew his curtains at dead of night, could hardly have looked so startled and horrified as the swell of St. Jim's at that awful moment.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. He stared almost dazedly into the top hat. His eyeglass fell from his eye—into the hat. It floated in tomato-juice. "Oh! What uttah wottah has done this—Blake— Have you—"

"Not guilty, my lord!" chuckled Blake.

"Lowthah! If you have been larkin' with my hat—" roared Arthur Augustus. "It is just one of your wotten japes—"

"Not guilty!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I will go all ovah the House lookin' for the fwightful wuffian who has put tomatoes in my hat!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"More likely to find him in the other House, Gussy. I expect some New House man has been here."

"That's it," agreed Manners.

Figgins, in the cupboard, caught his breath. They had guessed that it was a New House raid. If they guessed that the raider was still there—!

"Yaas, wathah! One of those New House wuffians—Figgins, or Kerr or Wynn! Bai Jove! I will go ovah to the New House at once, and thwash them all wound," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You fellows come and back me up, and we will mop them up all ovah their wotten House." Arthur Augustus fished his eyeglass out of the tomatoes, wiped it on his handkerchief, and jammed it back into his eye, and surveyed his friends with an indignant glare. "What are you fellows laughin' at?" he demanded, hotly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! If you fellows think it funny to put tomatoes in a fellow's hat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' ovah to the New House—"

"Hadn't you better look after the topper first?" suggested Tom Merry, "That cargo of tomatoes won't be doing it any good."

"Oh! Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus lifted the top hat from the table. He pitched out its contents into the fireplace. Then he grabbed a duster and began to wipe out the hat. Luckily, the tomatoes had not been many minutes in the topper. They had not had time to do their worst. But Arthur Augustus, as he rubbed and scraped, could not feel that that topper was likely ever to be its own beautiful self again. Concentrated on the topper, Arthur Augustus seemed to have forgotten the purpose for which the gathering had been called in Study No. 6. He dabbed, and rubbed, and scraped, and breathed wrath, while six fellows sat down round about the study, and watched him with smiling faces—and Figgins, closely-packed in the study cupboard, perspiring, with pins and needles assailing his cramped legs, wished from the bottom of his heart that he was safe back in the New House.

CHAPTER II

GUSSY'S ISLAND!

"Gussy, old man—!" said Tom Merry.

"Wottah!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

"Thanks! If you've asked us to this study to call us fancy names—"

"I was not addressin' you, Tom Merry! I was speakin' of the wottah who put those tomatoes in my hat."

"Well, I was addressing you, old bean. You told us you had a spot of news—and we're here to hear it."

"What are we going to hear?" asked Monty Lowther. "If it's anything good, we shall say hear, hear!"

"It's about the summah holidays," said Arthur Augustus. "We are just goin' to bweak up, you know. I can tell you while I get this toppah clean. I have had a lettah fwom my governah—oh, the uttah bwute!"

"Draw it mild, Gussy," remonstrated Blake. "You can't talk of your governor like that—a peer of the realm, too."

"Shocking!" said Herries, shaking his head.

"Bad form!" said Dig.

"You uttah asses!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I was not speakin' of my governah, as you know very well. I was speakin' of the uttah bwute who has been larkin' with my hat! If you suppose for one moment that I was speaking of my pater in such an oppwobwious mannah, you are an uttah ass, Blake, and you are an uttah ass, Hewwies, and you are anotheah uttah ass, Wobert Digby."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To wesume," said Arthur Augustus, with a devastating glare at his grinning chums. "I have had a lettah fwom my governah, and he has bought an island. How do you fellows like the idea of a week's campin' on an island in the Thames in the summah hols?"

"Oh, my hat! Fine! exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Top-hole!" said Manners.

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther. "If that's what we're to hear here, Gussy, we all say hear, hear, here!"

"Bai Jove! Is that a wotten pun, Lowther?"

"No—a rather good one!" answered Monty Lowther, modestly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats! The patah has told me all about the island," went on Arthur Augustus. "It's about two miles—or thwee—or perhaps six or seven—I forget—fwom Staines, or Cookham, or Kingston, or somewhah—"

"Nothing like having it exact!" said Tom Merry, gravely. "A man blindfolded could not miss it, with precise directions like that."

"Well, I want to give you quite a cleah ideah of the place," said Arthur Augustus, innocently. "It is a vewy small island, called Togg's Eyot—I believe it belonged to a man named Toggs, see? But there are twees on it, and bushes and things, and a bathin' and boatin' hut, and of course we can wov acwoss to Staines, or Cookham, or Kingston, or somewhah, for food—though pwobably I shall catch enough fish to see us thwough. It will be wathah like Wobinson Cwusoe, campin' on an island, what?"

"Good man!" exclaimed Blake, heartily. "So that's the news, is it?"

"Yaas, deah boy. I have been thinkin' it ovah, since I wead my governah's lettah. I am goin' to pwopose—"

"You are!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! I am goin' to pwopose—"

"Who's your lady friend?" asked Lowther.

"Wha—a—t?"

"If you're going to propose, I suppose there's a lady in the case?"

"You unuttewable ass!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not mean pwopose, you duffah—I mean pwopose," shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to pwopose that we all meet at Staines, or Cookham, or Kingston, or Wichmond, or somewhah, and pwocceed to the island, in the hols."

"Hear, hear!"

"The patah has awwanged for a boat to be weady for us at Smith's Yard, at Staines, or else Cookham, or somewhah. Well, we pick up the boat, and put our baggage on board, and wov up the wivah to Togg's Eyot, and there we are!" said Arthur Augustus. "Evevwythin' will be weady for us exceptin' food—we shall have to manage that. Lots of fish in the wivah, pwobably."

"People on islands often live on shell-fish," remarked Monty Lowther.

"I hardly think there will be shell-fish on an island in the Thames, Lowther," said Arthur Augustus, doubtfully.

"But you'll be rowing in the boat, won't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's all right then! You'll catch enough crabs for a dozen Robinson Crusoes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats! Are all you fellows agweed that we are goin' to camp on that island in the hols?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather!"

"Passed unanimously!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Vewy good, then," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps I had bettah warn you to twavel light. There won't be a lot of space in a boat, you know, or in a bathin' hut on the island. I shall only take one hat-box and one twunk—"

"Eh?"

"And a suitcase, and pewwaps a few bags—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And a sleepin'-bag, and a gwound sheet, and some blankets and things—" went on Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully, "and I mustn't forget a change of shoes, and some slippahs—"

"You said it was a small island, didn't you?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it's lucky you're travelling light! If you were travelling heavy, we should want a rather big one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all right," said Blake cheerily, "If Gussy turns up with a hat-box and a trunk, we'll slip them overboard—"

"Bai Jove! I should uttably wefuse to have my hat-box and twunk slipped ovahboard, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, warmly. "Pway do not be an ass! And don't you fellows forget your waincoats. I twust that the weathah will wemain fine, but it might wain, you know, and if it wains it will be wet."

"Gussy ought to be in the Weather Department at the Air Ministry," remarked Lowther. "He knows all about the weather! Take note, you men, that if it rains it will be wet! Will it be dry if it doesn't, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats! Fwom what my governah says, it is wathah a jolly little island, with a vevy big oak twee gwoin' in the middle. You can see that twee for miles up and down the wivah, you know. If you fellows get lost, when I haven't got an eye on you, you will be able to find your way back to camp by lookin' for that twee. Of course, I shall do my vevy best to look aftah you," added Arthur Augustus, in his most fatherly manner. "I shall wegard myself as bein' wesponsible for you while you are in my care."

"You'll be responsible for our actions?" asked Monty Lowther, while the other fellows grinned.

"Yaas, deah boy."

"That's jolly good of you, when you're not responsible for your own!" said Monty, heartily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be such a funnay ass, Lowthah. I wathah think you fellows will like the island—Bai Jove! The tomato juice has soaked wight thwough it."

"Through the island?" exclaimed Lowther, in astonishment.

"No, you ass—thwough the hat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Weally, you fellows, it is not funnay. That hat is pwactically wuined. I am goin' to thwash the awful wottah who cwammed tomatoes into my toppah," hooted Authur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I wish we had come in a little soonah and caught him at it! Bai Jove! What's that?"

Arthur Augustus jumped at a sudden sound from the study cupboard. Six other fellows fairly bounded, staring round at the cupboard in astonishment. Something had stirred there—and several articles of lumber had crashed. Clearly, there was something alive in the study cupboard.

It was not Figgy's fault. He really couldn't help it. His long legs, curled up in too narrow space, were cramped, and pins and needles had attacked him mercilessly. For a long time—it seemed centuries to the unhappy New House junior—he had borne it stoically. But endurance had its limits. Pins and needles crept up those long legs from the ankles to the knee—till, at long last, George Figgins realized that he had to move his legs or scream. He moved them—with all the caution he could—but that did not avail. There really was no room to move. A box rocked—a frying-pan crashed—a saucepan clanged. And seven juniors in the study jumped to their feet.

“Bai Jove! There's somethin' in the cupboard!” exclaimed Arthur Augustus. “If it is your dog Towsah, Hewwies—I insist upon your takin' the bwute away at once. That bwute has no wespect for a fellow's twousahs.”

“Towser can't be here,” said Herries. “What's the thump—”

Tom Merry pulled open the cupboard door.

Then there was a yell from seven fellows: at the sight of a New House junior, with crimson face and curled-up legs, packed among the varied assortment of articles in the lower half of the study cupboard.

“Figgins!”

“New House smudge!”

“Bai Jove! That must be the wottah who wagged my toppah!”

“Collar him!”

Tom Merry grasped one long leg, Jack Blake grasped the other. George Figgins came out of the cupboard, travelling on his back, with a frantic yell.

CHAPTER III

NOT NICE FOR FIGGINS!

FATTY WYNN, the plumpest junior in the New House at St. Jim's, munched a ripe pear with enjoyment and satisfaction, and looked across the study table at Kerr. There was quite a pile of good things on the table in that study in the New House. Fatty had unpacked a parcel from a relative in Wales: and that relative had evidently known that Fatty had a good healthy appetite. There was going to be quite a feast in that study when Figgins came back. In the meantime Fatty Wynn started on the pears, loth to waste time while he waited for his absent chum. His plump face registered contentment. Kerr,

on the other hand, looked a little worried, and seemed indifferent to the good things.

"Do try the pears, old chap!" said Fatty. "I can tell you they're good. Everything in the parcel was jolly good, excepting the tomatoes. They'd gone off a bit. But the pears are prime."

"It's high time Figgins was back," said Kerr.

"Well, we'll wait for him, of course," said Fatty. "But no reason why we shouldn't scoff a few of the pears to go on with."

"He's been gone a long time."

"Well, he will have to be a bit careful," said Fatty. "Not so jolly easy to dodge in and out of a School House study without being spotted."

"If they've spotted him—"

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

Kerr crossed to the study window and looked out. It had been quite a bright idea of Figgy's. Those tomatoes had gone "off" in the parcel, owing to delay in the post. No longer edible, they were exactly the thing, in Figgy's opinion, to cram into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's top hat. His comrades concurred, so far as that went. But Figgy had been gone quite a long time, and Kerr could not help feeling a misgiving. He looked rather anxiously from the window.

"See him?" asked Fatty, pausing before taking another generous bite at the luscious pear.

"Yes: here he comes."

"Oh! Good!" said Fatty.

Kerr was not quite so sure that it was "good". He spotted George Figgins, in the quad, heading for the New House. But Figgins did not seem to look his usual bonny self. He was coming at a trot, and seemed in a hurry: but as he trotted, he contorted himself quite oddly, and a good many fellows in the quad stared at him. A squeak from Baggy Trimble reached Kerr's ears at the window.

"He, he! Like tomatoes, Figgins?"

And Kerr noted that quite a crowd of School House juniors were laughing.

He guessed that something must have happened to Figgins. Matters had not gone wholly according to plan in that jape on the rival House.

Figgins disappeared at the doorway below, and Kerr turned from the window. There was a sound of hurried footsteps in the passage, and the study door flew open, and George Figgins hurtled in.

Kerr looked at him. Fatty Wynn ceased to munch, and stared. Figgins looked wildly excited. He contorted and wriggled in the most extraordinary way. His collar was strangely stained. He gasped for breath.

"What's happened?" exclaimed Kerr.

"Urrrrrggh!" gurgled Figgins, wriggling wildly. "Oh, crumbs! Urrrggh!"

"Did you leave the tommies in Gussy's hat?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Urrrrggh! No! I put them in—urrgh! But I've brought them back with me," gasped Figgins.

"Eh! Where are they, then?" asked Fatty. Figgins's hands were empty: and he could hardly be carrying over-ripe tomatoes in his pockets.

"Ooogh! Down my neck!" groaned Figgins.

"Oh, crikey!"

Figgins tore off his collar. He hurled off his jacket. He wrenched open his shirt. He grabbed at squashed tomatoes.

"B—b—but what have you got them down your neck for, Figgy?" stuttered Fatty Wynn, in astonishment.

Figgins gave him a glare.

"Oh! Because I like tomatoes down the back of my neck, of course," he bawled. "Tomatoes are nice down the back of the neck, ain't they? Idiot!"

"They got you?" asked Kerr. He suppressed a smile. Figgins did not look as if he would have appreciated smiling faces at the moment.

"Urrgh! I'm all clammy and sticky!" groaned Figgins. "By gum! I'll make those School House smears sit up for this! Get me a sponge and a towel from somewhere, Kerr—can't you do anything but stand there staring at a chap like a sheep at a train?"

"I say, it's no good slanging Kerr," pointed out Fatty Wynn. "Kerr didn't put those tommies down your neck—"

"Fathead!" roared Figgins.

"Well, he didn't," said Fatty Wynn. "Keep your temper with your pals, old chap."

"Idiot!"

"If you're going to call a fellow names because you let the School House men put tommies down your neck—"

"Shut up!" roared Figgins. "Go on eating! That's your mark. Just eat, and shut up, see?"

"Fatty Wynn looked, as he felt, indignant. Still, he seemed to think that there was something in Figgins's advice: for he selected fresh ripe pear, and started on it. Kerr sped forth in search of sponge and towel, and Figgins hurled a shirt with a clammy neck across the study.

There was no doubt that over-ripe tomatoes, pushed down between a fellow's collar and his neck, were distinctly clammy and uncomfortable. Perhaps it was not surprising that Figgy was a little excited.

"Here you are, old chap!" Kerr reappeared with a tin bowl of water, a sponge floating in it, and a towel.

"I'm all clammy! Grooogh." Figgins sponged at clammy tomato. "I say—urrgh! The rotters—ooogh! What are you grinning at, Kerr?"

"Was I grinning, old chap?"

"If you want this bowl of water up-ended over your silly head, you've only got to say so."

Kerr did not say so. He retreated to the window. Figgy's Scottish chum had lots of tact. Fatty Wynn paused in his operations on the pear.

"Look here, Figgy—!" he began, warmly.

Figgins lifted a sponge dripping with water, and regarded him with a deadly eye.

