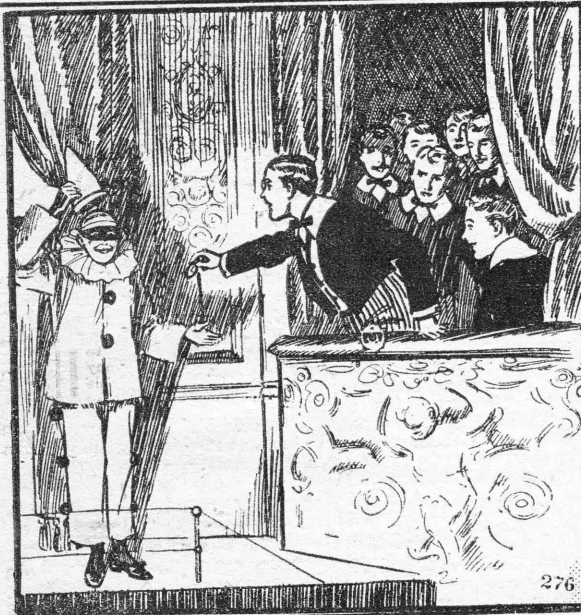


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D'Arcy obligingly handed down his gold ticker. "Ladies and Gentlemen," said the conjurer, "I shall now proceed to reduce this watch to fragments!" (See chapter 3.)

CHAPTER 1.  
D'Arcy's Box.

"TOM MEWWY, deah boy—"  
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, looked into Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and a clear, sharp winter's afternoon. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were in their study. They were holding an important discussion—what to do with the half-holiday—when the swell of St. Jim's looked in through his famous eyeglass.

"Tom Mewwy—"  
"You see, the ground's no good for footer," Tom Merry remarked. "And I don't know about getting up a row with the New House kids. I believe Figgins & Co. are going off somewhere this afternoon."

"Tom Mewwy—"  
"Might go along to Study No. 6 and rag Blake and those young bounders," said Monty Lowther, in a thoughtful tone.

"Weally, Lowthah—"  
"Yes; might do that," agreed Manners. "Let's go along and bust Gussy's best silk topper, and shove some soot on his latest fancy waistcoat—"

"Weally, Mannahs—"  
The Terrible Three did not seem to see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the open doorway. They continued their discussion just as if he had not been there.

"That's a good idea!" said Tom Merry heartily. "I hear that Gussy has been wasting the study funds lately on a new topper and a set of silk neckties, and it would only be a fair thing to Blake and Herries and Dig, to give Gussy a lesson on the subject. I—"

# THE MASKED ENTERTAINERS!

A Splendid, New, Long Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Admirers of Tom Merry should buy our new Companion Paper THE PENNY POPULAR, just out, and read the splendid tale dealing with the famous junior's early schooldays.—  
EDITOR.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"  
"Good—we'll get along!" said Lowther. "Leave the silk toppers to me. I'll—"

"You uttah asses!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's. Then the Terrible Three turned round towards him, with expressions of astonishment upon their faces.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Is that you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, you ass!"  
"Glad to see you! We were just going to pay you a visit!" said Tom Merry blandly.

The swell of St. Jim's screwed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and regarded the Shell fellow with elaborate disdain.

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy. I wegard Lowthah as anothah ass, and Mannahs as an ass, too! You are three uttah asses. Howevah, I did not come here to tell you that. I came here to tell you I've got a box—"

"A box!" repeated the Terrible Three, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah!"  
"Well, we've all got boxes, for that matter," said Tom Merry. "Nothing new or surprising in having a box, is there?"

"You ass—"  
"Do you mean your clothes box, or a box of matches?"  
"Neithah, you duffah—"

"A box on the ear?" suggested Manners. "If you haven't one, I could give you one, and I would with pleasure—"

"Ear, 'ear!" said Monty Lowther.

"I wepeat that I have a box," shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, for a moment losing the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. "I am takin' Blake and Hewwies and Dig, and I came to offah to take you with me in the box."

"My hat! What are you going to do in a box?"  
"You'll be crowded in a box, I should think," said Monty Lowther. "And you haven't told us what kind of a box it is. Is it a musical box?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"  
 "Or a colour-box?"  
 "It is a box at Wayland Theatre, you silly asses!"  
 "Oh, now you're talking!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Why couldn't you say that at first?"  
 "Because you were intewwuptin' me with widiculous wemarks, you asses. I have taken a box at Wayland Theatre for the matinee this aftahnoon," said Arthur Augustus, "and there is woom for all of us, if you like to come."  
 "Talk about corn in Egypt in the lean years!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "We were just wondering what to do with the afternoon, and could think of nothing better than busting your silk hats—"  
 "Weally, you ass—"  
 "We'll come!" said Manners affectionately. "Gussy, old man, you always do the right thing at the right time."  
 "Yaas, that's what comes of bein' a fellow of tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "I shall be vewy pleased if you will come. I've taken the biggest box at the theatre, and I think there will be woom for the lot of us. It's about time we started. There's a wippin' performance—singin' and conjurin' and things—and Cutts of the Fifth says it's wippin'. He's seen it, and he's goin' again to-day for the last performance. They go away this evenin', I undahstand!"

"Then it's the last chance," said Tom Merry. "Pull up your socks, you fellows."

"Ready!" said Lowther.

"Quite!" said Manners.

"Then lead on, Maoduff!" said Tom Merry.

"Follow me, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus turned to lead the way down the passage. The Terrible Three followed him. Arthur Augustus was walking with his usual elegant gait, which was always distinguished, and the chums of the Shell imitated that elegant gait as they followed him down the passage. Fellows looked out of their studies, and roared with laughter as they caught sight of the procession. D'Arcy looked surprised; he did not see what there was to laugh at—not being blessed with vision in the back of his head.

"Weally, Goah!" he exclaimed, as Gore of the Shell looked out and cackled. "I should be glad to know what is the joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gore.

"Weally, you fathead—"

"Look behind you!" chuckled Gore.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked behind him. The Terrible Three stopped instantly, with expressions upon their faces of owl-like seriousness. They regarded D'Arcy with solemn inquiry.

"What are you stopping for?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothin'. Come on!"

They marched on again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is it—a belated Fifth-of-November procesh?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell, as he met them in the passage.

"Weally, Noble—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A sudden suspicion dawned upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he swung round abruptly, and glared at the Terrible Three.

They were fairly caught in the act. All three of them were walking with an exaggerated strut, in ludicrous imitation of D'Arcy's elegant bearing.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle tighter into his eye.

"You—you uttah asses!" he exclaimed.

The Terrible Three turned pink.

"What are you doin', you feahful chumps?"

"Only—only exercising the arms and—legs!" said Tom Merry. "Lead on! We're trying to learn the Piccadilly crawl!"

"I werged you as an uttah ass—"

"Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," suggested Monty Lowther. "Keep on, Gussy; I was just getting into my stride."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have a gweat mind," said D'Arcy, glowering. "to wefuse to take you out now, you impertinent young wascals."

The Terrible Three grinned. All three of them were older than D'Arcy of the Fourth; but D'Arcy always had a somewhat fatherly way with him.

"So he's taking you out?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes; and we're taking him in—one good turn deserves another," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a shout from below.

"How long are you going to be, Gussy? We sha'n't wait much longer." It was the voice of Jack Blake of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove! We shall have to hawwy, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "Pway don't play the giddy goat—come on, or we shall be late."

"Hear, hear! Hurry up, you chaps!"

And the Terrible Three seized hold of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and rushed him along the passage at top speed. The swell of St. Jim's shouted expostulations.

"Leggo, you uttah asses! You're wumplin' up my necktie! Yawwoh!"

"That's right, bring him along," said Blake, as the Terrible Three came dashing down the stairs with their helpless prisoner. "The way Gussy keeps us waiting is simply shocking. Help him along!"

"Ow! I wefuse to be helped! Yow! Wow!"

"Here you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they arrived in the lower passage. "Come on! Don't trouble to thank us, Gussy; you can do that later!"

"You—you—you fwightful ass—"

"Come on!"

"You dangewous lunatic—"

"This way!"

"You feahful chump—"

"Look here, Gussy, if you're going to run through the whole giddy dictionary, we sha'n't wait for you!" said Digby in a tone of patient remonstrance.

But these fwightful asses have wumpled my collah, and—

"Are you coming?" roared Blake. "My hat! If you don't come, we shall carry you!"

"I wefuse to be cawwied—"

"I give you two seconds," said Blake, taking out his watch. "If he doesn't start in two seconds, you chaps, take hold of his arms and legs and ears and—"

D'Arcy started in one second.

## CHAPTER 2.

### D'Arcy's Little Party.

QUITE A crowd of St. Jim's fellows were turning out to go to the matinee at the Wayland Theatre Royal.

A party of the Fifth Form, headed by Lefevre and Cutts, of the Fifth, and elaborately ignoring the juniors, were going out by themselves.

D'Arcy minor, of the Third, and a party of fags were just starting. Over by the New House, Figgins and Kerr and Wynn and Redfern, of the Fourth, could be seen, with their coats and hats on.

The fact that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had engaged a box at the local theatre seemed to have become known, for Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows came round him as he emerged from the School House, and their sweet manners and polite smiles showed that they knew about the box.

"Going to the entertainment, Gussy?" asked Levison, of the Fourth.

"Yaas!" said D'Arcy shortly. He did not like Levison.

"Got a box, I hear?"

"Yaas."

"Room for one more?"

"Sowwy; no!"

Levison sniffed.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" he said. "It's a rotten entertainment, anyway—rotten cohjuring, and silly entertainers with masked chivvies. Br-r-r-r!"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Oh, go and chop chips!" said Levison.

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs, and then remembered in time that if he committed assault and battery upon the cad of the Fourth, he would be dishevelled for his little excursion. Levison knew that, or he would have made his remarks at a safer distance.

"I will thwash you anothah time, Levison!" said D'Arcy sulphurously.

"Oh, you couldn't thrash a white mouse!" said Levison.

"You howwid cad—"

"Tailor's dummy!" said Levison cheerfully.

"Bai Jove! I—I—"

"Rats!" said Levison. "I—Wow, wow! Yow!"

Jack Blake inserted his elbow in Levison's ribs with considerable force, and Levison sat down.

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(See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)

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Cutts & Co. made a sudden rush. Cutts was pretty certain that the spoofers belonged to St. Jim's, and he meant to know for certain. "Take your masks off!" he roared. "Impossible!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Our noble connections amongst the highest aristocracy of the land would be shocked if they knew that we were doing a variety turn. My uncle, the aged duke, would have a fit!" "And my father, the marquis, would never get over it!" said Monty Lowther. (See Chap 12.)

"Thank you, vevy much, Blake, deah boy!" said D'Arcy graciously. "Come on!"

The party walked towards the gates. Bishop, of the Fourth, and Kangaroo, of the Shell, and Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane, and several other fellows, hung longingly round D'Arcy.

"Standing room only in the box, I suppose, Gussy?" said Kangaroo.

"I'm afraid there isn't even that, Kangy," said D'Arcy. "We're seven already, and the box is only weally for four."

"Well, if seven can get into a box for four, eight can get in!" said Kangaroo argumentatively. "What do you fellows think?"

"I leave it to the othahs," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, come on, Kangy!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"We'll manage somehow!"

"Good egg!"

"If eight can get in, nine can get in! One more can't make much difference," said Bernard Glyn.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"If nine can get in," said Reilly, of the Fourth, "ten can

get in! One more doesn't make any difference, just as Glyn says, intirely."

"Weally, Weilly—"

"If ten can get in, eleven can get in!" said Kerruish, the Maux junior. "I'll come with you with pleasure, Gussy!"

"Weally, Kewwuish—"

"If eleven can get in," said Gore, "twelve can get in—"

"Thirteen, you mean!" said Bishop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, the whole coll. can't get in, you know!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, we can squeeze in!" said Bishop. "I don't mind a crowd—in fact, I rather like it!"

"Same here!" said Reilly. "Faith, it will be all right!"

"Quite a pleasure!" said Bernard Glyn.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Tom Merry. "It isn't a sardine box, you know, and we're not sardines!"

"Wathah not! You see—"

"Faith, and I've got an idea!" exclaimed Reilly enthusiastically, as if struck by a sudden and brilliant

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NEXT  
WEDNESDAY.

"AT GRIPS WITH THE GRAMMARIANS!"

inspiration. "We'll all go with Gussy, and if there's not room in the box, Gussy shall take stalls for us!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bishop. "That's a really ripping idea!"

"Weally, Bish—"

"Couldn't be improved upon!" said Clifton Dane. "We're much obliged to you for pressing us to come in this way, D'Arcy!"

"But I weally haven't pussed—"

"That's all right; we'll take the will for the deed!" said Kerruish. "Don't apologise about the accommodation, Gussy; we shall manage somehow!"

"Yes, rather!"

"But I wasn't going to—"

"Better get off, or we shall be late," said Gore. "We don't want to miss any of the show, when D'Arcy's so kind as to take us all free of charge!"

"Hear, hear!"

"But, weally—"

"Come on!" roared Blake.

And the party, which grew in size like a snowball rolling downhill, marched out of the school gates. Arthur Augustus glanced over his company through his monocle. He had intended to take six fellows, and the party already numbered sixteen or seventeen.

Figgins & Co., of the New House, joined them at the gates. The School House fellows gave the New House party a warlike look, but Figgins waved his hand in a friendly way, in sign of amity.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "No House rows now. This is a special occasion, and rags are barred when we're going to share a box with Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's jolly kind of you to take us with you, Gussy!" said Kerr amiably. "Some fellows would only take chaps from their own House. Nothing of that sort about Gussy."

"Not at all!" said Fatty Wynn heartily.

"Oh, Gussy's the right sort!" said Redfern. "You can always depend on Gussy to do the proper thing!"

"Hear, hear!"

"But, weally, deah boys—"

"Not a word!" said Figgins generously. "We won't allow you to disclaim your proper credit, Gussy! It's kind of you to take us, and I insist upon saying so!"

"But—"

"Really kind!" said Lawrence. "We wouldn't miss the show for anything, chiefly because Gussy is so kind!"

"He does those things in such a nice way, too!" remarked Owen. "It's always a pleasure to go anywhere with Gussy!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"Not at all, Gussy! It's kind of you, and we all say the same! Come on, or we shall be late. If there's a crowd in the box, we don't mind stalls," said Redfern; "in fact, these School House bouncers could go in the gallery!"

"Weally, Weddy—"

Blake seized the swell of St. Jim's by the arm, and rushed him on.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "We shall have all the Fourth and the Shell, and half the Third along with us soon!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas!"

The party numbered well over twenty by this time. They marched down the road in great spirits, one or two of the juniors broke into song. Near the stile, where the foot-path through the wood began, they overtook Cutts and his party of Fifth-Formers. The seniors glanced with great disdain at the junior crowd. The juniors hailed them with great friendliness.

"Hallo, Cutts, old chap!" said Monty Lowther. "Going to the show?"

"I am going, but I'm not going with a crowd of fags!" he said. "Keep your distance!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes; sheer off, you kids!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—sheer off! We're not going to take children to the show!"