"Well?" he yapped.

"Oh! Nothing!" said Fatty: and he went on with the pear. Fatty was not quite so tactful as Kerr: but he discerned that Figgy was not in a mood of sweet reasonableness, and he said no more.

Figgins, snorting, sponged away sticky clammy tomato. Then he proceeded to towel himself. He was red and breathless and wrathful.

"Think I can stick that shirt on again, all cloggy with tomato?" he suddenly demanded of his chums.

"I shouldn't!" said Kerr, mildly.

"Well, I think somebody might cut up to the dorm and get a fellow a clean shirt," said Figgins. "I think he might get a fellow a collar, too, if it wasn't too much awful trouble."

Kerr smiled, and quitted the study again. Figgins was dry, by the time he returned with collar and shirt. Figgy accepted them with a snort in lieu of thanks.

However, once more clean and comfortable, the great chief of the New House juniors became a little more placable. No doubt it was borne in upon his mind that his faithful chums were really not to blame if he had been caught by the enemy in the rival House. Figgy was never in a bad temper for long. Now he began to approximate more to his usual sunny self.

"It was pretty ghastly, you know," said Figgins, half-apologetically.

"Must have been, old boy," agreed Kerr.

"It was rotten luck! I'd got D'Arcy's topper out of the hat-box and bunged in the tommies, when they came up to the study in a crowd, and I was cornered. I dodged into cover in the cupboard to wait for them to go."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Fatty Wynn. "Must have been a cram! Where did you put your legs?"

"I didn't take them off and drop them out of the study window," snapped Figgins, sarcastically. "I took them into the cupboard with me. And I had to curl up like a hedgehog, and got pins and needles— You fat ass, what are you laughing at?" roared Figgins. "Think it's funny for a fellow to get pins and needles crammed in a cupboard, with a crowd of School House smudges in the study?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Fatty. "Ha, ha—I—I mean, not at all! Oh! No!"

"Oh! Laugh!" hooted Figgins. "I got pins and needles all over my legs, and had to move—and then they heard me, and yanked me out! They pulled me out by my legs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Laugh!" bawled Figgins. "It was frightfully funny—especially when they collected the tomatoes out of the fireplace, and crammed the whole lot down the back of my neck!" Figgins snorted, "It was funnier still when they rolled me down the stairs. Laugh!"

Kerr and Wynn, with many efforts, contrived not to laugh. They seemed to be able to see—though Figgins could not—something of a comic nature in this disastrous outcome of Figgy's jape on Study No. 6 in the School House. But it was clear that it did not appeal to Figgy's sense of humour.

"I say, old chap, have some of this tuck!" suggested Fatty Wynn. "You'll feel better if you do."

"Oh! Stuffing will cure anything, won't it?" jeered Figgins. "That's you all over, Fatty—stuff, and be happy."

"These pears are good, Figgy," said Fatty, patiently. "I've had seven—and I can tell you, they're prime."

Figgins gave a snort. Nevertheless, he sat down and joined his comrades in an attack on the pile of pears. Perhaps, after all, it did him good, and he felt better: for his rugged countenance grew more and more equable.

"Well, it was rotten," said Figgins, again half-apologetically. "Clammy and sticky all over—and those School House smudges killing themselves with laughing! I can tell you I felt beastly! And—and I was going to wind up the term with that jape on the School House—and look how it turned out!"

"We'll give 'em the kybosh next term," said Kerr, comfortingly.

"We're jolly well going to give them the kybosh before next term!" said Figgins, emphatically. "We're going to give them the kybosh in the hols, and I know how."

"In the holidays!" ejaculated Kerr.

"We shan't see them in the hols, old chap," said Fatty Wynn.

"Shan't we?" snorted Figgins. "Well, I can jolly well tell you that we shall! You see, while I was in that cupboard, those smudges were jawing over their plans for the holidays, and I heard them. They're going to camp on an island in the Thames, called Togg's Eyot, somewhere up by Staines or Cookham. It's a little spot in the river that belongs to Lord Eastwood, and they're going to have it all to themselves—so they think! See?"

Kerr and Wynn did not seem quite to "see". They gazed inquiringly at their great chief and leader.

"Well," said Figgins, "They won't have it to themselves! They're going to have a high old time on that island—because three fellows about our size will be spotted around, making things warm for them. Now do you see?"

"Oh!" said Kerr.

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

"They thought it funny, jamming tomatoes down a fellow's neck!" said Figgins. "Perhaps they'll think it funny when their tent comes down on their nappers in the middle of the night! Perhaps they'll think it funny when their

boat disappears and strands them on their island. Perhaps they'll think a lot of things funny that are going to happen to them. Or, "added Figgins, with a chuckle, "perhaps they won't!"

"But—!" said his two chums together.

Figgins gave them a glare.

"Did you say 'but'?" he asked. "If you did, don't! Nothing to butt about. That's what we're going to do these hols. And that's that!"

Which settled the matter without appeal.

CHAPTER IV

WET!

"Wow, bwothahs, wow! The stweam wuns fast,
The wapids are near and the daylight's past!"

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY'S voice was raised in song.
It was a glorious day. Summer on the Thames seemed to have put on its best bib and tucker, so to speak, to welcome the St. Jim's holiday party.

Perhaps it was a shade too warm for some of the party. Tom Merry and Manners, Jack Blake and George Herries, pulling at the oars, found it fairly warm. Monty Lowther, sitting rather precariously on three or four bags, fanned himself gently with a straw hat. Digby swiped at a buzzing insect that persisted in haunting him. Arthur Augustus was steering. In spotless flannels and a beautiful Panama hat, the swell of St. Jim's looked a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. His eyeglass flashed back the rays of the sun: his aristocratic face was calmly cheerful and contented: and his melodious voice floated over the shining Thames.

"Look out, you!"

It was a sudden shout. Who shouted and why, Arthur Augustus did not know, or care. He chanted on regardless.

The boat was fairly well laden. Gussy's benevolent pater seemed to have played the part of universal provider. Tom Merry and Co. had met at Staines in the morning, as per programme: they had found the boat ready at Smith's yard: and the camping paraphernalia on board. All they had to do was to step on and pull up the river to the island, camping paraphernalia filled some space—and more was filled by the junior's own belongings. Arthur Augustus had been gently but firmly dissuaded from bringing either a trunk or a hat-box. But every fellow had a bag, and Gussy had two. So there was plenty on the boat when the St. Jim's fellows pulled out of Staines and started up the

river. The oarsmen had rather an impression that they were pulling a heavy bus up a hill.

Steering, however, was easier work. Arthur Augustus, sitting at the lines, had both energy and breath for a boat song.

"Hi! There! Look out! You!"

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I wish people would not shout on the wivah! This is weally a vevy peaceful and idyllic scene, you know, and it is quite spoiled by people shoutin'! I wondah who it is, and why he is shoutin' like that."

Six fellows in the boat grinned.

Coming up astern was a launch. A man with a red face, who looked rather excited, was shouting. He was shouting to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy: but Arthur Augustus was not yet aware of that trifling circumstance. The St. Jim's boat was in the way. Six fellows looked back at the launch. Arthur Augustus did not. Having no eyes in the back of his noble head, Arthur Augustus did not see the launch, and remained happily unaware of its existence.

There were quite a lot of craft on the river. The glorious summer weather seemed to have brought them out in myriads. Skiffs shot by. Canoes whizzed. Bright dresses and parasols added gay spots of colour to the scene. It was, as Arthur Augustus remarked, a peaceful and idyllic scene—but it was rather spoiled by an angry and excited voice shouting, waking the echoes among the leafy old trees that shaded the bank.

"Here! You! Have you bought the river?"

"What a widiculous question, you chaps," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I wondah who is shoutin' like that!"

"Will you clear the way? Do you want all the Thames, and some over?" came the shout from astern. "Want to be run down? You! You with the window-pane in your eye!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. Apparently the man on the launch had had a glimpse of the eyeglass flashing back the sun. It dawned upon Arthur Augustus that he was being addressed.

"Pull into the bank," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We're in the way of that launch, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus looked round. His eye, and his eyeglass, gleamed at the red-faced man on the launch, now very near at hand.

"Steer for the shore, boys, steer for the shore!" sang Monty Lowther.

The red-faced man waved an excited hand.

"Are you going to clear the way, or do you want to go under the water?" he bawled.

"I wegard that question as uttably widiculous!" retorted Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think you have forgotten your mannaahs. Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus pulled at the wrong line, with considerable energy. The result—unexpected on Arthur Augustus's part—was to whirl the boat

almost athwart the bows of the launch, and for a moment it looked like a crash.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look out!"

"You mad ass, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

The launch rushed by with about a quarter of an inch to spare! The red-faced man, looking back, told Arthur Augustus what he thought of him, at the top of a powerful voice, still further detracting from the idyllic calmness of the scene. But nobody on the St. Jim's boat heeded the red-faced man. The boat was left rocking wildly on the swell, baggage was tumbling about, and Monty Lowther was rolling and yelling. Herries appeared to be trying to dig up the river-bed with his oar. Blake had pulled his oar in so hurriedly that it unfortunately clumped against Digby's head, and Dig's voice almost equalled that of the red-faced man on the launch as he roared. Arthur Augustus had leaped to his feet—that being about the most injudicious thing he could possibly do on a rocking boat.

"Look out, Gussy!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Yawwooh!"

Splash!

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Man overboard!"

"Great Pip!"

How and why he went over the side Arthur Augustus did not know. But he knew that he went. He was left in no doubt about that, as he plunged head-long into the waters of the Thames. Manners, grabbing at him as he went, caught a Panama hat and saved it. But the inhabitant of the hat plunged head-long into the water and disappeared.

"Gussy!" yelled Blake.

"Oh! The ass!"

"Oh! The fathead!"

"Oh! The chump!"

These ejaculations did not sound sympathetic. Arthur Augustus's comrades seemed more exasperated than sympathetic.

A head rose beside the boat. A minute before, it had been a well-brushed head. Now it looked like a wet mop.

A startled face, streaming with water, looked up at the boat's crew, as Arthur Augustus grabbed the gunwale.

"Oooooooooogh!" was his first remark.

"You silly ass!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—ooooooooogh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway help me in! Keep that boat-hook away, Lowther, you howlin' ass—if you touch me with that boat-hook I will punch you in the eye."

"What about leaving him in the water?" asked Manners. "He's less trouble in the water than on the boat!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Good egg!" said Blake. "Hang on, Gussy, and we'll tow you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Will you give me a hand in, or will you not give me a hand in?"

"Hold on, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "Wait till I get this boat-hook under your ear, and I'll have you in in a jiffy."

"Keep that boat-hook away!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You dangewous maniac, keep that boat-hook away fwom my yah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and Digby grasped the swell of St. Jim's, and hauled him in. He sat down squelching in a pool of water.

"Oh, cwiskey!" he gasped, "I'm all wet! I'm feahfully wet, you fellows."

"That's because the water's wet," explained Monty Lowther. "If you gave more attention to natural history, Gussy, you'd know that."

"You uttah ass!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "Oh, cwumbs! I shall have to get a change at once!"

"Oh, do!" gasped Tom Merry. "There's about a thousand eyes on us, and it will be a free entertainment for the whole river."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I cannot sit heah in wet clobbah, Tom Mewwy. Pewwaps I cannot vewy well change heah. But I must change! I am dwippin'. Cannot you see that I am dwippin'?" howled Arthur Augustus. "I feel like a wet wag! I shall pwobably catch a cold. I wefuse to sit heah like a wet wag and catch a cold. Pull for the bank, and I will take a bag ashore and change in the twees."

"Wait till we get to the island," suggested Blake.

"I wefuse to sit heah like a wet wag till we get to the island, Blake. And what do I look like?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "I uttahly wefuse to go up a cwowded wivah lookin' like a wet wag. Look at those boundahs in that punt—they are laughin'!"

"You'd make a stone image laugh, old pippin."

"I wefuse to make a stone image laugh—I mean—"

"Oh, pull for the bank," sighed Tom Merry. "We shall get to that jolly old island about midnight, I expect."

The boat pulled in to the tow path, on the left going up from Staines. Arthur Augustus scrambled ashore—the cynosure of all eyes on the tow-path. He was no longer a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. His once spotless flannels hung round him clinging and dripping. He jammed a wet eyeglass into his eye, and gave a devastating glance at grinning faces. There was no doubt that the swell of St. Jim's was adding considerably to the gaiety of existence for the crowds that the beautiful summer weather had brought out along Father Thames.

"Bai Jove! I feel like a ddowned wat!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"You look it!" agreed Blake.

"Wats! Hand me that bag!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

Luckily, at that point the tow-path was bordered by an open wood. It was practicable to get out of sight in the wood and change. Gussy simply had to change. Sitting in wet clothes was asking for a cold. Still more important, from Arthur Augustus's point of view, was the matter of appearances. A fellow really couldn't proceed up a crowded river looking like a drowned rat. At all events Arthur Augustus D'Arcy couldn't.

He grasped the bag, and turned to cut across the tow-path. Tom Merry and Co. resigned themselves to wait—probably an hour! Changing his clobber was not quick work with Arthur Augustus. But Gussy, always considerate, turned back.

"You fellows need not wait for me!" he called out. "Pull on to the island—I will walk the west. I can walk fastah than you can wow, anyway. You can fewwy me acwoss at the island when I awwive."

"Look here, we'll wait if you'll buck up," said Blake.

"I wefuse to huwwy—"

"Fathead!"

"Wats!"

"Well, give us a call when you arrive, if you ever do, and we'll fetch you across to the island," said Tom. "Give way, you men."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared into the wood with his bag, and Tom Merry and Co. pulled on up the Thames.

CHAPTER V

CATCHING A TARTAR!

PUG JUDSON raised his frowsy head, and blinked round him at the sound of a footstep. In the warmth of the summer's afternoon, Pug had been sleeping in the shade, amid the trees and thickets of the little wood bordering the tow-path. His resting-place on a green grassy bank was hardly more than a couple of hundred yards from the river: but thick underwoods screened it from view. Pug was content to frowst there during the heat of the day: his activity, in fact, was scheduled for nightfall, after which he carried on his calling as a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. Pug was dog-stealer, chicken-rustler, occasionally when opportunity offered in lonely spots a footpad. An unguarded boat, a stray wheelbarrow, apples from an orchard, even washing left out on the line, were all grist to Pug's mill. But at the moment, Pug Judson

was taking his ease in the shady wood, when he was disturbed by a footstep and brushing twigs.

He stared round at a wet but still elegant figure that came through the thickets. Quite unaware that a particularly frowsy and unpleasant tramp was dozing there, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped under the tree whose wide branches shaded Mr. Judson from the sun.

Pug looked at him.

His reddened eyes gleamed. This young fellow was what Pug would have called a "toff", obviously well off, and carrying a bag. Why he came into the shady wood, Pug did not know: but there he was—more grist for Pug's mill, if the spot was not too dangerously near the tow-path, which was well populated that summer's afternoon. Pug debated in his mind whether it would be safe to give the young "toff" a "oner" on the jaw, knock him out, rifle his pockets, grab his bag, and run. He did not feel sure, and he lay in the grass and thought it out.

Had Arthur Augustus glanced round him attentively, no doubt he would have observed the frowsy figure sprawling half-hidden by bracken. But Arthur Augustus was not an observant youth. Satisfied that he had penetrated to a sufficiently solitary spot, he set his bag on the ground and sorted out a change of clobber and a towel and a small mirror which he stuck on the trunk of the tree, which now interposed between him and Pug, and barred the tramp from his sight even if he had looked round attentively.

The Pug comprehended. The young toff had had a ducking, and had come into the wood to change his clothes.

While Arthur Augustus towelled away Thames water, and donned dry attire, Pug meditated. The greedy gleam in his reddened eyes intensified. That young toff had money about him, he was sure. The bag, with its contents, was a prize. And the crowded river and the tow-path were a couple of hundred yards away, and the trees were thick. It would be safe, Pug considered—as safe, at least, as he could reasonably expect in his peculiar line of business.

Pug made up his frowsy mind at last. He rose to his feet, with a rustle of bracken.

Arthur Augustus had finished changing and shut his bag with the damp clothes in it. He was now getting as good a view of himself as possible in the little mirror on the tree-trunk. That was a rather important matter to the swell of St. Jim's. But he ceased to gaze into the mirror, and gave a start, and looked round, as a burly, frowsy, and very unpleasant-looking tramp came round the tree.

This was Gussy's first intimation that he was not alone in the wood. He looked at Mr. Judson. It did not occur to him, for a moment, to be alarmed: but he certainly did not like Pug's looks. As Mr. Judson came closer, it was not alarm, but the unpleasant aroma of spirits and stale tobacco surrounding Pug, that caused Arthur Augustus to back away.

"'Old on!" rapped Pug, sharply.

"Do you want anything?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Pug stared at him, and then grinned. In all his career as tramp, footpad, and sneak-thief, Pug thought that he had never come across a softer specimen than this. He anticipated no trouble with him. The mere sight of Pug's knuckly fist would be enough. If it was not, Pug was quite prepared to land that knuckly fist in the middle of D'Arcy's aristocratic features.

"Do I want anything?" repeated Pug. "I fancy so, you young idjit! I want all you've got about you, and sharp! And don't yell—if you do, it will be the last 'owl you'll give for some time. I'd knock your block off as soon as look at you."

"Bai Jove!"

Pug picked up the bag in his left hand, and came closer to Arthur Augustus, with his right clenched and raised.

"Nar then!" he rapped. "Turn out your pockets—sharp! I ain't got any time to waste on you."

It dawned upon Arthur Augustus that the frowsy man was a footpad, and that his intention was robbery—with or without violence, according to whether resistance was offered or not.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, startled.

"You 'ear me?" snarled Mr. Judson.

Arthur Augustus's noble eye gleamed through his eyeglass. "Soft" as he looked to Mr. Judson, he was by no means so soft as Pug supposed. Physically, the burly, thick-set ruffian was a match for half-a-dozen of him. But Arthur Augustus did not even think of submitting to robbery.

"You howwid wuffian," he exclaimed. "Dwop that bag at once! Do you heah! Put down my bag, you wascal."

"Wot!" ejaculated Pug, staring.

"Put down that bag at once, or I will knock you down!" exclaimed Augustus, hotly. "If you fancy that you can wob me, you wottah, you are vewy much mistaken. Put that bag down."

For a moment, Pug stared at him, quite surprised. Then an extremely unpleasant expression came over his unshaven face. He dropped the bag, to have both hands free, and came straight at Arthur Augustus. One jolt to the jaw from that knuckly fist would suffice.

Had that jolt landed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have known nothing of what happened next. But it did not land. The St. Jim's junior could not have stopped it—but he dodged it with an active spring aside, and a heavy fist swept empty space.

"Gor!" panted Mr. Judson. He swung round at Arthur Augustus, and rushed at him—and had he not caught his foot in a trailing root, that rush would have overwhelmed the swell of St. Jim's. But by great good fortune, Mr. Judson did catch his foot in a trailing root, and he pitched headlong forward, and crashed fairly at Arthur Augustus's feet.

"Oh, cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, staring down at him.

"Gor!" gurgled Mr. Judson.

He heaved up.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not, perhaps, always quick on the uptake. But in the stress of the moment, his noble brain worked quickly. In a manner of seconds, the frowsy ruffian would be on his feet again, and once on his feet, D'Arcy's number was up. Arthur Augustus did not give the ruffian the necessary few seconds. As the red, savage, bristly face was upturned, Pug heaving up, Arthur Augustus hit out, with all the strength he could put into the punch, and landed his clenched fist in Judson's right eye.

It was a tremendous punch, and Mr. Judson was unfavourably placed to receive it. It fairly crashed into his eye, and rolled him over. He sprawled in the grass yelling frantically.

Arthur Augustus did not linger.

He had knocked down that hefty, muscular tramp. Only too well he knew what would happen when Mr. Judson got up again, if he was still within reach. To run from so unpleasant and disreputable a rascal was not agreeable—but to be smashed up under a rain of blows from those knuckly fists was still less so. Arthur Augustus did not hesitate. He clutched up his bag and bolted. Like a deer he sped through the trees in the direction of the tow-path.

He had nearly a minute's grace. Pug Judson sprawled, spluttering, his hand to an agonized eye. He sat up, still caressing that eye—swollen, and already blackening. When he did, at last, scramble to his feet, Pug's face was like unto that of a demon in a pantomime. He gave a savage glare round—with one eye—and then charged after Arthur Augustus.

Brushing and crackling in the wood guided him. Burly and heavy as he was, Pug ran fast, only longing to get his hands on the schoolboy who had knocked him down and blacked his eye. Had it been a long race, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's last state would have been worse than his first, for Pug assuredly would have had him. Luckily, it was a short race—the tow-path was near: and Mr. Judson, breathing profanity, was still a dozen yards behind, when the swell of St. Jim's bolted out of the trees, into the midst of two or three dozen loungers by the river. And Mr. Judson came to a sudden halt, as he found himself in the public view.

Promptly, he vanished into the wood again.

His intended victim had escaped, and Mr. Judson had to be content with retreat, taking his black eye with him.

"Gor!" breathed Pug, as he went. "Gor! If I come across that young toff agin—Gor!"

Mr. Judson scuttled away through the wood, guided by only one eye—the other shut and swollen and black. He hoped, indeed yearned, to meet that young "toff" again: in the meantime, he had a fearful black eye to remember him by.

On the tow-path, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy slackened to a walk. Occasionally he sucked his knuckles, as he walked on up the river. He had barked them on Pug Judson's unpleasant face, and they felt rather hurt—though not so much so as Pug's face. But he was feeling, on the whole, quite merry and bright, when he arrived in sight of the tall spreading oak-tree on Togg's Eyot.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ISLAND

TOM MERRY shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked up the shining river. "That's it!" he said.

"Looks like it!" agreed Blake.

"Gussy wouldn't be on the spot to tell us, of course," remarked Monty Lowther. "But he said there was a big oak—and that must be it. If we land on the wrong island, I daresay the natives will tell us where we get off."

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's it all right," he said. "Give way!"

The St. Jim's boat pulled on. They knew that Togg's Eyot was somewhere between Staines and Bell Weir Lock: and the spreading oak was, as D'Arcy had told them, a landmark. High and stately, with vast spreading branches, it towered over the little eyot, in the midst of smaller trees and bushes. Certainly it did not occur to the boat's crew that, from the masses of foliage of the great oak, eyes might be watching them as they came. The School House fellows had forgotten all about Figgins and Co., since St. Jim's had broken up for the summer holidays.

"Jolly, and no mistake," said Dig, as the boat floated under shady branches to a grassy margin.

"Topping!" said Manners. "Lucky I brought my camera. I shall get some good pictures here. I wonder whether I shall be able to get films at Staines."

"I wonder!" said Monty Lowther, with deep sarcasm. "It won't be much of a holiday if you can't get films for your camera."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grunt, from Manners. As a matter of fact, Harry Manners did not see how there could be much in a holiday, minus a camera.

Tom Merry caught an overhanging branch, and, standing up, guided the boat to the little landing-place. There he tied up, and the six juniors jumped ashore.

They looked round then with great satisfaction.

The little island, green and shady, in the wide river that rolled gleaming between leafy banks, was undoubtedly a very attractive spot.

There was level green grass round the landing-place, but the greater part of the eyot was thickly wooded. Between the water's edge and the trees, stood a small hut—the bathing-hut Arthur Augustus had mentioned in Study No. 6. It was large enough to accommodate two or three fellows: but for the whole party, the tent was needed.

The door of the bathing hut was padlocked. The grass before it had a rather trampled look, and Jack Blake scanned it curiously.

“Didn't Gussy tell us that there was nobody on this island, since the Toggs man sold it to his pater?” he exclaimed.

“He did,” answered Tom Merry. “What—?”

“Well, this jolly well looks as if somebody has been tramping around here,” said Blake.

“By gum! It does! Picnickers landed here, perhaps!” said Tom. “After all, it's a jolly spot for a picnic, and no harm done.”

“Can't get into the hut,” remarked Herries. “Gussy's got the key on him—and he won't blow in yet awhile.”

“We'll get the boat unloaded while we're waiting for Gussy to blow in,” said Tom Merry.

Blake scanned the padlock on the door of the bathing-hut.

“We needn't wait for Gussy to blow in, to get into the hut,” he said. “Somebody's been in already.”

“It's locked,” said Dig.

“That padlock's been cracked open, and shoved together again to look as if it's locked,” answered Blake. “Look here.”

He snapped the padlock open. Evidently, it was unsecured.

“Oh!” ejaculated Tom Merry. “That's pretty plain proof that somebody has been here.”

Blake threw the door of the hut wide open, and the juniors looked in

The hut was empty, save for half-a-dozen deck-chairs stacked in one corner. Blake gave a sniff, as he stepped in.

“Somebody's had an oil stove here,” he remarked.

In one corner of the hut, there were plain signs where an oil-stove had stood, and there was a lingering and unmistakable aroma of paraffin. There could be no doubt now that some person or persons unknown had been camping on the island, and that they had made use of the hut. Other signs met the eyes of the juniors as they looked round—two or three burnt matches, a fragment of egg-shell, and a spot of orange-peel. And there were many traces of muddy shoes on the wooden planks of the floor.

“Picnickers, I suppose,” said Tom. “Myriads of them up and down the river at this time of the year.”

“Might have run into them when we landed,” said Blake. “Some of these signs are pretty fresh—I'll bet they were here to-day. Like their cheek!”

“Never mind—they're gone now,” said Tom, cheerily. “After all, this is a

jolly spot for camping—can't blame a boating-party for landing, when there was nobody about."

"Looks to me as if they didn't just land," grunted Blake. "Looks as if they made a regular camp of it. Might have been here for days, from the look of things. And they were here quite lately—I shouldn't wonder if they saw us coming, and cleared off."

"They wouldn't know we were coming to this eyot, if they saw us in the boat," said Manners.

"No! I suppose not!" admitted Blake. "But they haven't been long gone—I can see that."

"Well, they're gone, anyhow," said Tom. "Now let's get the boat unloaded, and the tent up. We'll have tea ready for Gussy when he blows in. We'll shove the oil-stove in here, and the cooking things, and the grub-box. Now, then, you fellows—all hands shift cargo!"

And the juniors proceeded to unload the boat: every now and then glancing across at the tow-path, to see whether Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in the offing. The camping outfit was taken ashore and sorted out, and a spot marked out for the erection of the tent, in which seven fellows were to sleep, and in which, as Jack Blake remarked, they would be rather like sardines in a can.

Manners disinterred the leather case, containing his precious camera, from the boat's locker, and carried it into the hut, where he hung it on a hook in the wall. Then he lent a hand with less important gear. Monty Lowther set up the oil-stove in the corner of the hut, which, to judge by the lingering aroma, had been used by the unknown campers for the same purpose. Then all hands set to work erecting the tent. Many hands made light work, and the tent was soon up, and ground-sheets, blankets, and Gussy's sleeping-bag packed within.

By that time, Tom Merry and Co. expected to see Arthur Augustus: but among the figures passing and re-passing on the tow-path across the stream, the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's was not yet visible. Monty Lowther stood looking out on the sunny river, and the passing craft, with a thoughtful expression on his face. Then he turned to Manners.

"This would make a jolly good picture, old chap," he said. "Why not a snap to stick up in the study at St. Jim's next term?"

Manners glanced at him, a little surprised, and rather pleased. This was the first time on record that Monty had displayed a keen interest in photography. His remarks on the subject of cameras were generally flippant, and often sarcastic. It was quite pleasant to see him taking an interest in a subject that was, in Manners' opinion at least, among the most important in the universe.

"Not a bad idea, old fellow," assented Manners. "I'll get my camera." And he cut into the hut.

Monty Lowther bestowed a wink upon Tom Merry, Blake, Herries, and Dig. What that wink implied, the four juniors did not know: though they could guess that the funny man of the Shell was "up" to something.

Manners came cheerfully back, carrying the leather case by the strap. But the cheerful expression faded from his face, as if wiped away by a duster, as he opened the case. He stared into it blankly. It was empty.

"Oh!" gasped Manners.

He stared and stared into that empty leather case, in amazement and dismay. But he could not stare a camera back into it. The camera was gone.

"Anything up?" asked Lowther.

"My camera—!" gasped Manners.

"Short of films, or what?"

"No—no—it's the camera! It's not here!" exclaimed Manners. "I'm absolutely certain I packed it in the case. I could swear to that. Did you fellows ever know me to be careless with my camera?"

"Never!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Anything but that!"

"Sure it isn't in the case?" asked Monty.

"You silly owl, do you think I can't see whether a camer-case has a camera in it or not?" hooted Manners. "I must have taken it out at the last minute for something—I just can't understand it! My camera's been left behind!"

Manners made that announcement, as if announcing that the crack of doom was impending.

"Well, perhaps we could manage to rub along without it, somehow!" suggested Jack Blake, with mild sarcasm.

Manners looked at him.

"Fathead!" he said.

"Well, if it isn't here, it isn't!" remarked Herries. "After all, what does it matter?"

"Idiot!"

"Calling fellows names won't fetch the camera along!" remarked Digby.

"Chucklehead!"

"My dear chap—!" said Tom.

"Don't be an ass, Tom," said Manners, crossly. "This is supposed to be a holiday, isn't it? I shall want my camera."

"It has been known, since history was first recorded, for people to take holidays without cameras!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"I suppose I can't expect any sense from you fellows," said Manners. He looked at his watch. "If I get back to Staines at once, I can get a train—I can get back here some time to-morrow—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom.

"Goodness knows where I left that camera, if I didn't pack it in the case as I thought I did," said Manners, anxiously. "I just can't understand it—it's the first time such a thing has ever happened. I'd better take the boat at once—"

"But we've got to ferry Gussy across, when he shows up!" exclaimed Blake.