"This isn't a juvenile party for the Zoo, you know!" said Cutts sarcastically.

The juniors glared wrathfully at the Fifth-Formers. There were twenty-two or twenty-three of them, and only five or six of the Fifth. It really was not a safe moment for Cutts & Co. to swank, but they realised it too late. Tom Merry called a halt.

"Gentlemen—" he began.

"Oh, come on!" said Blake! "The matinee begins at three—"

"Hold a minute! This is important! Gentlemen, it is up to us to see that any St. Jim's fellow who goes to the

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theatre behaves himself. We don't want to give the general public an impression that we have rowdies at our coll. I am not satisfied with those Fifth-Form chaps."

"Hear, hear!"

"Cutts has his tie sideways, and Lefevre has forgotten to brush his hat. Jones's bags bag at the knees, and Gilmore hasn't washed his face."

"Horrid!"

"Disgraceful!"

The Fifth-Formers frowned angrily. They would have passed on majestically, but the crowd of juniors had halted between them and the stile, and the way was barred.

"Clear out of the way!" exclaimed Cutts sharply.

"Yes; that's what I say—clear out!" said Lefevre.

Tom Merry paid no heed.

"The important question before the meeting, gentlemen, is—"

"Get out of the way!"

"Is whether we can allow Fifth-Form chaps to bring discredit on the school in this way. My opinion is—certainly not."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite impossible!"

"Quite outside!"

"Therefore—" said Tom Merry.

"Let us pass, or we'll lick you, you young asses!" yelled Cutts.

"Therefore—"

"Will you clear aside?"

"Therefore, I suggest bumping these swanking bouncers, and leaving them here," said Tom Merry.

"Hurrah!"

"Here, keep off!" roared Lefevre. "That's what I—  
Yow-ow-ow!"

Bump—bump—bump!

"Yah!"

"Oh!"

"Gro-oh!"

"Yo-o-op!"

The rush of the juniors simply overwhelmed the little party of the Fifth. They went down in the muddy lane, with the juniors sprawling over them. Recent rain had left the lane in a far from desirable condition for rolling in. The Fifth-Formers sprawled in mud and slush, and the juniors rolled them there; and then, yelling with laughter, crowded over the stile and pursued their way to Wayland.

Cutts & Co. sat up. They looked at one another, and said things. They were muddy from head to foot, and in a towering rage. Tom Merry & Co., quite contented and cheerful, marched on, and arrived at Wayland.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Masked Trio.

THE Theatre Royal, Wayland, was not crowded. It seldom was, especially for matinees. Arthur Augustus

D'Arcy had no difficulty in finding seats for his flock. True, there was no room for a quarter of them in the box; but the stalls in the theatre were not high-priced, and not overcrowded. Arthur Augustus had received a fiver from his "governor" that morning, hence the box. The swell of St. Jim's genially planked down the fiver, and his numerous followers were accommodated with seats in various parts of the house. In the box, Arthur Augustus and Blake and Digby and Herries and the Terrible Three found room—at all events, they managed to get in. The performance was about to begin.

"Bai Jove, we're wathah crowded!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "Pewwaps I had better stand—"

Tom Merry laughed, and pushed the swell of St. Jim's back into his chair.

"That's all right!" he said. "We can stand at the back as we're the tallest."

"What rot!" said Blake warmly. "If it comes to that I'd better stand."

"My dear chap, I'm a good inch to the good—"

"Rats! I could give you half an inch!"

"Bosh!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here! I'm going to stand, as I'm the tallest chap here!" said Blake excitedly, and he jumped to his feet.

"All serene," said Tom Merry, as he dropped into the vacant chair. "I don't mind. Thank you very much!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"H'm!" said Blake, on reflection. "Come to think of it, perhaps you have the start of me a fraction."

"Not at all," said Tom Merry blandly. "I'll sit down, thanks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There goes the curtain, deah boys!" said D'Arcy.

"Order, there!" said Lowther. "Don't stand on my feet, Blake! You're tall enough to see without that."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Pway don't wag, deah boys. The music's beginnin'."

All attention was given to the stage now. It was not a theatrical performance that was "on" at Wayland Theatre Royal that afternoon. Three entertainers formed all the troupe, and they gave a show of conjuring, acrobatic tricks, and singing and dancing. They were dressed as pierrots, and wore black masks upon their faces. They were billed in Wayland as the "Masked Entertainers," and that dodge, so common on the sea-sands in the summer, was new to the unsophisticated folk of Wayland Town. There was a rumour that the three entertainers were members of the highest aristocracy, who, for obvious reasons, concealed their identity when they were giving public performances. The number of members of the aristocracy who give pierrot performances, with their faces masked to conceal their identity, at the seaside resorts, is astonishing—in fact, quite outnumbering all known members of the peerage. But in a little country town like Wayland, the mystification was novel, and it had attracted quite an unusual number of visitors to the local theatre.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, who was not of a suspicious nature. "I wondah who those chaps are, you know? There's a wumah that they belong to the peewage, you know."

"Might have relations among them," suggested Lowther. "Have you any near connections in a stony state, with a gift for giving a song and dance, Gussy?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"The fat one is a duke, I believe," said Lowther solemnly.

"Since Lloyd George started his little games, you know, the dukes have been very hard hit. A hard-up duke might do worse than give a variety turn while the duchess takes in washing—"

"You uttah ass—"

"And that skinny chap—the one with the violin—resembles Gussy—doesn't he?" said, Manners thoughtfully. "Might be a cousin, or something."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Don't talk, Gussy! They're going to sing!"

"I wasn't talkin', you ass; I was—"

"Order!"

The crowded box relapsed into silence. The performance had started. The three masked pierrots sang a comic song to start with, and then proceeded to give a dance, and then the fat member of the party, whom Lowther surmised might be a duke, did conjuring tricks. The good folk of Wayland watched him with wide eyes as he made endless strings of coloured ribbon come out of his ears, and produced fire from his mouth, and rabbits from his sleeves. Then he advanced to the footlights, and asked a member of the audience to oblige him with the loan of a watch.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy obligingly handed down his famous gold ticker.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the conjurer, "I shall now proceed to reduce this watch to fragments under your eyes—"

"Bai Jove!"

"You will see me smash it to pieces—"

Arthur Augustus jumped up.

"That you jolly well won't, you boundah!" he shouted.

"I'm not goin' to have my watch smashed up, you ass!"

The audience laughed, and the masked conjurer smiled.

"I shall then restore the watch to its former state," he said.

"Wats! You can't do it!"

"Sit down, Gussy!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"It will be all right," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"But he says he's going to smash it!"

"It's only a trick."

Arthur Augustus sat down rather uneasily. The conjurer placed the watch—or, seemed to place it—in a metal jar, and crashed a stick into it, and there was the sound of a smash. Arthur Augustus gave a sort of yelp.

"Bai Jove! My watch!"

"Quiet!"

"But my watch—"

Smash—smash—smash! The fat conjurer was evidently in deadly earnest. The watch was not likely to go when he had finished with it. He brought the jar to the footlights, and showed the broken fragments to the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you can all see that the watch is smashed—"

"You awful wottah! My watch—"

"Any lady or gentleman is at liberty to take it in his hand and examine it."

Two or three ladies and gentlemen did so. There was no doubt that the watch was a hopeless wreck, whether it was D'Arcy's watch or not. The audience being satisfied, the smashed watch was tossed back into the jar. The conjurer covered it with a cloth.

"My only hat!" murmured Figgins, of the Fourth, who was one of the gentlemen who had examined the watch. "If that's really Gussy's watch—"

"But it isn't!" grinned Kerr. "They change 'em when they're performing this trick. It's as old as the giddy hills!"

"But it was a gold watch—" said Fatty Wynn.

"Rolled gold!" grinned Kerr. "It's some rubbish they get cheap for this trick, you duffers! Gussy's watch is all right."

"Gussy doesn't look as if he thinks so," chuckled Redfern, with a glance up at the face of the swell of St. Jim's in the box above.

"Ha, ha! No!"

The swell of St. Jim's was watching the conjurer with great anxiety. He had fully resolved that if his watch was damaged, he would say some very plain things to the masked gentleman. The conjurer made some mysterious passes over the jar, and then inserted his hand in it. He held up the jar; it was empty.

"Bai Jove! Where's my watch?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Dear me!" said the conjurer. "The watch has vanished!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"It will be found in the pocket of a member of the audience," said the conjurer.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, that's rather thick!" grinned Figgins. "He could change one watch for another; but I'll bet he couldn't get it into the pocket of a chap sitting about here!"

"Sounds very steep!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Gentlemen," said the conjurer, "will you kindly feel in your pockets, and the gentleman who has this young gentleman's watch will kindly produce it!"

"Rot!" said Figgins.

The conjurer looked at him.

"You are not feeling in your pocket, sir," he said.

"Me!" said Figgins. "I—I mean, I!"

"Certainly!"

"I haven't got it!"

"Feel in your pocket, please!"

"But I—"

"Pray oblige me!"

Figgins felt in his pocket, and, with a look of wonder, drew out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's famous gold ticker. He gazed at it with an expression of almost idiotic bewilderment.

"M-m-my hat! There it is!"

"Thank you!" said the conjurer blandly.

And he took the watch, and handed it back to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a bow.

D'Arcy gave his watch an anxious glance; it was quite undamaged. Then the face of the swell of St. Jim's was wreathed in smiles.

"Bai Jove! That's a jolly clevah twick!" he exclaimed.

"Bravo!" shouted all the juniors.

Figgins looked astounded.

"Well, I'm blessed if I know how he did that!" he exclaimed.

"If you saw him do it, there wouldn't be much conjuring in it!" grinned Kerr. "He must have slipped it into your pocket when you were looking at the smashed watch."

"I didn't see him."

"That was his business."

"Well, it was jolly clever!" said Figgins. "Bravo!"

"Jollay clevah, and no mistake!" D'Arcy remarked. "I shall twy that twick myself at St. Jim's. One of you fellows can lend me a watch—"

"Why not use your own?" demanded Blake.

"Well, I mightn't succeed with the twick, and then it would be wuined, you know!" said D'Arcy cautiously.

Blake's heated reply was drowned by a glare from the orchestra as the Masked Trio proceeded to sing and dance. The entertainment wore on, and it was three-parts over when Cutts & Co., of the Fifth, came in, and took back seats. Cutts & Co. had had to return to St. Jim's to clean up before coming to the theatre, and they were very late indeed. They gave the juniors ferocious glances, to which Tom Merry & Co. replied with the sweetest of smiles.

"Cutts looks angwy about somethin'," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "The cheek of these Fifth Form chaps is weally astoundin'! Of course, they can't expect us to stand it. I have been thinkin' for a long time that it's time we wallied-wound and wagged the Fifth, and bwought them to their senses, you know!"

# ANSWERS

—THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 262.  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.  
Order in Advance.

NEXT  
WEDNESDAY:

"AT CRIPS WITH THE GRAMMARIANS!"

"They haven't got any," said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Besides, how are you going to wag a Fifth-Former? He isn't a giddy flag!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"  
"Would you take him by his head or his heels to wag him?" asked Lowther.

"You uttah duffah! When I say wag, I mean wag, not wag!"

"Well, that's lucid, anyway. There goes the last turn!"

And the entertainment of the Masked Trio being over at last, Tom Merry & Co. crowded out of the theatre, well satisfied with the show, and walked home to St. Jim's. On the way home D'Arcy made several requests for the loan of a watch, to try a trick with—requests that were refused unanimously.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Cutts Pays a Debt with Interest.

TOM MERRY stood at the table, in his study in the Shell passage, and cut up a loaf into big rounds, and Monty Lowther was opening a new jar of jam. There were sardines on the table, and a big jelly. The Terrible Three had come home hungry after the visit to the theatre, and they were "doing themselves" unusually well. Tom Merry had found, on his return, a postal-order awaiting him from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess, and the postal-order had promptly changed hands at Dame Taggles's little shop in the corner of the quadrangle.

"Nuff to go round!" said Monty Lowther. "Might ask somebody in. Those chaps in No. 6 are having a feed with what's left of Gussy's liver. But Kangaroo—"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Call him in!"  
Monty Lowther moved towards the door. It opened before he reached it, and Cutts, of the Fifth, looked in. Cutts had a somewhat unpleasant smile upon his face. Lefevre was looking in over his shoulder, and behind Lefevre could be seen Jones and Gilmore and Prye.

The Terrible Three looked at them in surprise. Visits from the Fifth Form to the Shell studies were not common. And the looks of the Fifth-Formers seemed to indicate that they had not come upon a friendly errand. The chums of the Shell remembered the encounter in the lane, and drew together for defence.

"Come to tea, you chaps?" asked Tom Merry, with forced hospitality.

Cutts smiled.  
"No; we haven't come to tea!" said Cutts. "We're not in the habit of taking tea with fags!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "You know jolly well that the Shell don't fag for anybody!"

"Rather not!" said Manners and Lowther emphatically.

"Well, we haven't come to tea!" said Cutts. "We've come for the pleasure of your conversation; we want to have a little talk with you!"

"Afraid we can't spare the time now," said Tom Merry. "Sorry—because you've got no choice in the matter!"

And the Fifth-Formers chuckled.  
The Terrible Three looked at the doorway; it was crowded by the Fifth-Formers. Escape from the study was cut off.

"Look here—" began Monty Lowther.

"Come in, you fellows!" said Cutts.

"We haven't asked you in yet!"

"Never mind; we can do without that!"

And the Fifth-Formers came into the study, and Cutts closed the door, and turned the key in the lock. The chums of the Shell watched them in alarm. There were five of the seniors, and they were nearly all powerful fellows. If it came to a scrap, the three Shell fellows would not have much chance. And there was no doubt that the visit of Cutts & Co. meant trouble. They were there to avenge their little adventure in Rylcombe Lane.

"Look here, you bouncers!" said Tom Merry. "If we yell, we shall have a crowd of the Shell here in a minute, and—"

"And they'll have to get through a locked door!" remarked Gilmore.

And the Fifth-Formers laughed.

"What do you want?"

"Only a little talk!" said Cutts agreeably. "I see you're going to have tea. Jam and toast and sardines. Good!"

"If you've come here to scoff our tea—"

"We haven't! You're going to have it—all of it—every bit! Only, you'll have it outside instead of inside!" explained Cutts.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fifth-Formers.

"The fact is," resumed Cutts, "you fags have been getting too cheeky—together too cheeky—lately! You seem to have the impression that you are regular nuts, and that you can't be cracked. We're going to try!"

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday.

"That's what I say!" remarked Lefevre.

"You smothered us with mud in the lane," remarked Cutts. "You made us late for the matinee, and I specially wanted the fellows to see that matinee, for a special reason. As a matter of fact, we're going to engage those artistes to give a performance at St. Jim's, and we wanted to size them up. You spoiled all that."

"Well, you were cheeky, you know!" said Manners.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lefevre. "I—"

"Let 'em run on!" said Cutts. "We're going to take all that out of them soon! You spoiled our clothes, and made us late for the performance!"