"Don't jaw," said Manners. "I've no time to listen to jaw."

"Look here—!" bawled Herries.

Manners did not "look there". He slung the empty camera-case over his shoulder, and made for the tied-up boat. Picking up Gussy, when he showed up on the tow-path, was evidently, in Manners's opinion, a trifle light as air, in comparison with that precious camera. He was going back for that camera, and all lesser considerations had to fade out of the picture.

"Manners, old man!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You—Oh! Monty, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake and Herries and Dig.

Monty Lowther's right hand had been behind him. He now brought it into view, and there was something in it. That something was a camera. He held it up, with a cheery grin on his face.

"O.K. Manners," he yelled. "I've found it."

Manners jumped, and spun round.

"Fuf—fuf—found it!" he stuttered.

"Look!"

Manners looked—and made a rush. He grabbed the precious camera. The expression on his speaking countenance made the juniors yell.

"I—I—what—where was it?" gasped Manners. "It's my camera—it ought to have been in the case—where did you find it?"

"In the case," answered Lowther, affably.

"In—in—in the case?" stuttered Manners. "Why, you funny ass—you practical joking idiot—you blithering cuckoo—playing tricks with my camera—why, you footling fathead—you—you—you—you."— Words failed Manners, and he proceeded to action. Tom Merry grabbed him, just in time, as he hurled himself at Monty Lowther.

"Hold on, old chap—!" gasped Tom.

"Leggo!" roared Manners. "I'm going to punch him—I'm going—will you leggo, Tom, you fathead?"

But Tom Merry did not let go: instead of that, Blake and Herries and Dig added their grasp to Tom's: and Manners was safely held till he agreed to cut out the punching. An elegant figure being sighted on the tow-path by that time, the Fourth-formers pushed off in the boat to ferry Arthur Augustus D'Arcy across, leaving the Terrible Three on the island, and Manners telling Monty Lowther what he thought of him, in a voice that could be heard on both banks of the Thames.

CHAPTER VII

CAMPING OUT!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stepped from the boat, as Blake tied up at the little landing-place. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and glanced at the three Shell fellows. All was not calm and bright, at the moment, on Togg's

Eyot. Monty Lowther was smiling sweetly, it was true: but Harry Manners was glaring at him as if he could have bitten him: and Tom Merry, between the two, was making soothing gestures and uttering placatory murmurs. Manners had ceased to tell his playful chum what he thought of him, having run out of breath—but his looks were as expressive as his verbal eloquence.

“Anythin’ the mattah, deah boys?” asked Arthur Augustus. “I twust that you fellows are not wowin’.”

“Manners seems a bit shirty,” said Lowther, shaking his head. “He couldn’t find his camera, and I found it for him—”

“Look here, I’m jolly well going to punch him!” roared Manners. “Ger-away, Tom.”

“Bai Jove! That’s wathah ungwateful, Mannahs, if Lowthah found your camewah when you had lost it—”

“Chump!”

“Weally, Mannahs—”

“For goodness sake, let’s hear the last of that camera,” exclaimed Blake. “What’s the matter with your knuckles, Gussy? We’re just going to have tea, if you’re hungry—no need to chew your knuckles—”

“I am not chewin’ my knuckles, Blake. But they are wathah sore—I barked them, hittin’ a twamp in the eye. I wathah think it must have blacked his eye, and it has left my knuckles wathah waw.”

Six fellows gazed at Arthur Augustus. Manners even seemed to forget the exciting episode of the camera for a moment.

“You’ve been hitting a tramp in the eye!” exclaimed Tom Merry.

“Yaas, wathah.”

“Isn’t he the limit?” sighed Blake. “The minute he gets out of our sight he lands in trouble. We ought to keep him on a chain. I’ve said so lots of times.”

“Weally, Blake, you ass—”

“What on earth have you been scrapping with tramps for?” asked Monty Lowther.

“I have not exactly been scwappin’ with twamps, Lowthah. It was when I changed my clobbah in that wood,” explained Arthur Augustus. “A huge hulkin-wuffian twied to wob me, so I knocked him down—”

“You knocked down a huge hulking ruffian!” yelled Herries.

“Yaas, wathah.”

“And he let you do it?” asked Dig. “Must have been a jolly good-natured huge hulking ruffian.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“As a mattah of fact, I was wathah lucky. He would have been wathah more than a match for me, I think,” confessed Arthur Augustus. “But, you see, he twipped ovah a woot, so I was able to land him in the eye befoah he got his paws on me, and then I don’t mind admittin’ that I cut. You see, he

was vevy huge and vevy hulkin', and it seemed only pwudent to cut while I had the chance. The howwid bwute wushed aftah me, and I can tell you fellows that I was wathah glad to get back to the tow-path and among a cwowd."

"Oh, you ass!" said Tom.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We won't let you out of our sight again," said Tom. "Next time you try to wreck a launch, and get a ducking, we'll hang you out on a line to dry."

"Wats! I must unpack some cold cwream now, to wub on my knuckles—they are weally vevy waw, aftah punchin' that bwute in the eye."

While Arthur Augustus attended to his noble knuckles, the other fellows attended to tea: and a cheery party sat round in deck-chairs, or in the thick grass, to dispose of it.

Arthur Augustus glanced, every now and then, at the tent. Some campers would have been rather glad to find the work done when they arrived in camp: but the swell of St. Jim's seemed a little dubious. Arthur Augustus had a fixed belief that his own supervising eye was required in all operations—a belief that was not in the least shared by his friends.

"I see that you've got the tent up, deah boys," he remarked, after awhile.

"Just noticed it?" asked Blake. "Observant chap, Gussy! You ought to be a detective, old bean."

"I was thinkin', Blake—"

"Gammon!"

"I was goin' to say that I was thinkin'—"

"Tell us an easier one!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Pway let a fellow speak, you chaps! I was thinkin' that it would have been wathah bettah to leave it till I awwived. You have to be vevy careful in puttin' up a tent, you know—that is one of the most important things in campin' out," explained Arthur Augustus. "Don't you think it would have been bettah to wait till you could put it up undah my instwuctions?"

"Ass!" said six voices, speaking as one.

"Well, it would be no joke if it tumbled down on our nappahs, in the middle of the night," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "That would be vevy disturbin', especially if it was wainin'."

"It's just barely possible that we know how to put up a tent, Gussy," remarked Tom Merry.

"Even without instructions from the biggest ass at St. Jim's," said Manners, with a nod.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Have another sandwich, Gussy," said Blake.

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy, but I have had enough."

"Oh! Do have another," urged Blake. "Look here, here's one with a ghost of ham in it! Do try it, old chap."

"I have weally had enough, Blake."

"Well, have this jam sandwich to wind up! It's jolly good—real raspberry jam, made of the best beetroot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am sure it is vewy nice, Blake, but weally I have had enough—I can't go on eatin' for evah like Fatty Wynn."

"Try some nuts, then," urged Blake. "I'll crack them for you."

"You are vewy kind, deah boy, but I don't want any more. You seem vewy anxious for me to go on eatin'," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"I am," admitted Blake.

"I weally do not see why, Blake."

"Because while you're eating you can't talk!" explained Blake. "Do have another sandwich, old chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I wepeat that I do not wegard you fellows as capable of puttin' up a tent on your own: and if it falls down on your heads duwin' the night, it will serve you wight! So wats!"

And the subject of the tent dropped: though Arthur Augustus continued to give it a dubious glance from time to time.

After tea, the St. Jim's party spent a happy hour or two in exploring the little island. Small as the eyot was, there were many nooks and corners, among the trees and bushes, and it was easy for them to lose sight of one another. In several places they found "sign" of previous campers—here and there, firewood had been cut, and in one spot a burnt patch showed where a camp-fire had been lighted. Whoever the unknown campers were, they seemed to have spent some time on the eyot—probably several days. And many of the traces were so recent, that Blake was confirmed in his belief that the intruders had only just cleared off before the St. Jim's party arrived.

They gathered for supper at the landing-place, in the sunset. Many craft passed the eyot, going up or down the Thames: and innumerable walkers passed and repassed on the towing-path. Arthur Augustus was glancing across at the tow-path, when he suddenly uttered a startled exclamation.

"Bai Jove! There he is!"

"Eh! Who?" asked Tom Merry, lazily.

"That twamp!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, excitedly. "The bwute who attacked me."

Arthur Augustus jumped to his feet, and pointed a finger at a disreputable figure lounging along the towing-path on the bank of the Thames. Tom Merry and Co. jumped up also, and they all stared across at Mr. Pug Judson.

"Looks a pretty specimen!" said Blake. "By gum! He's got a black eye! Did you give him that black eye, Gussy?"

"I wathah think I did," chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Pug Judson, catching sight of the crowd on the margin of the little island,

stared across at them—and in the bright sunset, his black eye showed up to great advantage. It was swollen, and black as the ace of spades—it was clear that Gussy must have landed a remarkably good one in that eye!

The tramp's scowling face was indifferent, as he stared across—but suddenly that look of indifference vanished, and his scowl deepened, and his sound eye glinted, as he spotted an elegant figure in the little crowd. The savage hostility that blazed in his face, as he recognized Arthur Augustus, was quite startling. He raised a knuckly fist and shook it at the St. Jim's crowd.

"He knows you again, Gussy!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Nice man to meet in a lonely lane," said Tom. "We mustn't let Gussy go wandering again."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, disdainfully. "I should certainly not take any notice of such a wotten wuffian. Bai Jove! He seems in a vewy bad tempah."

There was no doubt about that. Mr. Judson was shaking a brawny fist, and scowling like a demon. It was quite plain that he would have enjoyed planting that brawny fist in the middle of Arthur Augustus's aristocratic features. The swell of St. Jim's gave him a look of superb disdain, which certainly did not have the effect of improving Pug's temper. He brandished his fist, and roared:

"Wait till I get 'old of you!"

Then he slouched away, and disappeared up the tow-path.

"Good widdance to bad wubbish!" said Arthur Augustus.

Fewer and fewer passers appeared on the banks, and the craft on the river thinned out, as the sun sank lower in the west, and the shadows deepened over the Thames valley. And Tom Merry and Co. at last, turned into their blankets in the tent, for a peaceful night's repose—which was not, as it happened, destined to be so peaceful as they happily anticipated.

CHAPTER VIII

TROUBLE WITH A TENT!

TOM MERRY awoke suddenly.

He hardly knew what had awakened him. Something seemed to be squashing down on him, flapping and wallowing over him. He started up, and his head banged into something soft and clinging. The darkness was like the inside of a hat.

"What—?" gasped Tom.

"Oooooogh!" came a splutter from the darkness. "What's up? Who's that? Stop kicking me, you maniac."

"Gweat Scott! What's the mattah? Oh, cwikey!"

"Look out!"

"I say what's up? What idiot is shoving his hoof into my eye? Oh, crikey!"

Confused voices were heard on all sides. Tom struggled with whatever it was that was flapping over him and pinning him down, and realized that it was loose canvas. It billowed and wallowed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom. "The tent—it's down!"

That was the simple explanation of the mystery. The tent had collapsed on the occupants, and seven sleepers had awakened in a state of wild confusion. Quite unlike the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the seven sleepers of Togg's Eyot jumped into wide wakefulness.

Tom Merry struggled up. Other fellows were sprawling and struggling. Somebody's foot caught him in the ribs, and he yelled.

"Ow! Look out, fathead!"

"What's up?" yelled Blake. "Is it the tent—?"

"It's the tent!" yelled Monty Lowther. "But nothing's up—it's down!"

"You silly chump!" howled Blake. It was no time for Monty's jests. "Can't you help being funny, you blitherer?"

"I say, gewwoff my legs, will you!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Who's spwawlin' ovah my legs! Pway gewwoff!"

For some minutes there was wild confusion in the camp. Seven fellows, in pitchy darkness, rolled and wrestled and struggled to get out of billowing, wallowing canvas. They bumped into one another, elbowed one another, stumbled over one another, pushed and shoved one another. Panting and gasping and yelling made a chorus that echoed over the eyot.

Tom Merry was the first to struggle out to freedom. He emerged into the open air, and the glimmer of the summer stars, and staggered to his feet.

"Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated, as he stared at the billowing canvas that still covered his struggling, wriggling, kicking comrades.

The tent was a wreck. It really looked as if all the tent-pegs must have pulled out at once, at one fell swoop. The night had brought a wind on the river: but the wind did not account for it. It looked as if Arthur Augustus's doubts about that tent and its erection had been justified. It was a complete collapse.

Blake wriggled out, and Herries and Dig followed him. Then they dragged flapping canvas away, and Monty Lowther was rescued.

Manners was a little more difficult to rescue. His struggling in the dark had rolled him up in canvas, and he had to be unwound, like a mummy. But he was got out at last, and sat in the grass gasping for breath.

Only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained in the collapsed tent. D'Arcy was the only one of the party provided with a sleeping-bag. It was easy enough to slip into that sleeping-bag. But it seemed difficult to slip out of it, with the canvas billowing over him.

"Pway lend me a hand, deah boys," came a breathless howl. "Pway dwag that wotten canvas off. I can't get out of this beastly bag! Blake—Hewwies—Dig—where are you, you asses? Can't you lend a fellow a hand?"

Six fellows dragged flapping canvas away, and the sleeping-bag was revealed, with Arthur Augustus's noble head sticking out of it. He blinked in the starlight, spluttering for breath.

"Oh, cwumbs!" he gasped. "I can't get out of this wotten bag! I think the stwing at the neck has got knotted, or somethin'—I am a pwisonah in this bag! What are you gwinnin' at, Blake, you ass? Will you help a fellow out of this beastly bag, or will you not help a fellow out of this beastly bag?"

"Isn't it Gussy all over to tie himself up in a bag?" sighed Blake.

"You uttah ass! I have not tied myself up in a bag!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "It has got knotted somehow, and I cannot get out. Will you help me out of this beastly bag, Jack Blake, instead of standin' there makin' idiotic wemarks?"

"Oh, pull him out," said Blake. "You take the end of the bag, Herries, and I'll take hold of his ears, and jerk him out—"

"Leave my yahs alone, you wuffian!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, all right! I'll get a grip on your hair—"

"Bai Jove! If you touch my hair, I will give you a punch in the eye! I wefuse to be dwagged out of this bag by my hair!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry, laughing, got a grip on Arthur Augustus's shoulders, and Herries dragged at the sleeping-bag: and Arthur Augustus came out of it like a wrinkle out of a shell. He sprawled and spluttered.

"Well, this is a sell," said Tom Merry, surveying the wreck of the tent. "I thought we had it up safe enough. You put in a lot of the tent-pegs, Blake! Think you hammered them in safe?"

"I know I did!" snorted Blake. "But you put in some—I have my doubts about those."

Arthur Augustus sat up.

"What did I tell you?" he hooted. "I jolly well knew that it wasn't all wight. You ought to have waited for me, befoah you put up the tent. You could not expect to do it without pwopah instwuction fwom a fellow who undahstands. Now look what's happened!"

"Can it!" hooted Blake.

"I wefuse to can it, Blake! I warned you that the tent would pwobably come down, and now it has come down. I twust that you will not deny that I told you so!"

Six fellows glared at Arthur Augustus. They had been quite satisfied with the way they had put up the tent, without either assistance or instruction from the swell of St. Jim's. Still, there was no doubt that it had come down: and no doubt that Arthur Augustus had told them so. Gussy's reminder that he had told them so did not, however, seem to produce any gratifying or soothing

effect on them. They looked at Arthur Augustus rather as if they could have eaten him.

"Anothah time," continued Arthur Augustus. "I twust that you will listen to me!" Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, still rather breathless. "I don't want to wub it in, but it is vevy fatheaded not to listen to instwuction fwom a fellow who undahstands the whole thing."

Blake breathed hard.

"What about chucking him into the river?" he asked. "It's quite handy."

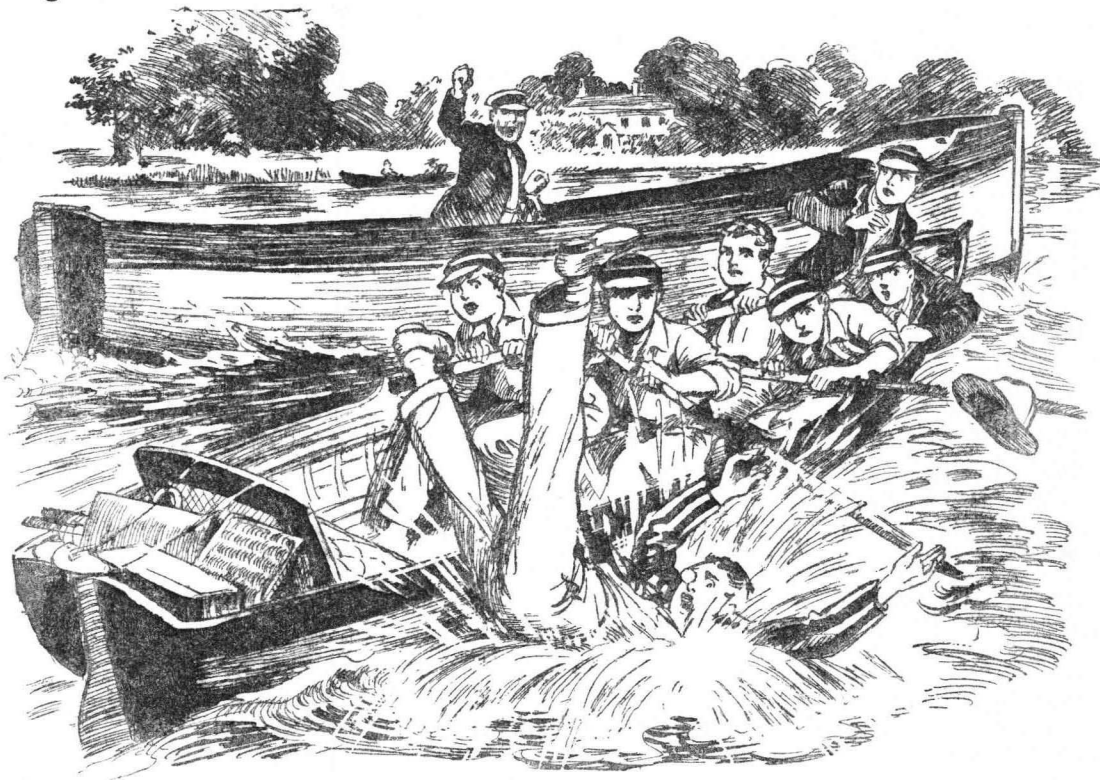
"Weally, Blake—"

"Or we might head him up in that sleeping-bag of his," said Monty Lowther, thoughtfully. "Then he could keep on talking without bothering anybody."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, we've got to get the tent up again," said Tom. "Blessed if I know how the dashed thing came down—but we've got to get it up again."

"Yaas, wathah! And this time, you can do it undah my eye," said Arthur Augustus. "I will stand wound and give diwections, and then it will be all wight."



"Man overboard!"

"You're asking for it, Gussy!" said Blake, warningly.

"I twust, Blake, that you are not thinkin' of diswegardin' my instwuctions, aftah the tent has fallen down on our heads! Do you want it to come down again before mornin'?"

"He's got to have it," said Blake. "Shove his head into the sleeping-bag."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove! I wefuse—I say—yawwooh! Wefuse me at once, you uttah wuffians!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as six exasperated juniors grasped him as one man. "You know vewy well that I told you so—you all heard me say—yawwooh!"

Kicking wildly, Arthur Augustus was shoved head first into the fleecy sleeping-bag! It was pulled down round him to his noble ankles, and his voice died away in a suffocated splutter.

Tom Merry and Co. set to work on the re-erection of the tent, in the light of the stars. Every now and then they grinned round at a strange object in the grass—a sleeping-bag that seemed endowed with life, that rolled and bumped and tumbled and wriggled. Only Arthur Augustus's feet projected from the neck of the bag, and the swell of St. Jim's seemed to experience great difficulties in crawling out of it backwards.

He succeeded at last, emerging with his hair like a mop, his face crimson, gurgling for breath. But he was in no state to give directions for tent-building—for quite a long time he sat in the grass, gurgling for wind. Once more the tent was put up without expert assistance from Arthur Augustus.

"Come on, Gussy," called out Blake, when all was ready. "You're not going to sit there all night, are you?"

"I shall not entah that tent, Blake! It will pwobably fall down again—"

"Sitting it out for the rest of the night?" asked Lowther.

"I shall take my sleepin'-bag into the hut. I shall not twust myself in a tent you fellows have put up. I wegard you all as clumsy asses."

"Fathead!"

"Wats!"

Six fellows turned in again, in the tent. Arthur Augustus, having recovered his noble wind, carried his sleeping-bag into the hut, inserted himself into it—feet first, this time—and went to sleep. Slumber descended once more upon Togg's Eyot, and seven schoolboys slept peacefully, lulled by the murmur of the rolling Thames.

That state of blissful repose lasted about an hour. Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was awakened by strange, startling sounds from the night. He sat up and listened. Sounds of struggling and breathless voices reached his ears.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What the thump—"

"Look out—"

"It's down again!"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

Arthur Augustus peered from the hut. The glitter of the summer stars showed him a mass of billowing, wallowing canvas, with legs sticking out from under it in all directions, and suffocated voices came from the wreck, yelling and spluttering. The tent was down again!

Arthur Augustus chuckled! Tom Merry and Co. had disdained his expert assistance a second time, and a second time the tent had collapsed on their heads! And Arthur Augustus, chuckling, returned to his sleeping-bag, and left them to it.

CHAPTER IX

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE!

BRIGHT morning on the Thames!

There were cheery faces and cheery voices on Togg's Eyot.

Tom Merry and Co. on holiday, seemed to be enjoying life. They had turned out at quite an early hour—despite the interruptions to slumber during the night. Twice had the tent collapsed upon them, unexpectedly and inexplicably—so very inexplicably, indeed, that they could almost have fancied that somebody had come along in the dark and unhooked ropes and loosened tent-pegs!

Had they been camping on shore, it certainly would have looked like it. But on an island it did not seem possible. So the persistent collapsing of the tent remained inexplicable.

However those little nocturnal misadventures had not affected their cheery spirits. They turned out bright and early, enjoyed a dip in the Thames, and gathered for breakfast. It was, they all agreed, jolly on the island. Sitting round on logs or deck-chairs or camp-stools, under shady branches, they had a wide view of the shining river, already dotted with early craft, of the green banks and the rolling woods. Over breakfast they discussed the programme for the day, which, so far as Manners at least was concerned, included taking photographs of scenes on the Thames. There was a limit to Harry Manners' enthusiasm as amateur photographer; and had there not been a limit to his films, the camera might have been clicking all day long.

"What about Wunnymede?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Is that a conundrum?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Certainly not! Wunnymede is a vewy histowical spot, and within easy weach fwom heah," explained Arthur Augustus. "Several centuwies ago—I forget how many—King What's-his-name signed the Great Thingumbob at Wunnymede. It is vewy histowical indeed."

"We haven't had King What's-his-name in history class with Linton at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, gravely. "Was he King What's-his-name the First, or King What's-his-name the Second, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I did not mean that his name was King What's-his-name, but I forget it for the moment."

"John, perhaps?" suggested Manners, sarcastically.

"Yaas, wathah," agreed Arthur Augustus, "that was the chap! King John—I wemembah now that Spokeshave—I mean Shakespeare—w'ote a play about him."

"Sure you've got that right?" asked Manners, still sarcastic.

"Well, I wathah think so, Mannahs—I am suah I wecollect it—we have had it in English Litewature with Lathom at St. Jim's. Yaas, I feel quite suah about it—it was King John all wight."

"And he signed the Great Thingumbob," said Blake, thoughtfully. "Are you sure whether it was a thungumbob? or a thingummy?"

"Wats! It was a gweat somethin-or-othah, but I wathah forget what it was, for the moment—"

"Possibly the Great Charter!" suggested Manners, with more sarcasm.

"That's wight! The Gweat Charter—othahwise called Magna Charta," said Arthur Augustus, with a nod, "Charta of course is Latin—"

"Not always," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, a Latin word is always a Latin word, and cannot vewy well evah be anythin' else."

"My dear man, there are English carters," answered Lowther. "Why, I saw one in Staines yesterday."

"You uttah ass, it is not that kind of a carter!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You weally don't seem to learn vewy much in the Shell, Lowthah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pewwaps you are makin' one of your wotten puns, though—"

"Not at all: one of my rather good ones," explained Lowther.

"Wats! Well, you fellows, King John signed Magna Charta on the island at Wunnymede, and it is feahfully histowical—"

"He didn't sign it," said Manners. "He put his seal to it. He couldn't write."

"Oh, wats—I don't care a wap whethah he signed it or sealed it—whatevah it was, he did it on the island at Wunnymede, which has been feahfully histowical evah since. We ought to wow down to Wunnymede and give it the once-ovah, as the cwadle of fweedom and all that."

"It's not certain whether John did it on the island, or on one of the banks," said Manners. "Nobody knows really."

"Perhaps the Great Charter was taken to one of the banks afterwards," suggested Monty Lowther.

"I don't see why it should, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus, puzzled. "If it was signed, or sealed, on the island, why should it be taken to one of the banks aftahwards?"

"Much safer in a bank," explained Lowther. "Valuable documents are generally kept in banks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You keep on makin' wotten puns one aftah anothah, Lowthah! Is there a single subject you have not made a pun on?" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"Yes—I don't think I've ever made a pun on an old bachelor," said Monty, thoughtfully.

"An old bachelor?" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Yes: an old bachelor is a single subject."

"Oh, cwikey! Pway give us a west! Now, what about a wun down to Wunnymede, deah boys. You can take a photogwaph of the place, Mannahs," added Arthur Augustus: a suggestion that interested Manners immediately.

"Not a bad idea, you men," said Manners. "I'll get my camera." And Manners walked across to the hut, where the camera in its case had been left on the hook.

"Runnymede it is," said Tom Merry, cheerily. "We get a pull on the river—that's the chief thing—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, the chief thing is to wevive histowical associations, and weflect on a gweat pewiod of English histowy. While we are there, I will tell you fellows, if you like, all I wemembah of the histowy of those stiwwing times."

"We'll let you do that," agreed Jack Blake. "It won't take you a minute."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

Arthur Augustus was interrupted. Manners had gone into the hut for his camera. He emerged with an excited expression on his face. Six fellows stared at him, wondering why he was coming back without his camera, and why he was looking so excited.

Manners did not explain. His view seemed to be that it was a moment for action, not for words. Red with wrath, he came striding back: and, without a word, grasped hold of Monty Lowther, and got his head into chancery.

Thump! thump!

Lowther gave a startled roar. He struggled wildly in the grasp of his chum, while the other fellows jumped up in amazement.

"Manners!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, Mannahs?"

Monty Lowther yelled and struggled frantically. But his neck was securely enclosed in Manners' left arm, and Manners punched and punched with his right.

"Leago!" shrieked Lowther. "Gone mad?"

"Where's my camera!" yelled Manners, punching.

"Blow your camera! Bless your camera! I'll chuck your rotten camera into the river! Leago!" roared Lowther. "Oh, crikey! Draggimoff!"

"Pewwaps we had bettah westwain Mannahs, you fellows—"

"Manners, you mad ass, stop it—"

The juniors rushed at Manners. They grasped him on all sides, and dragged him away from Lowther by main force.

Lowther tottered, and sat down in the grass. He sat gasping, for breath, with his hand to his nose. His excited chum had got in quite a few hefty punches before he was dragged off. And even now he did not seem satisfied. He struggled in the grasp of many hands, striving to break loose, evidently anxious to get at Lowther again, and administer some more of the same.

"Let me go, you dummies!" roared Manners. "I tell you I'll punch him—I'll spiflicate him—playing tricks with a fellow's camera—"

"Oh! That camera!" sighed Tom.

"You mad ass!" yelled Lowther. "I haven't touched your rotten camera! I wish I'd chucked it into the Thames—but I haven't! Blow your silly camera."

"Where is it then?" howled Manners.

"How should I know where it is!" howled back Lowther.

"You had it yesterday, and I was just going back to Staines when you owned up. What have you done with it?"

"I haven't done anything with it!" shrieked Lowther. "I wish I had—but I haven't! I hope it's lost for good this time, though."

Manners wrenched at holding hands.

"Will you let me get at him?" he roared. "I tell you I won't have tricks played on my camera. This is the second time, and it's going to be the last. Let me go, I tell you."

"Let him go!" hooted Lowther, scrambling to his feet. "I'll mop up the island with him, and then I'll find his rotten camera and jump on it. Let him go."

"Hold on," gasped Tom Merry. "Keep that ass back, Blake! Grab him by the ears if he won't keep quiet, Herries. Collar him, Dig."

"Will you let go?" roared Manners.

"Will you let go?" roared Lowther, like an echo.

"Pway keep the peace, deah boys! You fellows hold that ass Lowthah—and we'll hold this feahful idiot Mannahs—"

Harry Manners and Monty Lowther were great chums. But, at the moment, their chief object in life seemed to be to get at one another and alter one another's features. By main force, they were kept apart. Blake and Herries and Dig dragged Lowther back—Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus held Manners by either arm. The foemen were reduced to exchanging glares, instead of punches.

"Look here," gasped Tom, "Has anything happened to your camera again, Manners?"

"It's gone!" yelled Manners, "and I'm going to punch that silly idiot's head till he turns it up."

"Isn't it in the case now?"

"I don't know whether it's in the case or not—the case is gone too! That blithering idiot has taken it off the hook—"

"I haven't!" shrieked Lowther.

"Oh, don't talk rot! Nobody but you is idiot enough to lark with a fellow's camera! Didn't you yesterday!" roared Manners.