"And we'll do it again if you check us!" said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther.

Cutts, of the Fifth, smiled again.

"Then it's high time you had a lesson," he remarked.

"Now, you're all going down on your knees to beg our pardon. If you do that sufficiently humbly, we shall let you off lightly—say, with a spank each!"

The Terrible Three glared. They were not likely to beg anybody's pardon on their knees, and they were not likely to be spanked while they had any fight in them. They drew closer together, and clenched their fists, as the Fifth-Formers advanced towards them.

"Now, what do you say?" asked Cutts agreeably.

"Oh, I say rats!" said Tom Merry.

"And many of 'em!" said Lowther.

"Millions of 'em!" said Manners.

Cutts waved his hand.

"Collar the young cads!"

"Rescue!" yelled the Terrible Three with one voice.

"Rescue, Shell! Buck up, Shell! Rescue!"

"Collar them!"

"Rescue!"

Then there was a terrific struggle.

Five Fifth-Formers against three of the Shell, naturally expected to have matters all their own way; but they did not find it quite so easy as they had expected. Tom Merry was the champion athlete of the Lower School, and Manners and Lowther were good seconds. Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, rolled over on the floor under a terrific right-hander from Tom Merry, feeling as if a mule had kicked him. Cutts closed with Lowther, and went down, Lowther on top. Prye gave a roar as a fist dashed into his eye.

Crash! Bump!

"Yah! Oh! Yaroooooh!"

Cutts rolled over on Lowther and sat on him. Prye and Gilmore closed upon Tom Merry, and bore him struggling to the floor. Jones and Lefevre succeeded in getting Manners down. Then the Terrible Three were helpless. Prye caressed his eye with a tender hand. It was already assuming a beautiful blue colour. Lefevre dabbed at his nose with a pocket-handkerchief as he sat upon Manners' chest. The handkerchief came away very red.

"The—the cheeky young rotters!" gasped Lefevre.

"That's what I say! Owl!"

"Grooh!" murmured Prye.

"Hold 'em tight!" said Cutts. "You sit on this beast, Gilly. I'll get the jam."

"Good!"

There was a shout in the passage, and a knock on the door. The handle was tried, and then Kangaroo, of the Shell, shouted through the keyhole.

"What's up?"

"We are," said Cutts, "and the fags are down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's the Fifth rotters!"

"The door's locked!" said Noble.

"Bust it in!"

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There were many excited voices and footsteps in the Shell passage. Juniors were crowding up from all quarters; but the door was thick, the lock was strong, and Cutts & Company did not feel alarmed. Cutts proceeded to ladle out jam from the jar Monty Lowther had opened for tea. He did not ladle it into the jam dish. He ladled it upon Tom Merry's face, and rubbed it gently into his hair.

Tom Merry roared and squirmed.  
 "Hold him tight!" said Cutts.  
 "What-ho!" gasped Prye.  
 "Give him beans!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say! Give him beans!"

"Haven't any beans," said Cutts. "I'm giving him jam, and I'm going to give him sardines and butter and jelly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 There was a roar outside.  
 "Open this door, you Fifth-Form bouncers!"  
 "Presently," said Cutts politely.  
 "What are you doing?"  
 "Jamming the fags!"

There was a laugh in the passage, as if it seemed funnier to the fellows outside than it did to the Terrible Three. But the attack on the door was renewed. The door stood firm.

Cutts expended the whole of the jam in fair proportions upon the three struggling and gasping Shell fellows. He smothered it on their faces, rubbed it into their hair, and squeezed it under their collars. The Terrible Three felt horribly jammy and sticky; but Cutts was not finished yet. The jelly followed the jam; and then the sardines and butter. Cutts squeezed sardines down the juniors' necks, and they shuddered with horror. The tea-table was soon cleared; the Terrible Three had had their tea—outside instead of inside, as Cutts had observed.

Gerald Cutts surveyed his handiwork with considerable satisfaction.

"Do you think they look as mucked up as we did in the lane, you chaps?" he asked.

The Fifth-Formers roared.  
 "Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"  
 "Yes, rather!" gurgled Lefevre. "That's what I say! Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump, bump! at the door.  
 "Have you had enough, you fags?" asked Cutts politely.  
 "Grooooh!" groaned the Terrible Three.

"Are you going to beg pardon?"  
 "No!" roared Tom Merry.  
 "Are you sorry?"  
 "No!" yelled Tom. "I'm glad! Yah!"

"Well, you don't look glad," said Cutts. "But if you're not sorry, we'll give you some more. There are some ashes in the grate, and they may as well be added to the collection."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "Ow! Beast! Chuck it! Yah!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts poured ashes on the jam and the butter, and the aspect of the Terrible Three when he had finished was shocking.

"There," said Cutts, "I think that's enough. They mayn't say they're sorry, but I'm sure they feel sorry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 Crash, crash! at the door.

Cutts took the tablecloth from the table, calmly tore it into strips, and tied the ankles of the Terrible Three together. The victims struggled desperately, but they were firmly held, and in a few minutes their feet were tied up in a bunch, and they lay helplessly on their backs on the carpet, their heads in different directions, and their feet inextricably mingled.

"Good-bye, dear boys," said Cutts.  
 Tom Merry gasped.  
 "Rescue! Shell! Look out for them!"  
 "Rush for it," murmured Cutts.

He unlocked the door quietly, and threw it open. The Fifth-Formers made a sudden rush together, and drove through the crowd of juniors in the passage, and darted away. They were gone almost before the juniors knew they were out of the study. It was not easy to stop five powerful seniors. Kangaroo made a clutch at Cutts, but he was pushed over, and they ran across him. The Cornstalk junior sat up rather dazedly when they had gone.

"Ow!" he said. "You asses! What did you let them pass for?"

"Let's follow them!" exclaimed Blake, of the Fourth.

But the juniors shook their heads. It was not a simple thing to pursue Fifth-Formers into a senior passage. Cutts & Co., after all, were seniors. The juniors crowded into Tom Merry's study, and what they saw made them forget Cutts & Co. They stared at the three jammy, sticky, dusty figures on the floor and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

## CHAPTER 5.

## Barred.

TOM MERRY sat up.  
 He blinked at the juniors through jam and jelly and dust.

The rescuers yelled.  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "You silly asses!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "You cackling chumps!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Monty Lowther. "There's nothing to laugh at, that I can see! Why couldn't you get in sooner, and lend a hand?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "Weally, deah boys, I must say that I wegard this as wathah funnay," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! You are in a shockin' state!"

"They want washing," grined Gore.  
 "Untie us, you idiots!" yelled Manners.  
 "Blessed if I care to come near you for one," said Levison, of the Fourth. "You're a bit too sticky for me to touch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 Kangaroo untied the feet of the Terrible Three, and they staggered up. Their aspect was so ludicrous that the juniors shrieked again. The Terrible Three glared wrathfully. It was not a humorous experience for them.

"Did Cutts do this?" gasped Kangaroo, at last.  
 "Yes!" snorted Lowther. "And we'll make him sit up for it. Gerrout of the way, you cackling duffers! I want a wash!"

"You do! Ha, ha, ha! You do, badly!"  
 "Oh, dry up!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, it is aw'ly funnay, deah boys!"  
 "Is it?" yelled Lowther, exasperated. "Then you can have some of the fun, too!"

And he grasped the swell of St. Jim's, and embraced him affectionately, and rubbed his sticky face against the aristocratic features and beautiful waistcoat of Arthur Augustus.

There was a wail of anguish from the elegant Fourth-Formers.

"Ow, ow! Welease me, you wottah! You're wuinin' my waistcoat! Ow!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy wrenched himself away, and a howl of laughter greeted his appearance. Monty Lowther, feeling a little consoled, stamped out of the study, followed by Tom Merry and Manners. The juniors gave them a wide berth; but they sent a fresh yell of laughter after them, and it rang in the ears of the Terrible Three as they made their way to the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry & Co. dragged off their sticky and dusty clothes, and plunged their heads and faces into basins of water. Then they washed and rubbed and scrubbed, till their skin was burning with friction, to get off the mass of stickiness.

It was off at last; but it was a long and painful task. The chums of the Shell were quite breathless when they towelled themselves down.

"We've got to make Cutts sit up for this!" growled Monty Lowther, as he selected a new collar.

"Yes, rather."  
 "If they can invade our quarters, we can invade theirs," said Tom Merry. "It will be a bit new to raid a senior study; but that's what we're going to do."

"Good! And the sooner the quicker."  
 The chums of the Shell went downstairs again. They found a good many fellows waiting to see them, grinning gleefully.

"Got it all off?" asked Blake sympathetically. "I think Gussy is still going strong. That ass Lowther mucked up his hair with jam."

"Serve him right!" growled Lowther. "Sorry I didn't muck up yours, too."

"We're going to raid Cutts in his study," said Tom Merry.  
 "Who's going to back us up?"  
 "Faith, and they're seniors, you know," said Reilly.

"I don't care if they are! They're not going to rag us without being ragged again."

"Well, they had their little bit in the lane," said Kangaroo.  
 "Oh, rot! Volunteers! Don't all speak at once."  
 "Who's game?" demanded Lowther.

There was some hesitation. A raid in a senior study might lead to trouble. But there were volunteers.  
 "Count me in," said Kangaroo.

"And me," said Clifton Dane, the Canadian.  
 "Faith, and me, too!"  
 And a dozen more fellows offered.

"That's enough," said Tom Merry. "Follow your uncle."  
 And Tom Merry, with a warlike expression upon his face, led the way to the Fifth Form passage.

"We've got to rush 'em, rag 'em, wreck the study, and clear, before they can call in the prefects," said Tom Merry. "Savvy?"

"What-ho!" said Blake. "Lead on."  
And the juniors trooped into the Fifth Form passage. Then they paused, for they had almost trooped into Kildare, of the Sixth, the head prefect of the School House, and captain of St. Jim's. The juniors assumed their most innocent expressions; but Kildare gave them a grim look. He was not likely to believe that sixteen or seventeen juniors were invading the Fifth Form passage with amicable intentions.

"What are you kids doing here?" Kildare asked.  
"Ahem!" said Tom Merry.  
"What do you want?"  
"N-n-nothing."  
"You've come here for nothing?" asked Kildare.  
"It seems so, anyway," murmured Monty Lowther.  
"Come, out with it," said the captain of St. Jim's tersely.  
"None of your nonsense. What is it—a rag?"  
"We—we were going to see Cutts," stammered Tom Merry.  
"Oh!" said Kildare grimly. "You were going to see Cutts, were you? Has he invited this numerous and distinguished party to his study?"  
The juniors looked sheepish.  
"N-not exactly. B-b-but he visited us, and we—we thought it only right to return the visit," said Tom Merry.  
"Quite in a friendly way, of course?"  
"Well, you see—"

"As a matter of fact, it's a Form row, I suppose?" said Kildare.

"Well, perhaps something of that sort," admitted Tom Merry. "You see—"

"I see that I'm not going to allow anything of the sort," said Kildare. "You keep the junior studies in an uproar with your japing, and rags in the senior studies are not permitted. Clear out!"

"But, I say—"  
"Kildare, old man—"  
Kildare waved his hand.

"Clear out. And don't come back. Mind, I order you to keep clear of the Fifth Form quarters, and if any of you come here again, I shall make it warm for you."

The raiders exchanged glances of dismay. There was no resisting the authority of the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare's word was law.

"We—we only just want to look in on Cutts, you know," ventured Monty Lowther.

"Clear out!" shouted Kildare.  
And the juniors cleared. There was nothing else to be done.

The Terrible Three re-entered their study, and surveyed the cleared tea-table, and the patches of jam and jelly and ashes on the carpet.

"Done!" said Tom Merry. "No good bucking up against old Kildare! Raids in the Fifth Form studies are barred!"

"Rotten!" growled Lowther.  
"Beastly shame!" grunted Manners.

"But Cutts isn't going to be top dog, all the same," said Tom Merry. "There are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream, you know; and we're going to bring Cutts down off his perch somehow."

"How?" asked Manners and Lowther together.  
Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's what we've got to think out," he said.  
And the chums of the Shell thought it out, but without much success for a long time.

## CHAPTER 6. Cutts' Programme!

SEEN the notice on the board?"  
Blake, of the Fourth, asked the question the next day after morning school. The Terrible Three were chatting in the Form-room passage when Blake came up.

"No," said Tom Merry, "what is it—footer notice?"  
"Footer. No. It's Cutts'."

"What on earth is Cutts putting up a notice for?" asked Manners, in surprise. "He's not head of anything in the roll—he's not in the footer eleven, and he hasn't much to do with anything, excepting sneaking cigarettes into the school, and smoking them in his study with the door locked."

"It's a show," explained Blake. "You remember the Masked Trio, as they call themselves, that we saw at the matinee yesterday?"

"Well?"  
"Cutts has engaged them to give a performance here at the school."

"Oh! I remember he said something of the sort in my study yesterday," remarked Merry, with a nod.

"He's got permission to use the Fifth Form room for

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Every Friday.

the show," said Blake. "He's going to charge for admission, and the takings are to go to the Fifth Form footer club, which wants bucking up. After expenses are paid—including Cutts' own expenses, you bet. I know Cutts."

The Terrible Three grinned, and strolled over to the notice-board. They knew Cutts, too. Cutts had more than once had a leading hand in getting up entertainments and things of that kind to assist something or other; and Cutts was generally flush of money afterwards. The "expenses," like charity, covered a multitude of sins.

The notice on the board was written in Cutts' hand, and ran:

### SPECIAL NOTICE!

To-night, at 7.30 precisely, a performance will be given in the Fifth Form room, by the Celebrated Variety Company, known as the Masked Trio, whose recent performances at Wayland Theatre Royal have created such a sensation.

The performance will be a specially attractive one, and the receipts will go to the Fifth Form football club, after necessary expenses have been paid.

Prices of admission: Reserved seats, 2s.; unreserved, 1s. Fags in the Third Form and below, half-price.

Roll up!  
Special attractions! Special turns. Gorgeous entertainment below theatre prices! Roll up in your thousands!

Tickets may be had of the Committee, or of Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth, in his study.

### BY ORDER!

A crowd of fellows were reading the notice.  
"Not a bad idea," said Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth.  
"I guess it's worth a bobble to see the show, anyway, if it's the same company that was at Wayland Theatre."

"Yaas, wathah! I have seen the show, but I regard it as a vewy clevah one, and I shall go, to encourage the Fifth chaps," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Good. You can take a box for us," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, there will be no box in the Fifth Form woom!"

"Yes, there is," said Lowther.  
"Bai Jove, in that case I shall certainly take a box! But are you sure?"

"Quite sure," said Lowther solemnly.  
"Is it a commodious box?"

"Quite large enough for the purpose," said Lowther.  
"Then I shall take it. I had better go and speak to Cutts about it at once, in case it is snapped up by somebody else," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Good. By the way, it will be rather a small box for you, Gussy, if you're taking a party, too," said Lowther.

"The box I mean is the one old Batty keeps the chalk and duster in for the blackboard."

Arthur Augustus turned back, and jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded the humorist of the Shell with a freezing glance.

"You uttah ass!" he said, in measured tones. "I regard you as a silly chump, Lowthah."

"Well, I was only giving you information," said Lowther innocently. "Of course, there might be another kind of a box—a matchbox, for example."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Oh, pway wing off, you ass!"

"Jolly good idea for us all to go, and rag the entertainment," Herries, of the Fourth, suggested thoughtfully.

"Have to pay for admission," said Blake. "Too dear at the price."

"That's all right; we'll make Gussy pay for the lot!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We ought to rag the entertainment somehow," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "This is where we make Cutts sit up!"

"Won't be possible," said Manners. "Trust Cutts; he's as deep as a well! He'll have the prefects there—distinguished visitors in free seats—what?"

"Yaas, wathah! Twust Cutts to look out for that!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"And the show will be a big success, I fancy," remarked Figgins, of the Fourth, the great chief of the New House juniors. "Most of the fellows are keen to see the giddy Masked Trio. Everybody who couldn't get over to the matinee at Wayland will be glad of a chance to see 'em here."

"And Cutts will be able to stand himself smokes galore out of the giddy expenses," Kerr remarked.

"Yes, rather!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Nothing funny in that, is there?" said Kerr. "Cutts always does it—it's an open secret! Where's the joke?"

"Eh? Oh, I wasn't laughing at that!"

"What were you laughing at, then, fathead?"



"Cutts."  
"But what for?" demanded several voices. "Where's the joke?"

Tom Merry smiled.  
"Excuse me," he said; "it's just an idea that came into my head. I'll tell you another time, so excuse me."

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Is it a wheeze?"

"Yes; a sort of a kind of a variety of one!"

"Then spout it out! Is it up against Cutts?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll all take a hand," said Figgins. "You owe him more than we do, but we all want to bring him down off his perch and cut his comb!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Cutts as an impertinent ass!" said D'Arcy. "He made an insultin' wemark yestahday about my waistcoat!"

"Horrible!" said Figgins. "It must be avenged! Blood must flow—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"So what's the wheeze, Tom Merry? If there's anything in it," said Figgins condescendingly, "we'll run it for you, and make it go!"

"Thank you for nothing, Figgy!"

"What's the wheeze?" shouted the New House junior warmly.

"It's a—"

"Yes—what?"

"A School House wheeze!" explained Tom Merry sweetly.

"Look here, you ass—"

"Dogs and New House chaps not admitted!" said Tom Merry.

"Sorry, Figgy, but I can't tell you! You know what asses you New House chaps are, and you'd muck it up! I'll tell you afterwards, and tell you when to laugh!"

"Why, you—you silly ass—"

"Quite right!" said Blake. "No good letting these New House bounders into a wheeze; they'd only mess it up! Come up to No. 6, and talk it over, Tommy!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Sorry, Blake—"

"Nothing to be sorry about!" said Blake briskly. "Come up to Study No. 6, and we'll see if there's anything in it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Another shake of the head from Tom Merry. He moved strategically towards the door.

"Sorry!" he said. "Can't let Fourth Form kids into it; you'd only mess it up! And, besides, you see—"

"What!" roared Blake and Herries and Digby and Reilly and Lumley, and half a dozen other Fourth-Formers all together. "You cheeky ass—"

"Bump him!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! I agree with my friend Figgins! Those Shell bounders are gettin' as cheeky as the Fifth Form wottahs, deah boys! Bump 'em!"

There was a general movement towards the Terrible Three. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther stepped quickly out into the quadrangle, and the crowd followed them.

On the steps of the School House, Mr. Railton, the House-master, was standing, chatting with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. Tom Merry had observed them.

"Rush the silly bounders!" yelled Figgins. "Rush 'em—Oh!"

He halted suddenly as he nearly cannoned into Mr. Railton.

"Figgins!" said the School House master severely.

"Ahem! Sorry, sir! I—I—"

"Please don't rush about in that reckless manner, Figgins!"

"Yes, sir—I mean, no, sir! Very well, sir!"

The Terrible Three strolled away across the quad., smiling. In the presence of the masters the exasperated juniors could not carry out their intentions.

"Now, what's the wheeze?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"It's first chop—it's ripping—it's gorgeous—if it will work!" he said. "But it will have to be kept awfully secret—just a whisper would mess up the whole thing. It will have to be kept awfully, frightfully, fearfully secret! Come round to the old chapel, and we'll talk it over when those bounders can't spot us!"

And Manners and Lowther, in a state of great curiosity, followed their leader to the old ruined chapel behind the School House, eager to hear the great wheeze.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Plotting a Plot.

FATTY WYNN, of the Fourth, the Falstaff of the New House, was seated behind a fragment of masonry in the ruined chapel of St. Jim's. Of the old chapel which had stood there in Saxon times, only ruins remained, but they were massive ruins, with trees and ivy growing among the shattered walls and casements. In the summer

the St. Jim's fellows often picnicked there, but in the winter the ruins were quite deserted. Fatty Wynn had the place to himself, and he had chosen it because he was not likely to be interrupted there.

Fatty Wynn was seated upon a block of stone, and upon another block before him reposed a large pie. That pie had been specially cooked by Dame Taggles, and it was a triumph of steak and kidney and flaky crust. It had been ready for Fatty the moment morning lessons were over, and Fatty had made a bee-line for the tuckshop as soon as he was released from the class-room. And he had borne his prize into that quiet corner to devour at his leisure.

Fatty Wynn was, as he had often explained, not greedy, but he liked a lot. That pie was a triumph, and Fatty Wynn meant to enjoy it thoroughly. Figgins and Kerr would not have joined him in a gorgeous feed so soon before dinner, and so Fatty felt justified in carrying off the pie all by himself. As for the other fellows, he was glad to get out of the range of their view. There was not enough of the pie for the dozen or so of fellows who would have chummed up with Fatty Wynn on the spot if they had known of it.

Figgins and Kerr knew, but otherwise it was Fatty's secret. And Fatty gloated over the pie as he sat before it and cut the nicely-browned crust, and sniffed the luscious odour that came from within.

"Oh, it's ripping!" murmured Fatty, as he helped himself to an enormous helping. "Mrs. Taggles can make pies, and no mistake! Jolly lucky I got here without a crowd spotting me—jolly lucky! This will just stay me nicely till dinner! I wish old Figgins and Kerr were here; but they don't know a good thing when they see it, after all! I'm going to do justice to that pie!"

And he proceeded to do it.  
He was half-way through the pie when he heard the sound of footsteps on the old stones of the ruined chapel.

The fat Fourth-Former started.

If the footsteps were those of Figgins and Kerr, Fatty Wynn was ready to call them to the feed; he was capable of that heroic self-sacrifice, though it would have required an effort. But if the footsteps belonged to anybody else, Fatty Wynn meant to lie low, very low!

So he ceased to eat, and remained quiet, and listened. The great masses of masonry behind which he was ensconced concealed him from view, unless one had known that he was there and specially looked for him. The footsteps came very near to his hiding-place, and stopped. Then a voice was heard.

"This will be all right!"

It was Tom Merry's voice.

Fatty Wynn drew a deep breath. He was glad that he had been so cautious now. It was not Figgins and Kerr—not New House fellows at all. And if the School House juniors had discovered him there, Fatty Wynn knew only too well that they would have raided his pie, and probably eaten it under his very eyes, and very probably poured the gravy down his back. Fatty Wynn sat tight, and scarcely breathed.

"Right as rain!" came Monty Lowther's voice. "There are none of the New House rotters to listen to us here, so get it off your chest!"

"Don't speak too loud," said Tom Merry cautiously.

"It's a ripping wheeze—a real high-roller, and Figgins would give his ears to know it!"

Fatty Wynn smiled.

"Well, get it off your chest!" said Manners.

"Right! Cutts is going to have the Masked Trio Variety Company here to-night, to give a show in the Fifth Form-room—"

"So the notice says!"

"We owe Cutts a long account—"

"We do—we do!"

"Well, this is where we score!" said Tom Merry.

"You've said that before," said Lowther. "But you haven't explained how we score. Suppose you get on with the washing?"

"Well, I couldn't explain before those New House bounders—Figgins would have boned the wheeze at once!"

"I shouldn't wonder; they're awfully keen, those New House bounders, and they can't think of any wheezes for themselves. Figgins is an ass, and Kerr is another ass, and Fatty Wynn never thinks of anything but gorging!"

Fatty Wynn glared at the wall that separated him from the speaker. The voices came quite clearly to the ears of the fat Fourth-Former. Fatty Wynn knew that he was about to hear a School House council of war, and he listened with all his ears. It was not eavesdropping; his conscience was clear on that point. The rival juniors were at war, and Fatty Wynn regarded himself as a scout picking up information from the enemy. He shook a fat fist silently in the air as he heard Monty Lowther's uncomplimentary reference to himself.

"The Masked Entertainers will be coming here this evening," pursued Tom Merry. "Now, this idea flashed into my mind—"

"What idea?"

"I'm coming to that, fathead! Suppose they didn't come—"

"But they will come!"

"Suppose they were prevented somehow—"

"Oh!"

"That would mess up Cutts' entertainment, and he would have to give the money back," said Manners; "I don't think that's much of a wheeze, though."

"That isn't all, duffer. Suppose they didn't come—"

"We've had all that!" murmured Lowther.

"Ass! Suppose they didn't come—"

"Third time of asking!" said Lowther. "Pile it on!"

"Change the record!" suggested Manners.

Tom Merry snorted.

"Shut up, you asses! Suppose somebody else turned up in their places—what price that?"

"Oh! Somebody else—"

"Three somebody elses!" explained Tom Merry.

"My hat!"

"They're masked," said Tom Merry. "Cutts, himself, has never seen their faces. If three young geniuses about our size came along masked, and dressed in the same way as pierrots, Cutts couldn't possibly tell the difference!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"My only Uncle Joseph!"

"What do you think of that for a wheeze?" demanded Tom Merry triumphantly. "Instead of the Masked Trio, it would be the Terrible Three—and we could give such an entertainment that Cutts would go off his head when he saw it—and the fellows would rag him to death. We could sing a song about Cutts, and make jokes about the Fifth-Form, and carry on like—like giddy clowns, and mess up the whole bizney—and Cutts would never know it was us until afterwards."

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, great pip!"

And the Terrible Three chuckled together.

There was a pause, filled in by the chuckling of the chums of the Shell. Fatty Wynn chuckled, too, but silently.

"Not a whisper, of course," said Tom Merry. "Not a breathe! This will have to be kept frightfully dark. Of course, Figgins wouldn't give us away; but he'd want to have a hand in the wheeze, and would spoil the show. And that ass Wynn would very likely jaw—he can't keep a secret!"

"Can't I?" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"No; he'd blab it all out in the tuckshop," said Manners. "He'd let on that he'd got a secret, and somebody would fill him up with tuck to get it out of him, and then the whole thing would be kyboshed. Wynn is an ass!"

"Exactly!"

"But it will be hard to keep the Masked Trio away," said Manners thoughtfully. "If they're booked to come here, they'll come, I suppose?"

"Easy as falling off a form, my son," said Tom Merry serenely.

"How, then?"

"Suppose they received a telegram. I know the hotel they're staying at in Wayland; the pro.'s who come down to the Theatre Royal generally stay there. Suppose they got a telegram from the school telling them that the order was cancelled."

"My hat!"

"The order would be cancelled, you see—we shall cancel it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They wouldn't come after that," said Tom Merry. "But to make all sure, I'd ask for a reply wire—or, better still, I'll get to them on the telephone, if I can. We can use the telephone in the prefects' room, you know, and I can make an excuse to get out of the class-room, and speak on the telephone while the Fifth are in their Form-room this afternoon. They have the telephone at their hotel, and it will be as easy as winking. That will be simpler than the telegraph, too, because there would be some difficulty about the reply wire—they mightn't think the name of Merry the same name as Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we can't let them lose the fee," said Manners. "They're booked for the evening, you know, and it wouldn't be fair on them to make them lose the money."

"Of course not! It's up to us to pay them their fee, of course. It's worth that, I should think, for such a ripping jape on the Fifth!"

"Depends on how much the fee is," said Lowther cautiously.

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"Well, they're only going to give about an hour's entertainment here, and I shouldn't think it would be more than a guinea each. This kind of entertainer doesn't rake in the cash by the barrelful, you know."

"Guinea each!" said Lowther.

"We'll make a subscription among the fellows to raise the cash," said Tom Merry. "We'll take some of them into the wheeze—fellows who can be relied upon to hold their tongues, you know. Besides, we want to make sure of having a crowd of our fellows in the room, in case of trouble. If the Fifth bowled us out—"

"There would be trouble! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Five bob each from a dozen or so fellows would raise the cash," said Tom Merry. "I think it's jolly well worth it!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Is it agreed, then?"

"What-ho!"

"Then I'll get on the telephone to them this afternoon," said Tom Merry, grinning, "and when it's all serene, we'll make our arrangements. We can borrow the pierrot dresses at Mr. Wiggs's, in Rylcombe, and shove them on, with silk masks, and then it will be O.K., as Finn says. One of the Masked Trio is rather fat, but one of us can pad out all right. They're not much taller than we are, and we can have high-heeled shoes."

"Easy as winking!" said Monty Lowther enthusiastically. "Tommy, my son, how do you do these things? You're a giddy genius!"

"We'll get Cutts on the stage to help us with conjuring tricks," said Tom Merry blissfully. "We'll conjure ink down his neck, and paint into his hair, and make him let himself be tied up so that he can't get loose, and sit on him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But mum's the word—mind that, especially with the New House bouncers! They'd be on to a wheeze like this at once if they knew!"

"Yes, rather—mum's the word!"

And the Terrible Three, chuckling over the great wheeze, strolled out of the ruins. When they were quite gone, and out of hearing, Fatty Wynn chuckled too.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Counter-Plotting a Counter-Plot.

FIGGINS came into his study in the New House with a frown upon his face. Kerr followed him into the study, frowning also. Fatty Wynn was seated in the room, finishing up a steak-and-kidney pie at the table.

"Hallo," he said, "anything up?"

Figgins grunted.

"Yes. Let that pie alone, for goodness' sake; dinner will be ready in ten minutes!"

"That's all right—this is a snack to go on with—"

"Grooh!" said Figgins irritably. "Blow your snacks! Sitting down here gorging while the School House are scoring over us!" added Figgins indignantly.

"Are they scoring over us?" asked Fatty Wynn, with a grin.

"Yes, they are!" snapped Figgins. "It's up to all of us to pull Cutts down off his perch, and Tom Merry's got a wheeze about that entertainment of his—and he won't let on about it. We've got to stand by while the School House bouncers score. Yah!"

"Perhaps we haven't!" suggested Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted again.

"Perhaps you can bowl them out, and discover what the wheeze is," he suggested sarcastically.

"No perhaps about it!" said Fatty calmly.

His chums stared at him.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Figgins breathlessly. "You don't mean to say that you—that you—"

"Yes, I do!" said Fatty Wynn, with a nod.

"You've found it out?"

"Yes."