"Yes, I did, fathead—but I haven't touched it since, lunatic—I haven't even seen it, dummy—I only hope it's gone for good, chump!"

"Will you let me gerrat him—?"

"Easy does it, old chap," said Tom, soothingly. "If Lowther says he never touched the camers, he never did. You know that."

"Then who did?" hooted Manners.

"Are you sure it's gone—"

"Idiot!"

"You might have put it somewhere else—"

"Fathead!"

"Well, let's look," said Tom. "If you put it in the hut, it's still in the hut, that stands to reason."

"That dummy Lowther—"

"Lowther hasn't had it, fathead. Come on," said Tom.

"Let him come on this way," howled Monty Lowther. "Think I'm going to have my nose punched—"

"Shut up, old man," said Blake.

"I tell you I'm going to punch him! Look at my nose!"

"Well, you asked for it yesterday, and you've got it to-day," said Blake. "That's all right!"

"Yaas, wathah," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Keep him safe, deah boys. We can't have fwiends fallin' out and punchin' noses on a holiday. Come on, Mannahs—I'll help you find the camewah, deah boy."

"Can you find what's not there?" hooted Manners.

"Oh, come on, and let's look!" said Tom.

Manners, snorting, suffered himself to be led back to the hut: Blake and Herries and Dig taking care of Lowther in the meantime. In the hut, Manners pointed to the hook, on which the camera, in its case, had hung by the strap. There was nothing on the hook now.

"See?" snorted Manners.

"Well, let's look round," said Tom. "You mayn't have put it there—"

"Talk sense!" snapped Manners.

To Tom Merry, it seemed quite possible that a fellow might have put down a camera, without remembering exactly where he put it down. To Manners, that was not only impossible, but unthinkable. He had left the camera-case

hanging on that hook, and that was that. If it was elsewhere in the hut, somebody had taken it down and put it there. Manners would not have been very much surprised to find it in the "grub" box, or behind the cooking-stove, or under Gussy's sleeping-bag—that was the sort of funny ass Monty Lowther was!

But he did not find it in any of those places, or in any other spot in the hut. Three juniors searched the little hut meticulously, looking in every possible and impossible recess. But the camera was not there. That Manners had left it in the hut, whether hanging on the hook or not, was certain. And it was certain that it was not now in the hut.

"Well?" snorted Manners.

"Blessed if I can make it out," said Tom. "That dashed camera will be the death of us! It must be somewhere."

"Yaas, wathah! But where?"

"That ass Lowther—!" hooted Manners.

"Well, it's not here," said Tom, and they quitted the hut—Tom and Arthur Augustus greatly puzzled: and Manners more convinced than ever that Monty Lowther, and Monty Lowther alone, could account for the mysterious disappearance of his precious camera.

CHAPTER X

STILL MORE MYSTERIOUS!

"Is this dashed island haunted?" growled Jack Blake.

"Blessed if I don't half think so," said Tom.

Seven fellows were looking, and feeling, puzzled and perplexed and worried. It was altogether too mysterious.

"Look at the way the tent came down in the night—twice," went on Blake. "Now something vanishes—without leaving a trace! What the thump can it mean?"

"It's a dashed mystery," said Herries.

"It does seem wathah a mystewy about Mannahs' camewah," remarked Arthur Augustus. "But there is no mystewy about the tent, Hewwies. I told you chaps it would come down if you put it up without my help. Don't you wemembah?"

"Kill him, somebody!" hissed Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Twice in one night, and we put it up all right each time," said Blake, "and now—this! Can't be some practical joker about, dodging on the island and away again while we were asleep, can there?"

"Some funny ass like Lowther—!" suggested Manners. Manners, at long last, had allowed himself to be convinced that Monty had not been larking with his camera. But perhaps a doubt lingered in a corner of his mind. Undoubtedly he was very exasperated.

Tom Merry glanced about him, at the distant banks of the Thames. The distance was not great, certainly—anyone with a boat could have pushed across in the night and landed on the eyot, no doubt without awakening sound sleepers. But it seemed extraordinarily improbable.

"Can't imagine any man staying up all night along a river, to push a boat around and play idiotic practical jokes on strangers," said Tom.

"Well, it does seem a bit thick," said Dig. "But where's the camera? And it was jolly queer, the tent coming down—twice!"

"I do not wegard that as queeah, Dig—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" shrieked Blake.

"I do not want to wub it in, Blake! But surely you wemembah that I told you that the tent would pwobably come down. Don't you wemembah my sayin'—yawoooh!"

Blake and Herries suddenly seized Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and sat him down in the grass. He sat hard and suddenly, and roared.

"Now can it!" howled Blake. "You tell us that again, and we'll roll you into the river—and leave you there."

"Ow! Oh, cwikey! You uttah wuffians—I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin'," gasped Arthur Augustus. "You have wumped my twousahs, you wottahs."

"It's all rot," said Manners. "Nobody would hang about the banks of a river to play silly japes on strangers in the night. And how would anybody know anything about my camera, or where to find it in the dark?"

"But it's gone," said Tom.

Manners gave a snort.

"I know that! And I jolly well know that it's still on the island, too."

"Think I had it, when I've told you honour bright that I never touched the rotten thing?" bawled Monty Lowther.

"You're not the only fathead here," snapped Manners. "Of course I thought it was you at first, after you did the very same thing yesterday. If it wasn't you, it was somebody else."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom, with rather a doubtful glance, however, at the Fourth-form members of the party.

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Shouldn't wonder," he said. "You're such a potty ass about that potty camera, that you ask fellows to pull your potty leg."

"If we're going to Runnymede, I want that camera," said Manners. "The joke has gone far enough, if you call it a joke—where's that camera?"

He looked at Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy in turn. Blake and

Herries and Dig shook their heads: and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his noble eye, bestowed a stare of disapproval on Harry Manners. Apparently the Fourth-formers knew nothing about the mysterious disappearance of the camera.

"Dashed if I make it out," said Tom, in perplexity. "But if you feel sure that it's still on the island, Manners—"

"I know it is," yapped Manners.

"Well, if so, it hasn't been pinched, and it will turn up, and there's nothing to worry about," said Tom. "Let's get out in the boat, and see about it later."

Manners gave him a concentrated look. Five heads nodded assent to Tom's suggestion: but Manners, judging by his look, seemed to regard it as the very last word in sheer idiocy.

"Well, what about it?" asked Tom. "Time's passing, you know, and it's a lovely morning for the river."

"I suppose," said Manners, thoughtfully, "that you can't help talking like an idiot, being one. But don't talk any more idiocy to me—you make me tired."

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Blake, impatiently. "We didn't come here to stand round talking about cameras, did we?"

"I know what I'm going to do," said Manners. "I'm going to find that camera, and if I can find who hid it, I'm going to push his silly nose through the back of his silly head. You fellows can get off in the boat, if you like—I'm not taking a step anywhere till I've found my camera."

And Manners stalked away to begin the search.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, gazing after him, "Mannahs seems wathah shirty, you fellows. What a feahful fuss to make about a camewah! I mean to say, it isn't as if it had been his hat or his twousahs—it's only a camewah!"

"Who's coming in the boat?" asked Blake.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther exchanged a glance. They both wanted to go in the boat—but Manners was their chum: and the fact that he had punched Monty's nose, and called Tom an idiot, did not alter that. They were perhaps fed up with the camera: but they felt that they had to stick to Manners.

"You fellows get off," said Tom. "We'll stay with Manners."

"After all, we oughtn't all to leave the island at once," said Lowther. "Somebody ought to look after the camp—lots of river pilferers about."

"Yaas, wathah! I nevah thought of that," asserted Arthur Augustus. "That howwid twamp whose eye I blacked might dwop in and cleah off the things. We'll come back early, as I am goin' to cook dinnah. You fellows don't know much about cookin', and I think I had bettah undertake that."

"You're going to undertake the cooking?" asked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Might mean a lot of work for the undertaker," said Lowther.

"I don't mean a little work, deah boy—I am no slackah, I hope—bai Jove what are you fellows laughin' at?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Are you makin' wotten puns again, Lowthah? Pway come on, deah boys, and let's get goin' befoah he thinks of anotheah one."

Blake and Co. proceeded to embark and push off. It was, as Tom said, a lovely morning for the river, and they headed for that very historical spot, Runnymede, in cheerful spirits—perhaps relieved that they would hear nothing more about Manners' camera for a couple of hours or so.

Tom and Monty looked at one another with a sort of comical resignation.

"It's up to us, Monty!" murmured Tom.

"O.K.," said Lowther. "Anyhow we shall get out of listening to Gussy at Runnymede, when he goes all historical. Do you think that one of those Fourth-form fatheads has hidden the beastly thing, Tom?"

"N—n—o!" Tom shook his head. "Manners does rather ask for it—but I don't think so. I just can't make it out. But Manners is going to root all over the shop after it, and it's up to us to help. Come on."

Manners' face was wrathful: but it cleared a little, when his two chums joined him to take part in the search. Having realized at last that Monty was not the culprit, Manners had no doubt that one of the Fourth-form fellows had hidden the camera for a lark: there seemed to be no other explanation. It was only a question of hunting for it until it was unearthed.

They gave the hut the twice-over, as Monty Lowther expressed it: and then rooted through the tent, and the baggage, and even the blankets and the coats. For a long hour they searched up and down and round about, with the happy result of ascertaining, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the missing camera was not in the camp at all.

By that time, Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were wishing, from the bottom of their hearts, that photography had never been invented at all. But if they were getting tired of cameras, Manners was not. Manners had his teeth into it now, and he was going to find that camera, if he rooted under every bush, and examined every blade of grass, on Togg's Eyot.

"He took it out of the camp," said Manners. "That's pretty clear now."

"Who did?" murmured Lowther.

"The idiot who's as big an idiot as you are, who hid the camera." Manners started for the trees. "I'm going to look among the bushes." He did not ask his comrades to follow on. Manners' temper, generally very placable, was now very near boiling point.

"Come on, Monty," murmured Tom. "We're for it!"

"What a life!" sighed Monty.

And they followed on. Another long hour was spent in rooting among trees and bushes, all over the little island. Manners even groped over the trunk of the big oak tree in search of a possible hollow in which the precious article

might have been shoved. Then they went further on, their search taking them right across the eyot to the further side.

Manners seemed tireless. Tom and Monty could not help wondering a little whether life was really worth living for fellows who chummed with an enthusiastic photographer. But they kept manfully on. They wouldn't give in till Manners did—and Manners kept it up, till even he had to realize that if the precious camera was still on the island at all, it was hidden beyond his ken. But Manners was now veering round to the opinion that some idiotic practical joker might have visited the island surreptitiously during the night.

"After all, that may be it," he said when at length they walked back through the trees and thickets to the landing-place and the camp. "It was jolly queer about the tent coming down twice—and the camera's gone. It does begin to look as if there's some sort of a japing idiot like Lowther about."

They reached the camp, and dropped into deck-chairs. Even Manners was tired. Far in the distance, amid innumerable craft on the river, they sighted the boat, with Blake and Co. in it coming back after the visit to Runnymede. As he saw the Fourth-formers, Tom Merry heaved himself out of his deck-chair.

"Better get the cooking-stove going," he remarked.

Lowther nodded—Manners did not even hear. With a deeply-corrugated brow, Harry Manners was trying to think out the mystery of the vanished camera. Tom went across to the hut, and went in. The next moment his voice was heard, in a shout.

"Oh, great pip! Manners!"

Manners did not answer. But Lowther called out:

"What's up, Tom?"

"It's here!" yelled Tom.

"What?"

"The camera!"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

Manners bounded from his deck-chair, and rushed to the hut, Lowther at his heels. They rushed in. Tom Merry, with a face of blank astonishment, pointed to the hook in the wall, where the camera in its case had been left hanging by the strap the night before—and from which it had mysteriously disappeared. There it was again—restored to its place as if by magic!

"Mum—mum—my camera!" stuttered Manners.

"But how—who—why—what—!" Lowther stammered helplessly.

Manners grabbed the strap off the hook. He almost tore open the leather case, to ascertain whether the camera was safe inside. He gasped with relief as he saw that it was!

"Well," said Tom Merry, blankly, "This beats it! There's the camera—"

"Put back while we were across the island!" said Lowther. "But who—what—who's been here—somebody in a boat, it must have been—but who—"

why—? It wasn't one of the Fourth-form men—they're not back yet—but who—!"

There was no answer to that. The disappearance of the camera had been a mystery—its reappearance was a deeper mystery still. That some practical joker was at work, seemed clear—but who he was, and where he was, and why he was, Tom Merry and Co. did not know and could not begin to guess.

CHAPTER XI

GUSSY KNOWS HOW!

“STWATEGY—”
“Eh?”

“Stwategy is the thing!” said Arthur Augustus.

His friends looked at him. Arthur Augustus had a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow, over dinner. Now, as the meal ended, he enlightened the camping-party as to the subject of his deep cogitations.

“Strategy!” repeated Tom Merry.

“Yaas, wathah! Look at it,” said Arthur Augustus. “Some pwactical jokin' wottah is playin' twicks on us. We don't know who he is, or where he spwings from—except that he must come in a boat—bein' on an island heah, you know. Vewy likely it is the same person who had the cheek to camp heah befoah we awwived, and cleahed off just befoah we came—he may be watty at havin' to get off our island, you know.”

“That may be it,” assented Tom. “But what—”

“Well, we've got to catch him,” said Arthur Augustus. “We can't have the wottah waggin' us like this all ththrough the hols. When we get hold of him, we'll jolly well duck him in the wivah, as a warnin'.”

“First catch your hare!” remarked Blake.

“That is what I am comin' to, Blake. That is where stwategy comes in,” explained Arthur Augustus. “I have wathah a stwategic bwain, you know. That extwaordinary twick with Mannahs' camewah shows that he keeps an eye on the island. Pwobably he pwiggged the camewah last night while we were all asleep—he must have come acwoss to the island in the dark—”

“Twice,” said Blake. “The tent came down twice.”

“I wathah think that that was because of the way you fellows ewected it—”
“Blitherer!”

“Weally, Blake—”

“That's pretty plain now,” said Tom. “Now that we know that a japer is at work, we know what happened to the tent. He came across twice to let it down on us. He must have bagged the camera then. But—”

"But he must have come acwoss in the daylight to weplace it," said Arthur Augustus. "He picked a time when four of us were away, and you Shell fellows on the othah side of the eyot. That shows that he is keepin' an eye onthe island".

"You think so?" asked Monty Lowther, thoughtfully.

"I am suah of it, Lowthah."

"Then we ought to be able to get him," said Lowther. "If he keeps an eye on the island, he must keep the rest of him along with it, mustn't he? He can't have a semi-detached eye to leave about."

"Bai Jove! You are wathah dense, old chap! When I say that he keeps an eye on the island, I mean that he keeps an eye on the island, not that he keeps an eye on the island—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, I am speakin' metophowically, you ass. I mean that he keeps a watch on the island."

"Oh! You think that he keeps a watch on the island?"

"Yaas, of course."