"My hat!" Figgins slammed the door of the study. "What is it, Fatty? How did you find it out, old man?"

Fatty Wynn chuckled.

"They talked it over in the ruined chapel, to make sure that nobody would hear them," he explained, "and I was on the other side of the wall—with this pie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I heard every blessed word," said Fatty Wynn, grinning. "All's fair in war, you know."

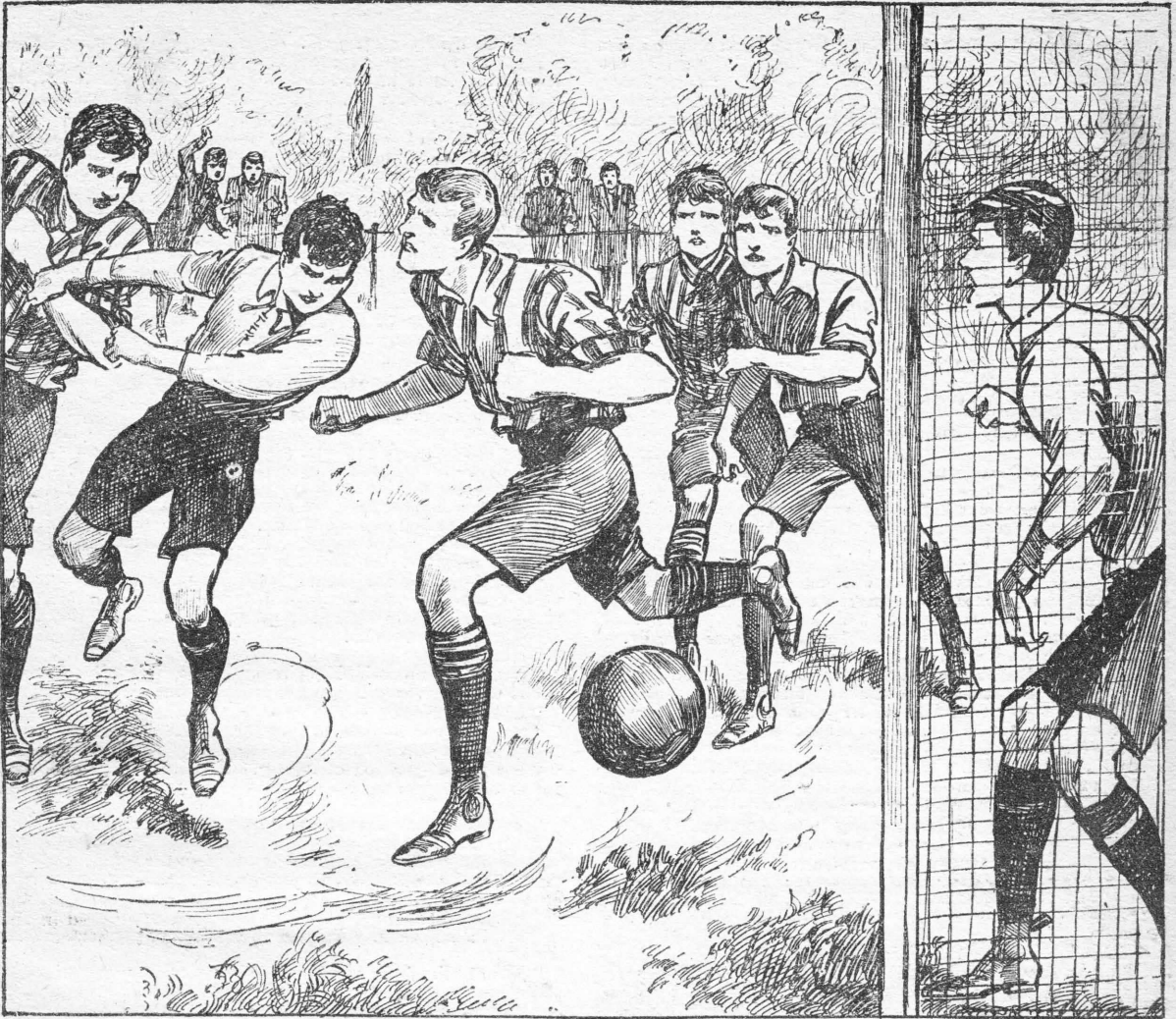
"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what's the wheeze?" asked Kerr.

Fatty Wynn explained.

The New House Co. simply gasped.

The audacity of the idea took their breath away for a moment.



Right for the goal mouth the ball whizzed, and the next moment Harry Wharton was shouldered over and fell. He heard a shout as he rolled over. Was it a goal? (An incident taken from the long complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "A SPLIT IN THE SIXTH," by Frank Richards. This grand story is contained in the current issue of our popular Companion Paper, "The Magnet" Library, and is one that all "Gem" readers will enjoy. Ask for this week's "Magnet" Library. On sale everywhere.

"Well, of all the cheek!" exclaimed Figgins, in amazement "They mean to stop the Masked Entertainers from coming—and come in their place! My hat!"

"That's it!" said Fatty Wynn, with a last glance into the pie-dish, which he had cleaned out so clean that it had a newly-swept and garnished appearance. "I wonder how long it will be to dinner?"

"Blow dinner!" said Figgins.

"Well, I'm rather peckish—"

"Yes, you must be, after that pie," said Kerr. "The question before the meeting is, what are we going to do?"

"We can't give 'em away to Cutts, of course," said Figgins thoughtfully. "Must play the game! But they'll muck it up, you know. Those School House chaps aren't up to a wheeze of that size."

"They'll mess it up, and it's the best wheeze going," said Figgins regretfully. "Now, if Tom Merry had had the sense to bring it to us, and ask us to carry it out—"

"Ah! If—" said Kerr.

"You're such a good actor, Kerr, you'd have been ripping, and I think I could have kept my end up, myself," said Figgins modestly.

"But the asses haven't come to us; and if we offer our services—"

"They'd refuse!" said Figgins.

"No doubt about that."

Figgins wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Well, we ought to jape 'em somehow," he said. "How can we do it without spoiling the joke on Cutts? We don't want to let Cutts off."

"No fear!"

"What do you think, Fatty?"

"They're late."

"Who're late, you ass?"

"With dinner, I mean," said Fatty Wynn.

"You fathead!" roared Figgins. "Who's talking about dinner?"

"I was," said the fat Fourth-Former. "You asked me what I thought, and I told you. What are you yelling for?"

"I mean, what do you think about japing those School House spoofers, to punish them for leaving us out of the game?" shouted Figgins.

"Oh, I see! I thought of something while I was hearing them jaw," said Fatty Wynn.

"Pile in," said Figgins generously. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know. What's your idea?"

"Well, if those Shell bounders are going to pass themselves off on Cutts as the Masked Trio from the theatre, I don't see why we—"

"Well, why we—"

"Why we couldn't do the same," said Fatty Wynn.

"What on earth good would that be?" exclaimed Figgins "Cutts would know that there weren't two sets of giddy entertainers, wouldn't he? They're a trio, not a sextette."

"I mean, suppose the entertainer chaps tumbled to the wheeze, and turned up after all, it would be a big come-down for the Shell bounders—"

"But they won't!"

"I know they won't; but we—"

Fatty Wynn did not need to say any more. Figgins under-

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stood at last. He rushed at Fatty Wynn, and hugged him in ecstasy.

"Come to my arms!" sobbed Figgins. "Oh, Fatty, Fatty, you're a howling genius! You ought to have a monument—of steak-and-kidney puddings! Oh, crumbs!"

"Hurray!" yelled Kerr. "It will be the wheeze of the season! And as easy as rolling off a wall."

"Here, leggo!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as Figgins waltzed him round the study in his exuberant delight. "Chuck it! Yarrah! I don't feel like dancing after that pie, you ass! Oh!"

"Waltz me round again, Willy!" gasped Figgins. "Oh, my only summer chapeau! What a joke on the School House! What a score over Tom Merry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" roared Fatty Wynn. "There goes the dinner bell."

And Fatty tore himself loose, and rushed out of the study and downstairs at top speed. Fatty Wynn was always in time for meals.

Figgins and Kerr exchanged a joyous grin, and followed him more slowly.

"Fatty's coming out!" chuckled Figgins. "If we get this jape off all serene, we'll stand him the biggest steak-and-kidney-pie Mrs. Taggles can make!"

"What-ho!" said Kerr.

And Figgins and Kerr wore smiles of great satisfaction during dinner. Even when Mr. Ratcliff, their Housemaster, found fault with Figgins for a soiled collar, in his unpleasent tones, and gave him fifty lines, Figgins hardly ceased to smile. And when Figgins & Co. encountered the Terrible Three on the way to the classroom for afternoon lessons, they laughed.

"Going to tell us the wheeze?" asked Figgins blandly.

Tom Merry shook his head solemnly.

"Can't be did," he said. "We'll tell you afterwards; you shall come in when the time comes to laugh!"

"Yes, I hope we shall!" said Figgins blandly. "I really think most likely we shall be there when the laughing starts. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. chuckled as they went to the Fourth-Form room.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Great Preparations.

**T**OM MERRY made an excuse for getting out of the Shell class-room that afternoon. He had been very circumspect, and Mr. Linton regarded him with a favourable eye. When Tom Merry said he wanted to telephone to Mr. Wiggs, in Rylcombe, about some costumes for amateur theatricals, before the shop closed, Mr. Linton kindly gave him permission to do so. Tom Merry made his way to the prefects' room, where a telephone was installed for the use of the seniors. The prefects' room was, of course, empty now, as all the prefects were in the Sixth-Form room. Tom Merry took down the receiver, and the young lady's voice from the exchange asked what number he wanted, when she had finished a little conversation with another young lady.

"Mr. Wiggs—I mean one nought one Rylcombe," said Tom Merry.

Tom Merry had been given permission to telephone to Mr. Wiggs, and he had to do it, and he had proceeded to do it. It had not been necessary to mention to Mr. Linton that when he had finished with Mr. Wiggs, he meant to telephone to somebody else, more especially as the somebody else was the Masked Trio staying at the Royal Hotel, Wayland.

Mr. Wiggs's voice came over the telephone. Mr. Wiggs was a tailor and a costumier, and several other things, and he supplied the costumes the juniors used in their amateur theatricals. Tom Merry & Co. were good customers, and Mr. Wiggs made it a point to be very obliging to them.

"Hallo!"

"That Wiggs's?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; I am Mr. Wiggs."

"This is Tom Merry, St. Jim's."

"Ah! How do you do, Master Merry?"

"Oh, topping! I say, Wiggy—I mean Mr. Wiggs, I shall call after school for three pierrot costumes and three black silk masks."

"Yes, Master Merry."

"You'll have 'em ready?"

"Oh, yes, I have plenty in stock!"

"Have you seen the Masked Trio show at Wayland, Mr. Wiggs? Yes? Well, I want the costumes to be exactly like theirs—we're getting up a show of the same sort."

"I see, Master Merry—quite so. They shall be ready at six."

"Right-ho! Thanks!"

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And Tom Merry rang off.

Then he rang up the exchange again, interrupting another interesting conversation between the young ladies there, and a somewhat tired voice asked what number he wanted. It is very annoying to a young lady at an exchange to be interrupted, in the midst of a discussion on the subject of winter toques, by a troublesome person requiring the use of the telephone, and the young lady's tone hinted as much.

"Number, please."

"I want the Royal Hotel, Wayland," said Tom Merry. "I don't know the number; but perhaps you would be kind enough to—"

"Hold on, please."

"Thank you."

A faint voice came to Tom Merry's ear over the telephone. "I was thinking of a grey wing—!" The junior grinned. But he was put on to the required number at last, and found that he was through.

"That the Royal Hotel, Wayland?"

"Yes; what's wanted?"

"The Masked Trio are staying with you?"

"Yes."

"I want to speak to them, please. It's about their engagement here—St. Jim's College—for this evening."

"Hang on a minute."

A minute elapsed, and another voice came through. Tom Merry recognised the somewhat fat voice of the leader of the Masked Trio, the conjurer of the day before.

"Hallo—hallo! Is that Mr. Cutts?"

"I'm speaking for Cutts," said Tom Merry, making his voice as deep as he could. "Cutts can't get to the telephone just now. You are booked to give your show here this evening, in the Form-room?"

"Yes."

"Owing to unavoidable circumstances, it can't come off. We're all very sorry if you are disappointed—"

"Oh, what rot! You've engaged the services of my troupe, and you'll have to pay for them. I can't be fooled about in this way!"

"It's not a question of money. The fee will be paid just the same."

"Oh, I see!" came in a mollified tone.

"You see, some chaps have arranged to give Cutts a show instead, and it is expected to go all right; but your cheque will be sent just the same. We are sending a fellow over after school to settle up, so you needn't have any uneasiness on that score."

"Oh, good!"

"That's all, then. I hope it won't put you out in any way."

"Not at all. Only as we're leaving to-morrow morning, we sha'n't be able to give you the show if it isn't given to-night."

"That's unfortunate, of course; but it can't be helped. We can't expect you to stay on another day for us. Only it's impossible to have it to-night—quite impossible. You can expect our messenger about six."

"Right."

"And the amount was—exactly—"

"Three guineas."

"I'll send you a cheque."

"Very good. Thanks!"

Tom Merry rang off. The entertainer was, in all probability, pleased enough to get the cheque without giving the show. And the fact that the money was to be paid before the time fixed for the entertainment, made it impossible for him to guess that it was a jape. In fact, such an idea was not likely to cross his mind. If there had been any doubt about the payment, the Masked Trio would undoubtedly have cut up very rusty; but as it was, all was serene.

Tom Merry put back the receiver, and quitted the prefects' room with a smile of satisfaction upon his face.

All was going well.

Cutts, of the Fifth, could not possibly have the slightest suspicion that a junior had rung up his entertainers that afternoon and cancelled the engagement.

He would expect the Masked Trio to arrive in time for the show at 7.30—and they would arrive. In the pierrot dresses and masks their identity could not possibly be discovered.

What Cutts & Co. would say afterwards was another matter. That did not trouble the hero of the Shell in the least.

Tom Merry returned to the Shell Form-room.

Manners and Lowther met him with an inquiring glance as he came to his place. Tom Merry gave them a smile and a nod.

"All right?" asked Monty Lowther, in a whisper.

"Right as rain!"

"Good egg!"

Lessons seemed insufferably long to the chums of the

Shell that afternoon. But the welcome hour of dismissal came at last, and they crowded out into the passage. The Fourth Form came out at the same time, and the chums of Study No. 6 at once gathered round the Terrible Three. They were very curious on the subject of that jape which Tom Merry had not communicated to them.

"Well," said Blake interrogatively, "is there a jape, or is it all moonshine?"

"There is," said Tom Merry.

"You had better tell us, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You see, I shall give you my opinion on it, and you can't do better than to wely on a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Quite so!" said Tom Merry, unexpectedly. "Come up to my study, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And bring all the money you've got."

"Eh?"