"Then shouldn't we hear it ticking?" asked Lowther.

"Wh—a—t?"

"We should be bound to hear it ticking sooner or later, if he keeps a watch on the island," said Monty shaking his head.

"I do not mean that kind of a watch!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I mean a watch, not a watch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I don't believe that you misundahstand me at all, Lowthah—you are just twyin' to be funnay—"

"What a brain!" said Monty, admiringly. "He's guessed that!"

"Wats! But to wesume, aftah Lowthah's idiotic intewwuptions, that wottah, whoevah he is, is keepin' an eye on us," said Arthur Augustus. "He won't show up while we are on our guard. That is where stwategy comes in. You fellows are thinkin' of pullin' up to Datchet and Windsor this afternoon. Well, if we all go, you can bank on it that the pwactical jokah will pay the camp anothah visit while we are gone—and pewwaps bag the tent next time instead of a camewah—"

"He won't bag the camera again," said Manners. "I'm keeping it on me after this."

"He might walk off with the oil-stove, or the kettle, or the blankets," said Herries. "It's plain enough that it's somebody larking, or the camera wouldn't have been put back. Anything might go, next time."

"Yaas, wathah."

"We can't leave the camp unguarded," said Tom. "We shall have to take it in turns to stay in camp when the boat is away."

"I am goin' to stay in camp this aftahnoon, Tom Mewwy, and catch the pwactical jokah."

"And how are you going to catch him?"

"By stwategy!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "I've got it all cut and dried. When you six fellows cleah off in the boat, you can wely upon it that the wottah will see you go. He will know that only one fellow wemains on the island. You can be suah he will be watchin', and I shall let him see me walk away thwough the twees, as you Shell fellows did this mornin'. Then he will think that the coast is cleah, and he will nip acwoss for anotheah twick. What?"

"Very likely," said Dig, staring at the swell of St. Jim's. "But with six of us away, and you on the other side of the island, what's to stop him from doing what he jolly well likes in our camp?"

"I have already wemarked that I am goin' to use stwategy, Dig. I shall disapeah into the twees. But," added Arthur Augustus, with a look of great astuteness, "I shall not go fah! I shall take covah behind a twee and watch for him. Now do you get it?"

"By gum!" said Blake. "Gussy's a jolly old strategist, and no mistake. Ten to one the blighter will come across, if he thinks the camp deserted. Gussy will catch him all right if he does."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Only," added Blake, "he might cut up rusty at being caught, and knock you into a cocked hat, old scout."

"I should wefuse to be knocked into a cocked hat, Blake. But I shall keep the boat-hook with me," said Arthur Augustus. "If the boundah has the cheek to cut up wusty I will pwod him with it. In fact I will pwod him anyway. I will pwod him back to his boat, and pwod him off the island. I think that will pwobably make him fed up with waggin' our camp."

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's a jolly good idea, Gussy," he said. "But perhaps I'd better stay in camp to carry it out, while you go in the boat up to Windsor—"

"Wats!"

"Or I," said Blake.

"Wubbish!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—!" said Herries.

"I wefuse to look there, Hewwies. It is my ideah, and I am goin' to cawwy it out," said Arthur Augustus, firmly. "I know you chaps would do your best," he added, graciously, "but what this mattah wequiahs is a fellow of tact and judgment. Leave it to me, deah boys, and it will be all wight."

"But, old son—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus closed the discussion by going down to the boat to take out the boat-hook. Six fellows smiled at one another.

"After all, Gussy will be all right," said Blake, "whoever that japer is, he's only some bounder looking for larks. He will make just one jump back to his boat, when he finds a fellow after him with a boat-hook."

"And ten to one Gussy will show himself when he's in cover and the boulder won't come across at all," remarked Lowther.

"A hundred to one," agreed Tom, laughing. "We know Gussy—when he's in cover he will stick out about a mile."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That boulder on the bank will know he's being watched for, and won't come," said Dig, with a chuckle. "It's all right."

Arthur Augustus came back with the boat-hook under his arm.

"You fellows gettin' off?" he asked.

"Well, we may as well make a move," said Tom.

"If you like, I will give you some historical information about Windsor Castle befoah you go—"

"Run for your lives!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Co. scampered to the boat. They did not, apparently, desire to be primed with historical information before they paid a visit to Windsor.

"Good-bye, Gussy," called out the boat's crew, as they pushed off.

"Cheewio, deah boys."

The boat rocked out into the Thames. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, having seen it off, proceeded to carry out his strategy. With boat-hook under his arm, he walked into the trees back of the camp, and disappeared. From the boat on the river, six grinning fellows watched him go. He disappeared—but from the thickets, a spotlessly white Panama hat remained in view. That hat, glaring white from the green, was about the most prominent object on Togg's Eyot.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Blake. "That's Gussy in cover!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A merry laugh floated back over the shining Thames as Tom Merry and Co. pulled away for Bell Weir Lock, and Datchet and Windsor beyond. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained, in deep cover, on the island—with his white Panama hat gleaming in the sunshine from the green bushes, happily unaware that it could be seen by every person on every craft going up or down the Thames.

CHAPTER XII

QUITE UNEXPECTED!

"OH, cwikey!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

His heart gave a sudden little jump.

Half an hour had passed since Tom Merry and Co. had pulled away. By that time they were on the other side of the lock. Arthur Augustus, greatly

pleased with his strategy, was on the watch. He grinned cheerily at the thought of the unknown practical joker sneaking across to the island, believing the camp deserted, and suddenly finding himself confronted by a fellow with a boat-hook! It was quite an entertaining thought. And when Arthur Augustus heard a sound of some craft at the landing place, and a rustling as somebody tied up there, he had no doubt that the expected japer had arrived, and was about to step ashore. With great caution he peered through the thickets, revealing not only the Panama hat, but considerable amount of white flannels, to see who it was. And the grin faded completely off his aristocratic face, as he beheld a burly, disreputable figure, and a rugged face adorned by a tremendous black eye!

"Oh, cwikey!"

Arthur Augustus gazed in something like horror at the burly tramp. This was the man who had attacked and sought to rob him in the wood by the tow-path near Staines. Arthur Augustus had almost forgotten his existence by that time. No doubt Pug Judson's memory was more retentive—assisted by the black eye. A black eye is undoubtedly one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive.

The burly tramp came up from his boat—a little skiff which he had found tied up under the tow-path, and borrowed with his accustomed disregard for the rights of property, to carry him across to the island. Pug did not intend to remain long on the island—only long enough to beat up the "toff" who had given him a black eye, and to fill his ragged pockets with anything of value he might find in the schoolboy camp.

There was a grin on Pug's face—an evil grin.

He had had bad luck in his previous encounter with that young toff. But this time luck seemed to be Pug's way.

It had not even occurred to Arthur Augustus that the ruffian might be watching for a chance to get at him when he was away from his friends. But that was exactly what Pug had been doing. Having seen the St. Jim's party on the island he knew where to look for him. That morning he had watched Blake and Co. pulling down to Runnymede. That afternoon, he had watched Tom Merry and Co. pulling up to Windsor. This was his chance. Of the existence of a practical joker who had been ragging the schoolboy campers, or of Arthur Augustus's strategical plans for catching that practical joker. Pug of course knew nothing at all. But he knew all that he wanted to know—that the young toff who had blacked his eye was alone on Togg's Eyot. That was enough for Pug.

He stared round him, grinning, for that young toff, and grinned more widely at the view of a Panama hat among the bushes. Nothing could have suited Pug better. He might have hesitated to carry on, at the landing-place, in view of passing craft. But among the trees and bushes, what he did would be screened from the public view. Gussy in cover, was just asking for it.

"Oh, cwikey!" breathed Arthur Augustus, for the third time: his eye, and his eyeglass, glued on Pug from the thickets.

He knew, of course, that the ruffian could not be the practical joker for whom he had been watching. That practical joker had not, after all, arrived. It was this burly brute who had arrived: and Arthur Augustus knew what to expect if those evil eyes fell on him, and those muscular hands grasped him.

His programme had been to issue forth from cover, boat-hook in hand, and prod the practical joker back to his boat. But he realized very clearly that prodding with a boat-hook was not a resource in dealing with a powerful ruffian. He sagely decided to remain in cover so long as the tramp was on the eyot.

So he was quite dismayed when Pug, after a stare round, started straight in his direction, just as if Pug knew that he was there—as, in fact, he did, having a plain view of a Panama hat, and glimpses of white flannels.

"Oh, cwikey!" said Arthur Augustus, for the fourth time.

He retreated through the bushes. He had a vague idea of dodging Pug round the big oak tree, and keeping him off somehow with the boat-hook. Pug came plunging through rustling thickets with a rush.

"'Old on!" roared Pug. "I gotcher! I gotcher all right."

"Oh, cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Pug was almost upon him, under the great spreading branches of the oak. He turned, lifted the boat-hook, and made a desperate jab at the pursuing ruffian. Pug gave a yell, as the business-end of the boat-hook jabbed at his shoulder. But the next moment he had grasped the boat-hook, and it was wrenched away from D'Arcy's grasp, and pitched aside. He leaped at the schoolboy.

Arthur Augustus made a rapid bound, and side-stepped the rush. He whirled round the massive trunk of the big oak, desperately dodging the clutching hand behind him.

After him flew Pug.

"Oh! cwikey! Help!" yelled Arthur Augustus, in the faint hope that his call might reach someone in a passing boat, and bring aid. "Help!"

"Gotcher!" hissed Pug.

His grasp was on the St. Jim's junior. Arthur Augustus knew only too well that he was powerless in that muscular grasp: but his courage, at least, did not fail. He turned desperately on the clutching ruffian, and hit out with all his strength. There was a spurt of crimson from Pug's pug nose, as his knuckles landed.

A roar of mingled rage and pain came from Pug. A moment more, and the hapless swell of St. Jim's was crumpling in his grasp. Under the thick canopy of foliage of the oak tree, Arthur Augustus struggled in that grasp, and struggled in vain. An evil face leered at him, a sound eye and a black swollen eye glinted at him, and heavy fists beat on him with a rain of blows—for a few seconds! And then—!

What happened next seemed like a dream to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It must have been equally astonishing to Pug Judson. Neither of them knew, or had the remotest idea, that there was any other person on Togg's Eyot. But now it suddenly transpired that there was—for there came a rustling and scrambling and panting in the canopy of foliage overhead, and three figures dropped, one after another, from the tree.

The first was a long-legged figure—the second, a sturdy youth with a freckled face—the third, an extremely plump but very active fellow—and they dropped within a second of one another, and all three leaped like tigers at the ruffian whose heavy fists were beating on the swell of St. Jim's.

A crashing fist, with all George Figgins's weight behind it, caught Pug under the ear, and he let go Arthur Augustus, with a startled yell, and staggered—and as he staggered the three piled on him, and dragged him down.

Arthur Augustus tottered, dizzily, to the trunk of the oak, and leaned on it, breathless, bewildered, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels. And as he leaned there, exhausted, panting for breath, Pug Judson rolled in the grass, struggling and kicking and panting profanity, in the grasp of Figgins and Co. of the New House at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER XIII

A CHANGE IN THE PROGRAMME!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY blinked at the startling scene under his eyes. He was so utterly astonished that he could do nothing but blink.

He had had five or six terrific thumps from Pug Judson, and his noble head was spinning. But rescue had come promptly. Had Pug been allowed to carry on, Arthur Augustus would undoubtedly have been reduced to a state of wreckage. But it was Pug who was getting wrecked now.

Pug was a hefty ruffian: but three sturdy fellows were too many for him—too many and too much. They had him down in a heap, and they were all over him, and for every frantic punch that Pug landed he received four or five, and all of them landed hard. Figgins and Co. did not stand on ceremony with the ruffian. They had to handle him, and they did it with vigour.

For several minutes the struggle went on, under the dizzy eyes of Arthur Augustus, tottering against the oak. Then Pug was down and out. Breathless, spent, he collapsed on his back, and Fatty Wynn sat on his chest to keep him there. He kicked out and Kerr trampled on his legs till he gave it up. He clutched at Fatty and Figgins got hold of his wrists and twisted them. Then Pug surrendered, gurgling feebly for breath.

"Uuurrggh!" gurgled Pug. "'Old on! Leave a bloke alone! I give in—you 'ear me? Strike me pink! I tell you I give in! Urrrrggh!"

"Sit on him, Fatty!" gasped Figgins. He dashed a stream of red from his nose, and picked up the boat-hook. "You give any more trouble, you brute, and you get this—in the neck!"

Pug only gurgled.

"Bai Jove! I wondah whethah I am dweamin' this!" murmured Arthur Augustus gazing with bewildered eyes at Figgins and Co.

It had dawned, slowly, on Gussy's dizzy mind that somebody or other must have been up in the oak tree, and had dropped down to help him. How and why anybody could be up the tree on Togg's Eyot he could not begin to guess. Then, as he discovered that they were St. Jim's juniors—Figgins and Co. of the New House—he really began to wonder whether he might be dreaming.

He had not seen Figgins and Co. or thought about them, since St. Jim's had broken up for the summer holidays. If he had thought about them, he would have supposed that Figgins was home in Somerset, Kerr in Scotland, and David Llewellyn Wynn in Wales. He would as soon have supposed that they were on the top of Mount Everest, as that they were up the oak tree on Togg's Eyot. Yet here they were—very luckily for Gussy!

Figgins dabbed his nose with a handkerchief, and grinned at the amazed swell of St. Jim's.

"Surprised to see us, Gussy?" he asked.

"Is—is—is that weally you, Figgins?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Either me or my ghost," answered Figgins.

"And—and is that Kerr?"

"Either Kerr or his double," grinned Figgins.

"And—and Fatty Wynn—?"

"Fatty—as fat as ever," said Figgins. "Has that brute hurt you much, old chap?"

"Not vevy much, I—I think," gasped Arthur Augustus. "But it would have been wathah wuff on me if you fellows hadn't dwopped in. I am vevy much obliged to you, Figgy."

"Oh, don't mench," said Figgins. "As cock-house of St. Jim's, we're bound to look after you School House duffers."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Our game's up, though," said Kerr, "Now we've shown up—"

"Well, we had to show up in the circs," said Figgins. "Couldn't let that brute knock the stuffing out of the one and only."

"I was getting a bit tired of perching up in that tree," remarked Fatty Wynn. "It was a lark, but—"

"But I don't understand," gasped Arthur Augustus. "I am twemendously glad that you fellows were heah, and came to the wescue: but I can't undahstand how you are heah! How did you get heah, Figgins?"

"Train to Staines," said Figgins. "Hired a boat to land us here, and here we are! We were ahead of your party, old bean—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, a light breaking on his mind. "You were the fellows who camped on the island befoah we awwived—camped in the hut—and cleahed off just befoah we came—"

Figgins chuckled.

"We kept an eye open for you," he said. "When we spotted you coming up the river, you can bet we faded out of the picture."