"Didn't I speak plainly?" asked Tom Merry. "Bring all the money you've got. It's a first-class jape, but it will cost money."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"If you don't like to subscribe, you can lend us the tin, and we'll pay it back later," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats! If there's anything in the jape, we'll stand our whack."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, Reilly and Lumley-Lumley and Kerruish, and one or two other fellows, were also quietly asked to step into Tom Merry's study. They did so cheerfully, and quite a large party crowded in. When they were all inside, Tom Merry closed the door and locked it.

"Quite mysterious!" grinned Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I expect it's all gas," said Blake. "But go ahead."

"All of you brought all the available tin?" asked Tom Merry.

"I have a pound, deah boy."

"I've got twopence," said Herries.

"Got it all in your pockets?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically, "or are you hiring a waggon to bring it along?"

"Look here——" said Herries.

"Half-a-crown here," said Kerruish.

"I guess I can make up ten bob," said Lumley-Lumley.

"I can stand a bit, too," said Blake. "But before we ladle out the cash, Tommy, my infant, let's hear the jape. Look before you buy, you know."

"Yaas; that is only weasonable, deah boy."

"Mind, it's a dead secret," said Tom Merry cautiously.

"Oh, we'll keep mum."

"Just one whisper outside this study, and the game would be up. Cutts would smell a mouse immediately. You know what a keen beast he is. And if the New House bounders got hold of it, they would chip in in some way and mess up the game."

"We know all that. Pile in!"

"Honour bright—not a word, then?"

"Honour bright!" said all the juniors together.

"Good!"

And Tom Merry explained.

There was a gurgle of laughter in the study.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Reilly. "You won't have the nerve, Tom Merry, darlint!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, you spoofers!"

"What a surprise for Cutts when he knows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors roared.

"Well, do you think it's worth three guineas?" asked Tom Merry.

"What-ho!"

"You bet!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then pile out the cash. Equal proportions from everybody in accordance with his means," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

And the cash was soon forthcoming. Tom Merry collected up the varied heap of coins to the value of three guineas, and counted it carefully.

"I'll get Mr. Railton to give me a cheque for this," he said. "He's done it before for fellows with accounts to pay, you know. That's easy enough. And a cheque looks better—more convincing to the chaps, you know. They couldn't suspect that junior fellows were japing them, than."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I'll get Toby, the page, to go over with it, and instruct him to keep his head shut," said Tom Merry.

"Gentlemen, the meeting's over, and mum's the word!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The meeting broke up, and Tom Merry made his way to the Housemaster's study with three pounds three shillings in various small coins clinking in his trousers' pocket.

Mr. Railton greeted him with his kind glance.

"Would you mind giving me a cheque for three guineas, sir, to pay an account?" asked Tom Merry diffidently. "I've got the money here—all small money——"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Railton, unlocking a drawer in his table and taking out his cheque-book. He smiled at the sight of the coins Tom Merry piled on the table. They could not be sent conveniently by post, certainly, and Mr. Railton naturally supposed that it was by post that Tom Merry wanted to send the payment.

"Whom shall I make the cheque payable to, Merry?" asked the School House master, as he dipped his pen into the ink.

"The M. T. Co.," said Tom Merry.

"Very well."

If Mr. Railton thought about the matter at all, he probably supposed that the M. T. Co. meant Manufacturing Something Co., or Midland Tyre Co., or something of that kind. He certainly did not suspect that it was the Masked Trio Company. He wrote out the cheque, and Tom Merry thanked him and left the study rather hurriedly. Ten minutes later, Toby, the School House page, was pressed into the service, and a bribe of two shillings induced him to neglect his many duties and slip out of the school and take the letter enclosing the cheque to Weyland. He was strictly enjoined to say merely that the letter had been given to him by a St. Jim's fellow to take, and not to mention names. And Toby grinned and promised that he would be careful. The cheque was enclosed in the envelope without a letter. Toby's message would make it clear enough where it came from.

"That's done!" said Tom Merry, with great satisfaction, when Toby had departed. "Now we'll have some tea, and after that a stroll down to Mr. Wiggs's."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 had a great tea together, and chuckled joyously most of the time. Over in the New House, Figgins & Co. were also having tea, and curiously enough they were chuckling most of the time, too.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Two Trios.

THE shades of night were falling fast—as has been remarked before—when Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came out of the School House with their coats and caps on, and walked down to the school gates. There was time to get out before locking-up, and as they intended to return in the character of masked pierrots, there would be no difficulty in getting in again. Figgins & Co. of the New House, also with their coats on, came down to the gates at the same time.

"Halko!" said Figgins. "Going out?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, rather annoyed by the meeting at that inopportune moment. Not that Figgins & Co. seemed to suspect anything.

"So are we," said Figgins.

"Missing the Fifth-Form show?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, no; we shall come back in time for that!"

"So shall we," said Manners.

"Walking down to Rylcombe?" asked Figgins, in a friendly way. "We'll come with you, if you like."

"Especially if you're going to stop at Mother Murphy's," added Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry frowned.

"We're not going to stop at Mother Murphy's; and we shall be walking too quickly for you youngsters to keep up with us," he said. "Come on, chaps!"

And the Terrible Three marched off.

"Well, of all the cheek——" began Kerr.

Figgins chuckled softly.

"All serene!" he said. "We don't want them to watch us, any more than they want us to watch them. I was only pulling Tommy's leg, though he doesn't know it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll go another way; we don't want to get to Mr. Wiggs's till after they've gone."

And Figgins & Co. chuckled joyously, and set off for the village by a roundabout path, which did not bring them into contact with the Terrible Three again.

The chums of the Shell, somewhat surprised and much relieved to get rid of the New House fellows so easily, walked quickly down the lane to Rylcombe.

"Jolly lucky getting away from those bounders like that!" Tom Merry remarked. "I was afraid Figgy had spotted something for a minute."

"No danger of that; the secret's all right. None of the fellows we've told would say a word."

"Oh, yes, it's all right!"

The chums of the Shell arrived at Mr. Wiggs's little shop. Mr. Wiggs was closed for the day, but he lived over the shop, and he was there ready for the juniors. He greeted them most benevolently, and he had the costumes and the masks all ready.

Tom Merry looked over them with great satisfaction.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "We shall want three cloaks or ulsters, too, Mr. Wiggs, to wear over these things. We'll change here."

"Very good," said Mr. Wiggs.

"We can keep our own clothes on under these things," said Manners. "That will be better, in case of a sudden change being necessary; and it will make us look a bit plumper, too. Those chaps were stouter than us."

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three soon had the pierrot garb on over their Etons.

Then they donned high-heeled shoes, which added to their height, and put on the black silk masks, which very nearly covered their faces. They surveyed themselves in a cheval glass with great satisfaction. If they had not known that they were themselves, as Lowther remarked, they would certainly have taken themselves for the Masked Trio of Wayland Theatre Royal.

Mr. Wiggs rubbed his hands.

"Excellent, young gentlemen—excellent!" he said.

"Do you think we look the part?" grinned Tom Merry.

"To the life, Master Merry!"

"Good! Now we'll put on the cloaks, and you can lend us some soft hats—kind of thing pros. wear, you know, and send for a cab. They'd come in the station-cab anyway," Tom Merry added to his chums.

And soon all was ready.

The Terrible Three, alias the Masked Trio, enveloped in greatcoats over their professional costume, and with soft Homburg hats on their boyish heads, took their places in the station hack, and drove off towards St. Jim's.

Mr. Wiggs watched them go with a smile. Mr. Wiggs knew Tom Merry and Co., and he could easily guess that a jape of some kind was in progress. But that was no business of his; and he knew Tom Merry well enough to be sure that there would be no harm in any jape that he planned, though the fun might be very funny.

Mr. Wiggs returned into his shop and locked the door, and ascended to his living quarters above. A quarter of an hour later he heard a loud ring at the bell, and as it was repeated again and again, he grunted and left his comfortable armchair and descended to see what it was.

Three youths in coats and caps stood before him as he opened the shop door.

"Good-evening, Mr. Wiggs!" said the voice of Figgins.

"Oh, is it you, Master Figgins?"

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "Sorry to disturb you in this way, Mr. Wiggs, but it's a most pressing matter."

"Has Master Merry forgotten something?" asked Mr. Wiggs, thinking that perhaps Tom Merry had sent Figgins back for some necessary article overlooked at the shop.

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes—he's forgotten us!"

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

Mr. Wiggs looked puzzled.

"I don't quite understand——" he began.

"It's all right," said Figgins. "I know you've got plenty of pierrot costumes and masks in stock, for fancy-dress balls and things, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wiggs, in wonder.

"Well, this is a repeat order; we want the same outfit."

"Dear me!"

Mr. Wiggs stepped back, and the New House juniors followed him into the shop. Mr. Wiggs turned up the gas, and closed the shop door.

"Pierrot costumes?" he asked.

"That's it!" said Figgins.

"And masks?"

"Yes; black silk masks, same as those chaps wore at Wayland Theatre, you know."

"Ah! The same as Tom Merry——"

"Exactly the same."

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"I have plenty in stock," said Mr. Wiggs. "You can take your choice. I suppose this is some joke that you young gentlemen are playing at the school."

"Just so," grinned Figgins.

Figgins & Co. promptly donned the pierrot costumes. They changed their boots for high-heeled shoes, and put on black silk masks, hiding their faces completely from recognition. They borrowed combs and brushes from Mr. Wiggs and parted their hair in the middle, as they had noticed the entertainers at Wayland Theatre did. Mr. Wiggs watched them with a smiling face.

"There, I think that's all right!" said Figgins, surveying himself in the glass which had reflected Tom Merry a short time before. "We want some big coats—shabby greatcoats will do, as we're professionals now——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And some ikey hats," said Kerr—"something squashy!"

"Good!"

Coats and hats were forthcoming, and the New House juniors donned them.

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Wiggs.

"That's all, thank you, Mr. Wiggs! You're a giddy Trojan. Good-night!"

"Good-night, young gentlemen!"

Figgins & Co. left the shop, and Mr. Wiggs smiled and closed the door after them. As in the case of the Terrible Three, it was none of his business; and as it was a double order for him for hire of costumes, he was not displeased.

"This way!" said Figgins, starting off.

"Are we going to walk, Figgys?"

"Of course!"

"But wouldn't it look better——"

"Ass!" said Figgins politely. "When we—the Masked Trio—arrived at the station, we found the station-cab was gone."

"Oh, I see!"

"It had been taken by the impostors who had preceded us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, we don't know anything about the impostors yet; we shall be astonished to find 'em at St. Jim's."

Figgins & Co. chuckled joyfully as they walked down the High Street of Rylcombe, and then tramped along the lane to St. Jim's.

They had been left out of the wheeze; but it seemed to Figgins & Co. that they were going to score this time, and score very heavily.

The station hack, going back to Rylcombe empty, passed them in the lane. Figgins hailed the driver:

"Hallo, Peter! Have you just taken a party to St. Jim's?"

"Yes," said the driver, staring at him in the gloom.

"Left them there all right?"

"Yes. What——"

But Figgins did not stay for any more. The Terrible Three, in their disguise, had evidently been received without suspicion at St. Jim's. Figgins & Co., chuckling under their masks, hurried on towards the old school.

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CHAPTER 11.  
The Entertainment.

CUTTS, of the Fifth, glanced into the Form-room soon after seven o'clock.

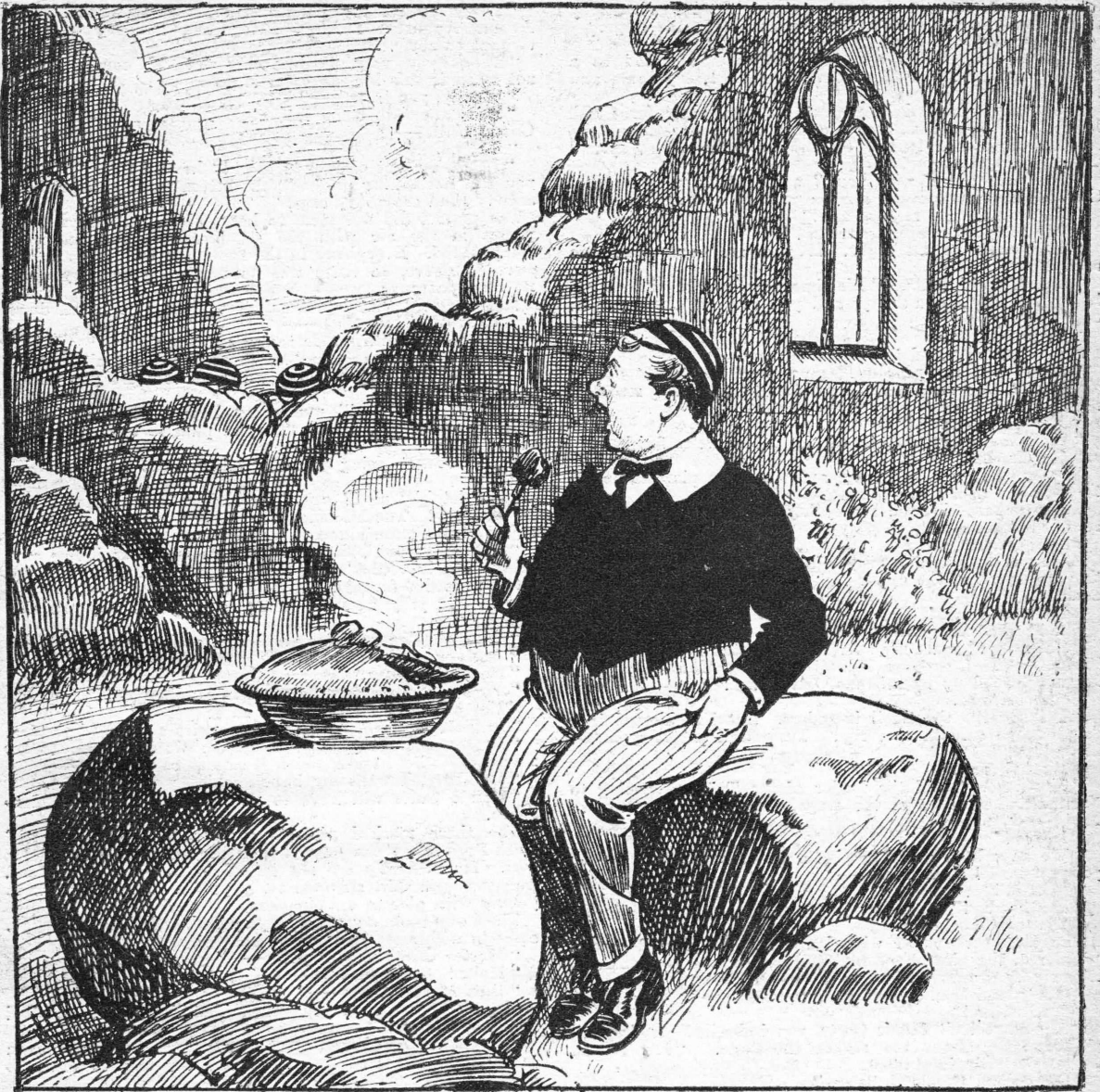
He wore a satisfied look.

The Form-room was a good-sized apartment, and, in addition to the forms used by the Fifth at classes, chairs and other-forms had been ranged in order, affording seating accommodation for a large audience.