"Oh, cwumbs! We thought it was some picnicking party—"

"So it was! We've been picnicking here for days," grinned Figgins. "Much obliged to you for telling me about this jolly little island, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! I don't wemembah tellin' you about it, Figgins," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"You told your pals about it, while I was in the cupboard in Study No. 6, fathead—same thing!"

"Oh! I—I see! I nevah thought—"

"I know that!" agreed Figgins. "You never did—in your life, old scout. Don't try to begin now—it will make your head ache."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Urrrrggh!" came a gurgle from Pug. "Will you gerroff my bread-basket, you fat bloke? You're a-suffocating of me."

Figgins glanced round at him, and made a motion with the boat-hook.

"Do you want this in your neck?" he inquired.

"'Ere, you keep that blinking thing away from my neck!" howled Pug, in alarm.

"Then suffocate quietly, or you'll get it, see?"

"Urrrrggh!"

"But have you fellows been on the island all the time?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "We nevah had an ideah that anybody was on the island. Why, we've been all ovah the place, and nevah saw anythin' of you—"

Figgins chuckled.

"We didn't mean you to," he answered. "When we saw you coming, we took to the tree, and we've been there ever since—living in branches like Mr. Darwin's ancestors. You see, we had it all cut and dried, and we had lots of time to fix up a home-from-home forty feet up, on top of the main trunk—we roped a lot of branches together to make it safe, and packed our things there. We were going to camp up that tree all the while you were on the island."

"Coming down every now and then to rag you," grinned Kerr. "Your tent was coming down once or twice every night—"

"Bai Jove! It was you—?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "We heard every word you said, and we jolly well knew none of you would begin to guess that there was anybody on

the island. We'd have kept it up for a week, if we hadn't had to chip in and handle that tramp. That wasn't in the programme."

"You've spoiled the programme, Gussy," said Kerr, laughing.

"And it was you collahed Mannahs' camewah—!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Just that!" chuckled Figgins. "Lowther put it into our heads—he did it first—so we walked it off. But poor old Manners got so excited about it, that we took pity on him, and put it back, while those Shell fatheads were rooting about on the other side of the island."

"But why—?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Why have you been parkin' yourselves on this island and waggin' us, you asses? Did you think it funnay?"

"As funny as cramming tomatoes down the back of a fellow's neck," answered Figgins. "Funnier, in fact."

"Bai Jove! I had forgotten all about that—"

"I hadn't!" grinned Figgins.

"It is wathah lucky for you that I nevah found you," said Arthur Augustus, "I should certainly have given you a feahful thwashin' all wound."

"Lucky for you, you mean?" asked Figgins.

"Howevah, I shall certainly not thwash you now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins, there is nothin' to laugh at in that wemark. Aftah what you fellows have done for me, I should not dwream of thwashin' you."

"If you did dream of it, old man, you'd have a rather painful awakening," chuckled Figgins. "But you're a good little ass, Gussy, and we're fearfully obliged to you. Ain't we obliged to Gussy, you fellows, for not thrashing us all round?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kerr and Wynn.

"Urrrrgh! I tell you that fat bloke is a-suffocating of me!" came a wail from Pug. "'Ow's a bloke to breathe under a bloke as 'eavy as a blinking elephant? Will you get orf my bread-basket, blow you? Oooooogh! Keep that boat-'ook away from my neck, you with the spindleshanks. Look 'ere, you let a bloke go, and I'll go quietly."

"I can't sit on him for ever, Figgy," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"Walk him down to the landing-place," said Figgins. "We'll give him a ducking and let him clear."

"You ain't going to duck me!" yelled Mr. Judson, in great alarm. The prospect of being immersed in water seemed to have a very disturbing effect on him.

"You look as if you want a wash," said Figgins. "You look as if you've wanted one for years. You're going to have one, whether you want it or not."

"Look 'ere—"

"Have him along," said Figgins.

Mr. Judson was allowed to rise to his feet. He was glad at least, to get Fatty Wynn's considerable weight off the region which he described as his "bread-basket". By that time, there was no doubt that Mr. Judson repented him of his visit to the island, which had turned out so very different from his happy anticipations. He would have been glad to go. But Mr. Judson was not going just yet.

Kerr grasped him by one arm, Fatty Wynn by the other. They walked him away. Figgins walked behind with the boat-hook ready, and at the first effort Mr. Judson made to break loose, he jabbed. Pug yelled—and did not make another effort. Arthur Augustus brought up the rear: and they arrived at the landing-place.

Pug cast a longing glance at the skiff tied up at the water's edge.

"You let a bloke go—!" he howled.

"You don't want a wash?" asked Figgins.

"No!" yelled Mr. Judson. "I don't!"

"It will do you good!"

"Look 'ere—"

"We can't spare you any soap," said Figgins. "But I daresay you're not keen on it. But there's lots of water—"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"'Ands off!" yelled Pug. Heedless of even the boat-hook, he began to struggle, on the water's edge. His dislike of water seemed to amount almost to hydrophobia.

But it booted not. Figgins and Co. tipped him over, and in he went.

Splash!

Pug Judson wallowed in water and mud. He came up streaming, and splashed away to the skiff. Spluttering wildly, he scrambled in and tore loose the painter, and went rocking away on the river—a little cleaner than he had been for years and years, but evidently feeling very unhappy about it.

"That's that," said Figgins. "And now I suppose we'd better get our things down from our nest, and pack. Gussy, you've mucked up our programme, and I've a jolly good mind to duck you too, before we go."

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"You're not goin' deah boy," he said.

"We can hail a boat, and get a lift to the bank," said Kerr. "We were going to make a week of it—but I suppose we couldn't let Gussy be chewed up by a tramp—"

"You are goin' to make a week of it all the same, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "You came heah to wag us, which was a feahful cheek—you New House smudges are much too cheekay—"

"Better duck him," said Fatty Wynn.

"But aftah the wippin' way you came to my wescue, I wegard you as fwriends. I have the honah of invitin' you chaps to join our campin' party on this island," said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner. "I twust you will not wefuse. Your company will be a weal pleasuah."

Figgins and Co. looked at one another. They grinned, and then they nodded.

"Well, we wouldn't like to deprive you of a real pleasure, Gussy," said Figgins, "It's a go!"

And a "go" it was!

CHAPTER XIV

PAX!

TOM MERRY gave quite a jump.

He stared.

"Great pip!"

The St. Jim's boat was coming down the river in the golden sunset. The juniors had intended to be back by tea-time: but there had been delay in getting through a crowded lock, and they were rather late. They were rather curious to learn what adventures, if any, Arthur Augustus might have had—little dreaming of what had happened on Togg's Eyot during their absence.

But whatever they might have expected, they certainly did not expect to see what met their eyes, as they came in sight of the landing-place.

Tom Merry, in fact, could scarcely believe his eyes. He stared blankly at three figures sitting at their ease in deck-chairs.

"What—?" began Blake. He was rowing: but he looked round to see what had so startled Tom. "Great Scott! Figgins!"

"Figgins and Co.!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"New House cads!" exclaimed Herries.

"Oh, my hat!" said Dig. "That New House crowd on Gussy's island—"
Manners gave almost a yell.

"They had it!"

"Eh! They had what?" asked Tom.

"My camera. It was that gang—they lifted the camera, and put it back again—pulling my leg, see? Why, they'd have had it again, very likely, if I hadn't taken it with me this afternoon." howled Manners.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom. "It was that gang—not some practical joking ass we've never seen—that gang—it's all clear now."

"By gum!" said Blake.

"But what have they done with Gussy?" exclaimed Dig. "We left Gussy there—never dreaming that those New House rotters were about!"

The boat floated on the current, the oarsmen no longer pulling. All the boat's crew were staring at the island.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not to be seen. As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus had gone into the hut, to unpack a further supply of cold cream to rub on the spots where Pug Judson's fists had landed. Tom Merry and Co. naturally, had no idea of that. All they knew was that Gussy was not visible, and that three New House juniors were!

Figgins and Co. sitting in deck-chairs, were looking down the river towards Staines. So they did not see the boat floating down from the direction of Windsor.

They seemed quite at their ease on Gussy's island. Apparently they had had tea. Fatty Wynn was not quite finished yet—he was disposing, happily, of a chunk of cake. The School House juniors in the boat gave them almost wolfish looks.

All that had mystified them since they had camped on Togg's Eyot was explained, as soon as they saw Figgins and Co. They did not guess that the New House Co. had been on the eyot all the time, hidden in the massive foliage of the big oak. But they knew now why the tent had collapsed twice in the night, and how and why Manners' precious camera had so mysteriously disappeared and reappeared. No doubt Figgins and Co. had planned a good deal more to come!

"By gum!" repeated Blake, with a deep breath. "That New House gang, all the time. And they've had the cheek to sit down to tea on our island—"

"And they've parked Gussy somewhere—"

"And they don't seem to expect us back yet, or they wouldn't be sitting there as if the place belonged to them!" said Lowther.

"And we never guessed!" said Tom. "Why, they might have gone on ragging us for a week, and we should never have known—"

"They won't go on now," said Blake, grimly. "We've got 'em! By gum, we'll make an example of them."

"We'll scrag them—"

"And duck them—!"

"We'll snatch them bald-headed."

"They haven't seen us yet," said Tom. "Keep quiet—don't give the alarm! We don't want to give them a chance to dodge off in their boat—can't see where they've left it, but it must be somewhere about—we'll take them by surprise, and collar them—"

"And give them the time of their lives," said Blake.

"What-ho!"

The boat crept in close by the island, Tom Merry punting with an oar. Still closer it came along to the landing-place, and Figgins and Co. never looked round. It was rather curious that the New House trio should be so much off their guard, while they were in occupation of the enemy's territory, so to speak: but there it was—they evidently had not the slightest suspicion of danger. The School House juniors were grinning now, as the boat crept closer and closer to the unwary enemy.

It was not till they were within a dozen yards of the landing-place, that Figgins became aware of them. Then Figgy's eyes fell on the boat—and he spoke to Kerr and Wynn, who both glanced round.

"They've seen us—"

"Quick!"

The St. Jim's boat did the last dozen yards in about a split second, at a rush. The bows bumped on the grassy shore and Tom Merry and Co. leaped out. Dig lingered a moment to tie up—while Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther and Blake and Herries rushed on the enemy.

Figgins and Co. jumped out of the deck-chairs.

"I say—!" began Figgins.



The three piled on him.

He had no time for more. Five School House juniors came on with a terrific rush, and Figgins and Co. were fairly bowled over. They staggered over the deck-chairs, which collapsed under the shock: and there were frantic yells on Togg's Eyot as the three New House juniors went sprawling, mixed up with deck-chairs, in the grass, with Tom Merry and Co. swarming over them.

"I say—!" shrieked Figgins.

"Collar them!"

"Scrag them!"

"Look out—!" yelled Kerr.

"Got you!"

"New House swobs!"

"Bag them!"

"I say, leggo!" raved Fatty Wynn, struggling wildly. "You silly School House fatheads, we're—ow! oh! Gerroff my head, will you? Ooogh."

"Oh, crumbs! Look here—!" roared Figgins. "I was going to say—yaroooooop! Oh, jiminy! You mad asses—wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've got 'em!"

"Duck them!"

Dig was joining in the fray now, and the School House were two to one. Figgins and Co. simply hadn't a chance! They rolled, and roared, and struggled, and yelled, waking many echoes along the Thames, and drawing startled stares from passing craft.

That terrific uproar drew Arthur Augustus out of the hut. He emerged with a pot of cold cream in his hand, and an astonished expression on his face. He gazed blankly at the hectic scene.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Duck them!" roared Blake.

"Shove them in!"

"In you go, you New House bounders."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins and Co. struggled frantically. But they rolled and bumped and tumbled towards the water's edge, in spite of their strenuous resistance: and into the silvery Thames they would inevitably have gone, had there not been an interruption.

"Hold on, you fellows!" Arthur Augustus came running from the hut. "Whatevah are you up to? It is fwightful bad mannahts to wag our guests! Pway welease them at once."

Tom Merry and Co. stared round at him.

"Oh! Here's Gussy!" exclaimed Blake.

"Lend a hand, Gussy," yelled Herries. "We're going to duck these New House swobs."

"Chuck them in!"

"Stop!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. He rushed into the mêlée and grabbed hold of Figgins, who was just going in, and dragged him back. "Have you fellows gone off your wockahs? Welease our fwiends at once! Figgins and Kerr and Wynn are our guests in this camp, you uttah asses."

"What?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Mad?" hooted Blake.

"Go to sleep again and dream again, Gussy," snorted Herries. "Chuck these New House smudges into the water, you men."

"Oh, crumbs!" spluttered Figgins. "Will you let a fellow speak, you dangerous maniacs? Let a fellow get a word out—"

"It's a pax!" yelled Kerr.

"Pax be blowed!" hooted Blake. "You're going in—"

"You uttah asses, stop!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I tell you we are all fwiends now—they saved me fwom bein' feahfully hammered by that howwid twamp—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"We've made it pax, and they are our guests on this island! Pway welease them at once!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Figgins and Co. were released at last. They sat and spluttered for breath, on the very edge of the water. They were quite breathless and extremely dishevelled, but luckily Arthur Augustus's intervention had saved them from going headlong into the Thames. Tom Merry and Co. stared blankly at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Look here, Gussy, what do you mean, if you mean anything?" demanded Tom.

"Sing it over again to us!" said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus proceeded to explain—to an accompaniment of gasps, and gurgles, and guggles, from the New House juniors. Tom Merry and Co. listened in astonishment.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom. "You uttah ass—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Why couldn't you be in sight when we came back?" roared Tom. "If you'd been with them, we shouldn't have collared them like that—"

"I was lookin' for some cold cwem—"

"Isn't it Gussy all over?" sighed Blake. "These chaps save him from being hammered to a jelly, and he goes out of sight when we're coming back, specially to make us believe that they'd been here ragging him—"

"Bai Jove! I did not mean anythin' of the kind, Blake! I wepeat that I was lookin' for some cold cwem—"

"Let's shove his cold cream down his back," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Well, we seem to have made a bit of a mistake." Tom Merry looked at the gasping, gurgling, dishevelled three. "Sorry, you men! We're tremendously obliged to you for saving our prize idiot—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"He's no use," said Blake, "but we keep him about as an ornament. Much obliged, Figgins."

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

"It's pax!" said Tom. "If Gussy had had the sense of a bunny rabbit, he would have been on the spot to warn us. But you know Gussy."

"Look heah—"

Figgins found his voice.

"You silly, fatheaded, blithering, idiotic, potty School House swobs—" he began.

"You blithering, benighted dunderheads—!" gasped Kerr.

"You chuckleheaded chumps—!" gurgled Fatty Wynn.

They paused for breath.

"Carry on," said Tom, encouragingly. "If it's any comfort to blow off steam, old scouts, go ahead, and don't mind us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins grinned, a breathless grin.

"O.K.," he said, "It's pax!"

And "pax" it was! Alarums and excursions were over—at least until the new term began at St. Jim's—School House and New House buried the hatchet, and in happy amity enjoyed the summer days on Gussy's Island.

THE END