There was standing room at the back and at the sides of the room for fags, who were admitted at half-price.

Cutts had reason to be satisfied with his audience. The reserved seats were nearly all taken. Half a dozen of them had been given free to prefects, in order to induce those great men to be present in case of a rag. Cutts suspected the juniors of intending some demonstration or other, but in the presence of Kildare, the captain of the school, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, and two or three other prefects, a rag by the juniors would be out of the question.

The Fifth Form had turned up almost to a man. The entertainment was in aid of the Form footer club, and the Fifth naturally supported it loyally.



"Don't speak too loud," said Tom Merry cautiously. "It's a ripping wheeze—a real high roller, and Figgins would give his cars to know it." Fatty Wynn drew a deep breath and ceased to eat. He was glad that he had been so cautious now. (See Chapter 7.)

Cutts had been doubtful about the number of juniors who would come, but he was reassured as he saw them crowding in.

Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, came along with a very large party; Kangaroo, of the Shell, brought a crowd of Shell fellows, and a swarm of fags came in at half-price, and ranged themselves round the walls.

New House juniors, too, came in great force; all Figgins's friends were there, and Figgy's friends in the New House numbered very nearly all the juniors on that side of the school.

Before seven o'clock the room was crowded, and after that the crowd thickened. Cutts and Lefevre and Prye and Gilmore and Jones had formed a magnificent committee of themselves, and they had everything in order for the entertainment. The upper end of the room had been marked off as a stage, and draped with borrowed curtains, and a piano had been placed on the stage for the use of the performers. Cutts & Co. were grouped about the door to see that no one entered without a ticket.

"My hat! It will soon be standing room only, that's what I say!" Lefevre remarked, as he glanced over the crowded room.

"We shall clear a few quid over this," Prye remarked.

Cutts nodded.

"Time the performers were here," he said, glancing at his watch.

There was a sound of wheels outside.

"Here they are!" said Jones, of the Fifth.

"Stay here, and see that nobody comes in on the nod," said Cutts. "I'll look after the pros."

"Right you are!"

Cutts went out to meet the new arrivals.

Three figures draped in big coats, with masked faces and soft hats, stood in the hall.

Cutts nodded to them.

"Glad you've come!" he remarked. "We're all ready! My word! Have you been travelling in those masks?"

"Certainly!" said the fat pierrot, who was evidently the leader. "I think you are aware that we have good reasons for keeping our identity secret."

"Our titled relations would not care to know that we gave variety performances," said the tallest of the pierrots—a pierrot about Monty Lowther's height, or a little taller.

Cutts grinned.

"Yes, I know," he said. "Come on! We've got you 3  
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Dressing-room here, and you can enter the Form-room by the door at the top end, so as to get right on the stage."

"Very good, Mr. Cutts!"

Cutts conducted the trio into the room assigned as a dressing-room. There they removed their heavy coats and hats.

They stood revealed in pierrot costume, their faces still hidden by the masks, and looking almost exactly as the Masked Trio had looked on the stage at the Wayland Theatre Royal.

"Got your props with you?" asked Cutts, noticing that the Trio had not brought any bags, as he had expected.

"No; we do not require any."

"But for your conjuring tricks?"

"That will be all right. If you are ready, we are ready!"

"Right!" said Cutts. "It's time now, nearly. I'll ring a bell at exactly seven-thirty, and you come in through this door!"

"Very good!"

And Cutts returned to the Form-room.

"All serene, my pippins!" murmured the tallest of the pierrots. "Our respected friend Cutts hasn't the remotest idea."

"Not the faintest!"

"We'll make Comic Cutts of him before we're finished!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a short time a bell rang, and the three pierrots passed through the door upon the stage.

They glanced through the eyeholes of their masks at the crowded Form-room.

The room was packed.

A sea of eyes and faces confronted the Masked Trio as they appeared at the upper end of the room, and there was a cheer.

"Here they are! Bravo!"

The Masked Trio bowed.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to Jack Blake. "I—I suppose it's all wight! The weal party haven't turned up by mistake, have they?"

Blake grinned.

"I fancy it's the Shell bounders. But I'm blessed if a chap can be sure in that rig! Their own paters wouldn't know 'em!"

"Wathah not!"

"Gentlemen," said the leader of the Trio, advancing to the marked-off edge of the stage, "we are just going to begin—"

"Bravo!"

"We have been asked to give a performance here by our young friend Comic Cutts—"

"Wha-at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts turned crimson.

The audience roared with laughter. Whether it was a mistake of the pierrot, or his first joke in the performance, it was very successful. The audience shrieked.

"Our friend Comic Cutts has requested—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My name isn't Comic Cutts, you imbecile!" said Cutts, of the Fifth, from the side of the stage. "It's Gerald Cutts, you silly idiot!"

"Our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you say your name was Comic Cutts or Chips?" asked the pierrot, turning with a polite bow towards the Fifth-Former.

"You—you fathead—"

"Eh?"

"Shut up about me, and get on with the washing!" hissed Cutts. "I'm not paying you three guineas to come here and play the fool! Leave me out of it, and get on with the performance, confound you!"

Cutts's voice was subdued, but a good many of the audience heard what he said, and they yelled again.

"Very well, Mr. Chips—"

"Cutts, you dummy!"

"Excuse me. I mean, Cutts, you dummy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The performance will now begin," said the pierrot chief. "I shall start with a conjuring trick. If a gentleman in the audience will lend me his handkerchief, I will undertake to make it disappear, and it will then be found down the back of our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Oh, good!"

"Look here—" began Cutts.

"Here's a hanky!" roared Wally, of the Third, rushing towards the stage. "Let's see it found down Cutts's back!"

"Ahem! I prefer a handkerchief that has not been used to clean a slate with!" said the pierrot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

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"Pway accept my handkerchief, my deah sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, rising and handing over his elegant cambric.

"Thank you very much, young sir! Of course, you do not mind if this handkerchief is damaged?"

"Weally, you know—"

"It is about to come into close contact with our friend Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leave me out of it, you idiot!" howled Cutts. "I tell you I'm not taking part in your rotten fatheaded performance! Find somebody else!"

The pierrot did not seem to hear. He made mysterious passes in the air with the handkerchief, and finally it disappeared. Everybody in the room had seen it go up the pierrot's sleeve, so there was no very deep mystery about its disappearance.

"Gentlemen, that handkerchief will now be found down the back of Comic Cutts—"

Cutts of the Fifth strode towards the conjurer.

"Look here, you chump," he hissed, "if you don't leave off calling me Comic Cutts there will be a row. Do you understand?"

"Chuck it, Cutts!" murmured Prye. "It's all in the entertainment, you know. They're paid to come here and make jokes!"

"They're not going to make jokes about me!" growled Cutts.

"Oh, let him rip!" urged Lefevre. "That's what I say, let him rip! The audience like it, anyway, and that's the object of the entertainment, you know."

"Just so!" said Gilmore. "The audience like it like anything. See how they're laughing at you, Cutts, old man."

Cutts scowled fiercely.

"They're jolly well not going to laugh at me, you silly fathead!"

"Well, they've paid for admission, and—"

"Are you ready, Mr. Cutts?" asked the pierrot.

"Ready for what?" growled Cutts.

"To be searched for the missing handkerchief!"

"I'm jolly well not going to be searched!"

The pierrot turned to the audience with a resigned gesture. "Ladies and gentlemen, if Comic Cutts refuses to be searched for the handkerchief, it cannot be produced—"

"Bai Jove, I want my handkerchief, you know!"

"Comic Cutts will have to be searched!" shouted Kangaroo.

The three masked pierrots surrounded the exasperated Fifth-Former. Cutts pushed back his cuffs and doubled his fists. He evidently did not intend to have his jacket and waistcoat and shirt stripped off in public. The juniors were yelling with glee in anticipation.

The Form-room door suddenly opened, and Toby, the page, came in with a startled face.

"Master Cutts, if you please—"

"Hallo! Clear out!"

"But, Master Cutts—"

"Don't bother now, you young idiot!" roared the ruffled Cutts. "Get out!"

"But three gentlemen want to see you—three gentlemen in masks!" stuttered Toby. "They say they've come to give the performance!"

"What?" yelled Cutts.

"They says I'm to tell you the Masked Trio have arrived, sir, and they're sorry they're late, 'cause somebody had taken the 'ack at the station, and they 'ad to walk!" said Toby.

There was a buzz of amazement in the crowded room.

Cutts was dumbfounded.

"There they are!" yelled Redfern of the New House suddenly.

In the open doorway of the Form-room appeared three figures—one of them very stout—three figures in pierrot costumes and black silk masks—and if the doorway had been a looking glass, it could not have reflected more accurately the three figures on the stage.

There was a shout of astonishment.

"The Masked Trio!"

"Another lot!"

"It's raining enertainers!"

"Gweat Scott! Poor old Tom Mewwy! Here's the weal partay turned up atah all!"

## CHAPTER 12.

### Bowled Out!

CUTTS, of the Fifth, looked at the Masked Trio in the doorway, and then at the Masked Trio on the stage, and his head seemed to turn round and round.

He was utterly mystified.

The three new-comers advanced into the room gravely.

They looked at the trio on the stage through the holes in



their masks; but the expression on their faces, of course, could not be seen.

On the stage, the Masked Trio—alias the Terrible Three—stood rooted to the floor.

"Bowled out!" murmured Tom Merry. "What a ghastly frost!"

"Done!" groaned Monty Lowther. "You ass, Tom! You said you'd arranged it all on the telephone, and now the real article turns up at the rottenest moment possible!"

"Oh, crumbs," said Manners, "let's cut!"

The three japers backed away towards the door leading into the adjoining room, which they had used as a dressing-room.

But their movement was at once spotted. There was a shout.

"They're going!"

"They're spoofers!"

"Stop 'em!"

Cutts made a bound to get between the Terrible Three and the exit. It was dawning on him now that he had been japed; and he understood at last the singular way in which the performers had persisted in making fun of him.

Kildare jumped up in his place. Most of the audience were on their feet now, and the room was in a loud buzz.

"You fellows had better explain yourselves," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Who are you?"

"We're the Masked Trio!" replied Tom Merry

"Then who are these other chaps?"

"We're the Masked Trio," said the tallest of the newcomers.

"My hat! There can't be two sets of them!" said Darrel of the Sixth.

"See that they don't get away!" hissed Cutts, to a crowd of Fifth-Formers, who were thronging on the stage to back him up. "We're jolly well going to have this out! We've been spoofed—it's a jape!"

"Looks like it," said Prye. "But how—"

"Tom Merry, and Manners, and Lowther ain't in the audience," said Cutts. "I'd noticed that already. Their friends are all here, but they're not!"

"Oh, gad!"

"Take off those masks!" thundered Cutts.

The three pierrots on the stage drew together.

"Impossible, Comic Cutts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you call me Comic Cutts again, or I'll squash your face for you!" roared Cutts. "Take off those masks. We're going to know who you are. I believe you're St. Jim's chaps japing us!"

"Oh, great Scott!" exclaimed Kildare, in amazement. "I shouldn't wonder! You'd better take off those masks, you fellows—"

"Can't be done, Kildare—"

"Hallo!" cried Cutts. "How do you know Kildare's name if you're not St. Jim's fellows?"

The pierrots were silent. It was certainly a slip of the tongue, and Tom Merry had pretty well given himself away.

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"You may as well own up," he exclaimed. "The real fellows are here now, and you can't keep this up, you know."

"We are ready to begin the performance, Mr. Cutts, as soon as you please!" said the leader of the newly-arrived trio.

"Wait a minute or two," said Cutts; "we've got to deal with these impostors. They came here representing themselves as you fellows, and took us in!"

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, and we're going to know who they are!"

"Dear me! I suppose that is why the hack was gone from the station—I suppose they must have come here in it?"

"So they did!" exclaimed Prye.

"The spoofers!" yelled Gilmore. "Have those masks off them!"

"Take 'em off!" shouted Cutts.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Our noble connections among the highest aristocracy of the land would be shocked if they knew that we were doing a variety turn. My uncle, the aged duke, would have a fit!"

"And my father, the marquis, would never get over it!" said Monty Lowther.

"And my brother, the earl, would cut me off with a tanner!" said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts made a sudden rush. He was pretty certain that the spoofers belonged to St. Jim's, and he meant to know for certain.

"Line up!" roared Tom Merry, forgetting to disguise his voice.

There was a shout.

"That's Tom Merry's voice!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're Shell chaps!"

Seven or eight Fifth-Formers rushed at the Masked Trio with Cutts. There was a terrific struggle on the stage for a moment. In the body of the hall, Blake & Co., and Kangaroo, and a band of Shell fellows, jumped up to rush to the rescue. There would have been a battle royal if they had succeeded in reaching the stage. But the wisdom of Cutts' arrangements was then apparent. Kildare and the rest of the prefects interposed, and the would-be rescuers were shoved back.

"Weally, Kildare, I must go to the rescue of Tom Mewwy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy exclaimed, as the captain of St. Jim's pushed him over a form.

Kildare grinned.

"So it is Tom Merry?" he said.

"Well, I—I mean—ahem!"

"Ha, ha! Stand back, you kids! You're not to go on the stage. Sling them back, you fellows! I'll turn out any fag who doesn't sit down immediately!" shouted Kildare.

The rescuers being thus kept off, Cutts & Co. had it all their own way with the Terrible Three.

The unfortunate japers of the Shell were rolled over on the stage, and the pierrot costumes and the silk masks were torn from them with no gentle hands.

Three juniors in Etons were revealed when the costumes and the masks were gone, and their faces were very well known to all present. There was a shout of recognition.

"Tom Merry!"

"Manners!"

"Lowther!"

"Oh, the spoofers! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silly asses!" grunted Blake as he sat down again.

"They were too cocksure about it. Now, if I had been working that little jape, I should have made sure that the real article wouldn't turn up."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"It's rough on poor old Tommy," said Kangaroo, with tears of merriment in his eyes. "I'm sorry for him. Ha, ha, ha! The silly ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther!" hissed Cutts, as he dragged the rags of the costumes from the much-dishevelled Shell fellows. "You young villains! I'll teach you to be funny at my entertainment! Bump the cads!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—bump them!"

Kildare strode forward.

"That will do," he said curtly.

Cutts glared at him.

"Leave us alone, Kildare!"

Kildare's blue eyes glinted.

"You're not going to handle them roughly, Cutts. I know what you did in Tom Merry's study, and this is only a jape in return, I expect. They've been pretty roughly handled already, and now you can let them slide.

"Look here, Kildare—"

"You hear what I say!"

There was a restive movement among the juniors in the audience. They would have chanced the prefects, and rushed to the rescue, if Cutts & Co. had been allowed to bump their victims. But Kildare's interposition had the desired effect. The juniors knew that the captain of St. Jim's could be trusted not to allow any bullying.

Cutts gritted his teeth.

But there was no gainsaying Kildare, and he reluctantly released his grasp upon Tom Merry.

"They can be turned out," said Kildare. "You'd better buzz off, you young rascals. And the next time you take on somebody else's name and character, mind that that somebody else doesn't turn up in time to show you up!"

Tom Merry grinned ruefully.

"Blessed if I know how they've turned up!" he said. "I had it all nicely arranged on the telephone, and—"

"Get off the stage!" shouted Cutts.

"Buzz off!" said Kildare. "The performance is over—due."

"Oh, we've had the best part of the performance!" said Darrel, laughing. "Buzz off, you kids!"

And the Terrible Three, extremely breathless and dusty, and almost in tatters, departed. Loud laughter followed them from the Form-room, and the door closed upon them. In the passage the dusty heroes looked at one another ruefully.

"Well, of all the ghastly frosts!" said Manners.

"This is the giddy ghastliest!" said Monty Lowther.

"How many sorts of a silly ass do you call yourself, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry snorted.

"It was a jolly good jape," he said. "How those chaps

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came to smell a mouse at the last moment, and turn up like that, I don't know!"

"Well, they did it, anyway."

"Yes, they did it, that's a cert. But how?"

"It doesn't matter how," grunted Manners. "We've been dishd and done, and Cutts is going to have his performance, after all. Let's go and get brushed, and get into the room again. They can't keep us out if we pay for admission, and there may be some chance of ragging the Fifth yet."

"Good!"

And the unhappy japers washed and brushed themselves, and returned to the Fifth-Form room; and although Prye and Gilmore, at the door, gave them very grim looks, they were allowed to enter and join the audience on paying for admission.

Jack Blake grinned as he made room for Tom Merry to sit down beside him.

"Something like a frost—eh?" he remarked.

The captain of the Shell grunted.

"You should have left it to the New House," said Redfern with a chuckle. "We should have handled it all right on our side."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry crossly.

"You should have left it to Studay No. 6, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a wise shake of the head. "In a mattah like this, what you wequire is the assistance of a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, dry up, and let's listen to the show!" said Monty Lowther.

**CHAPTER 13.  
The Vanishing Trick.**

THE newly-arrived Masked Trio had been silent spectators of the peculiar scene on the stage.

They joined in the laughter, true, but they made no movement to interfere actively, and waited patiently till the stage was clear for them.

Then they took up the place vacated by the late spoofers.

The audience, having laughed themselves husky, settled



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down into quietness again, to see what the genuine performance would be like. But it was generally agreed that there would be nothing quite so funny as the debut—and abrupt exit—of the Terrible Three.

Cutts' face was clearing now. If the "spoof" performance had gone on, he knew that he would have been further japed by the Terrible Three, and the timely arrival of the Masked Trio the Second had saved him from that. And, in fact, there came a smile upon the face of Gerald Cutts as he reflected how completely the Shell fellows' jape had turned out to be a frost.

But the smile vanished as the performance began.

Cutts had not specially demanded it, but he had supposed that the performance at St. Jim's would be the same as that given at Wayland Theatre Royal, only cut a little to compress it into a shorter time.

But the three pierrots seemed to have made great changes in their programme.

The shortest and fattest of the trio was the first to begin operations, while the other two sat upon chairs on the stage and watched him.

The fat pierrot glanced at Cutts.

"I shall require some things, please," he said. "We haven't been able to bring with us all that we need, owing to—to circumstances—"

"Had to walk, you know," explained Figgins. "Couldn't carry a heavy-bag."

"Ahem; yes!" said the third pierrot.

"Quite so," said Cutts. "I understand. It's all due to those young scoundrels. What can I get for you?"

"This is a new thing," said the fat Pierrot, who was speaking in a deep, guttural voice. "It is called the Steak Pie and Twelve Jam Tarts Trick."

"The—the what?"

"The Steak Pie and Twelve Jam Tarts Trick," replied the pierrot calmly. "I make a steak-pie and twelve jam tarts disappear. Can you get them for me?"

"Well," said Cutts, "I suppose we could get them at Mrs. Taggles', but—but—"

"Then please get them."

"Shall we borrow them, to be returned?"

"No; I am afraid they could not be returned."

"Well, those things cost money, you know."

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"Oh, if there is a lack of funds I will not perform the trick!" said the fat pierrot, with dignity. "But I should have thought that, after the indignity we have been subjected to—our names borrowed, our appearance imitated—and as we have made no complaint—"

"Dash it all, let 'em have the things they want, Cutts!" whispered Prye. "The blessed audience are getting impatient, too. Must give some kind of a show."

"All right. Cut down to the tuck-shop and get them, then. I suppose a cold pie will do?"

"Certainly," said the pierrot. "I require a steak-and-kidney pie, twelve jam tarts, and knife and fork and plate. And look sharp!"

"Oh, all right!"

Prye disappeared. In the interval of waiting the three pierrots kept up a fire of talk with one another, and the audience grinned. For the talk, strangely enough, had local allusions, and they were mostly to Cutts. The tallest of the pierrots recited a limerick which ran:

"There's a school which is famous for 'nuts,'  
Where the Fifth are regarded as butts,  
They are all off their dot,  
But the worst of the lot,  
Is an asinine bounder named Cutts."

Cutts could scarcely believe his ears.

There was a howl of laughter in the Form-room, and the Fifth-Formers did not join in it, but looked decidedly blank.

"What on earth—" muttered Jones.

"This is as bad as the other gang!" said Gilmore. "Better give 'em a hint not to be so funny about us."

"The audience like it!" murmured Lefevre. "That's what I say."

"Oh, dry up!"

Fortunately Prye re-entered just then with the requisites from the tuck-shop. He opened a basket upon the stage, and produced a large pie in a dish, and a dozen jam tarts wrapped up in tissue-paper.

The fat pierrot's eyes glistened with satisfaction through the holes in his mask as he regarded them.

"That all right?" asked Prye.

"Yes, that will do, thanks."

Prye retired from the stage. The fat pierrot took the knife and fork, and sat down with the pie between his knees, and began to eat it. The audience stared at him blankly. He had undertaken to make the pie disappear, but there was nobody present who couldn't have made it disappear in that way, and many of them would have been very pleased to make the trial.

Cutts & Co. watched the fat pierrot.

So did the audience.

In fact, he was the cynosure of all eyes. But he did not seem to be aware of it. All his attention was given to the steak-and-kidney pie.

"My hat!" said Prye at last. "What's the giddy game? Is that what they call an entertainment, Cutts?"

"Chap seems to be entertaining himself," said Lefevre. "I don't know about the audience. That's what I say."

"The silly ass!" growled Cutts, restlessly. "If it's part of the game, I don't know about interfering with him. But—"

The audience were grinning, but in rather a puzzled way. They did not know what to make of the fat pierrot and his proceeding any more than Cutts did. Some of them supposed that it was a very deep joke, of which the point would be seen later. Many of the juniors laughed heartily, especially New House juniors. The New House fellows, in fact, seemed to think it was a really ripping joke, for reasons best known to themselves.

"Well, I think Cutts would have done better to let us keep on," said Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three watched the performance from the back of the room. "I'm blessed if I see anything exhilarating in watching that fat bounder wolfing a pie! We could watch Fatty Wynn doing that any day!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "He's got a fat chivvy just like Wynn, too—you can see it now he's pushed his mask up a bit. Blessed if this is worth paying admission for!"

"Let's give 'em a yell," suggested Manners. "After all, we've paid, and we've a right to be entertained."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I must say that this is wathah slow. You boundahs have got us in for this!"

"How?" demanded Lowther.

"We paid to come in and see you jape the Fifth," said Arthur Augustus severely, "and it hasn't come off!"

"Ahem! Well, if those chaps hadn't turned up—"

"If I had been awwagin' the mattah, deah boys, they wouldn't have turned up, you know," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hallo, he's finished the pie, at any rate!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Perhaps there's something going to happen now."

"There is," grinned Lowther. "He's starting on the tarts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lawrence and Owen, and Pratt and Thompson, and a crowd more New House juniors. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's finished the tarts," said Tom Merry at last. "I wonder what's coming next? We've been waiting long enough."

"Gentlemen," said the tall pierrot, "we shall now proceed to do a dance."

"Hold on!" said Cutts. "Have you finished that trick?"

"Yes; that is finished," said the fat pierrot.

"You said you were going to make those tarts and the pie disappear!" hooted Cutts.

"Well, I've made 'em disappear, haven't I?"

"Why, you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience.

"I've had to pay for that tommy!" roared Cutts.

The fat pierrot nodded.

"Yes," he explained. "That's where the joke comes in."

The audience roared again.

Cutts was speechless; and the three pierrots, leaving him muttering to himself, proceeded with their dance.

Their method of dancing seemed to be to put their hands on their hips, and standing in that attitude, to bring their boots down with a clatter on the stage.

This lasted for about five minutes, and by the end of that time some of the seniors among the audience retired from the Form-room. They were fed up. Cutts muttered a remonstrance to the Masked Trio.

"Dash it all! Can't you do something a bit more entertaining than that, you fellows?" he said. "Do you call that dancing?"

"It's our style of dancing," said the tall pierrot.

"Well, I call it rotten!"

"Oh, that's your ignorance, you know."

"What!"

"Cheese it, Cutts!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Don't interrupt!" said the pierrot severely. "How can I dance when I'm being jawed at by a silly ass?"

"Oh!" gasped Cutts.

Lefevre tapped his friend on the arm.

"Better let 'em alone, Cutts," he whispered.

"But look here—"

"Better let 'em rip! After all, you engaged 'em, you know, and they've got to be paid, so may as well let 'em go through their tricks," said the captain of the Fifth philosophically.

"The audience are getting sick of 'em."

"Never mind. They paid in advance."

"Well, there's something in that," agreed Cutts. "But I didn't engage these fellows to come here and play the fool. I thought they were going to give a show like the one in Wayland Theatre."

"Perhaps it'll improve."

Cutts snorted.

"Doesn't seem much prospect of it," he said.

Stamp—stamp—stamp!

The Masked Trio were still dancing—what they called dancing.

Presently they ceased—not, apparently, for any reason, excepting that they were out of breath. Half the seniors had left the Form-room by that time, tired of the show. But some of them, and nearly all the juniors, remained, determined to get their money's worth as far as they could. But the fellows were beginning to get restive now, and shouting to the performers to buck up.

The tall pierrot bowed to the audience when he ceased stamping.

"Yah!" yelled the juniors in the audience.

"Gentlemen—"

"Poof!"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Gentlemen," said the pierrot, undisturbed, "this is where you cheer."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Hurrah!" roared Redfern, of the Fourth. "Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"What are you cheering for, you New House duffer?" demanded the Terrible Three, with one voice. "There never was a rottener show!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear, hear! Hurrah!" yelled Redfern.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 262

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,  
Editor in Advance.

"Gentlemen, I shall now proceed to perform my celebrated conjuring trick with a silk hat. Will any gentleman present lend me a silk hat?"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"That's up to you, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Surely you came in a silk hat, Gussy!" exclaimed Redfern, in a shocked tone.

"Weally, Weddy, I should not be likely to put a silk hat on to walk down a passage into a Form-room."

"Gentlemen, I require a silk hat! I require a silk hat of the first quality, belonging to a wearer of really first-class toppers."

D'Arcy rose.

"Then I suppose it's up to me!" he remarked. "I'm the only chap at St. Jim's who answers to that description."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at. Pway wait a few minutes, my deah sir, and I will bring you a silk hat."

"Your best one, please," said the tall pierrot.

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Do you want my Sunday toppah?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"It will not be damaged?"

"Not unless you damage it yourself."

"Oh, vewy well."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quitted the Form-room, and returned in a few minutes with the silk hat. He walked up to the stage and handed it to the pierrot. The performer made him a sign to step on the stage.

"Pray lend me your assistance," he said.

"Weally, my deah sir—"

"I shall require assistance in performing this feat, and you look like a youth of the greatest intelligence," said the pierrot.

"Yaas, wathah; you are quite wight there!" said D'Arcy.

"Pray hand me the hat!" The pierrot turned it over in his hands. "This is your Sunday silk topper?"

"Yaas!"

"Very good! Now, ladies and gentlemen, I call upon you to watch me closely, and see whether you observe me change this hat for another."

The audience began to get interested at last. Some of the seniors who had got up to go sat down again. The pierrot certainly did not seem to have much chance of changing the hat for another. Certainly, he wore baggy clothes in which he might have concealed the ribbons, the white rabbits, the yards of coloured paper, etc., which are the usual conjurer's paraphernalia. But it did not appear possible that he had a silk hat concealed about him; in fact, it seemed impossible.

The conjurer turned his back to the audience, holding the silk hat close to his chest, so that it was hidden from view.

He turned round in another minute, and placed a silk hat on the stage.

"My word!" murmured Blake. "If he's changed it, he must have been smart! How could he have a hat hidden about him?"

"Opera hat, perhaps, closed up," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Then what has he done with Gussy's?"

"True!"

The tall pierrot pointed to the hat.

"Does that look to you like your hat, young sir?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas; it looks wemarkably like it," he said.

"You would be deceived by the resemblance?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! Now, jump on that hat!"

"Wha-at!"

"It is part of the performance," the tall pierrot explained. "Jump on it!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated, and then he remembered the wonderful restoration of his gold watch at the performance at Wayland Theatre Royal. Then his hesitation vanished. He made a jump, and landed on the silk topper.

Crunch!

The topper bore a slight resemblance to a concertina after that, but no resemblance to anything else on earth.

D'Arcy stepped off the wreck.

"That all wight?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The three pierrots roared. "Ha, ha, ha! Yes; that's all right!"

"Good egg!"

"Gentlemen, you see that wreck of a hat? You would say that it was impossible to restore this young gentleman his hat as he handed it to me—"

"I know I should!" said Monty Lowther.

"Examine the hat, gentlemen," said the pierrot.

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"Master D'Arcy, pray hand the hat down among the audience!"

"Bai Jove! How do you know my name?" exclaimed D'Arcy, in astonishment.

"Ahem! I— It is written in your hat!"

"But you didn't look in the hat!"

"Am I not a conjurer?" demanded the tall pierrot, with dignity. "Pray do as I have requested!"

"All wight!"

Arthur Augustus handed down the smashed topper. Kildare took it and looked at it, and then Darrel, and then it passed among the juniors. There was not the slightest doubt that it was a hopeless wreck, and that nothing short of the most powerful magic could possible restore it to its pristine glory.

The hat was handed back to the conjurer.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?"

"Yes."

"Are you satisfied, Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas!"

"You are sure you are satisfied?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! That is fortunate! Gentlemen, now you have examined that hat, would you not say that it is quite impossible to restore it?"

"Yes."

"What-ho!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, gentlemen," said the pierrot calmly, "you would be quite right!"

"What!"

"Oh!"

"You would be quite right; it is quite impossible to restore the hat. But as Master D'Arcy has stated that he is satisfied, quite satisfied, it is a matter of no moment. Now, if any gentleman will lend me a gold watch, I will proceed to—"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Bai Jove! Is—is that my hat?"

The pierrot nodded.

"Yes, that is your hat. Kindly remove it, as the trick is finished! If any gentleman will lend me a gold watch—a valuable one will be necessary, I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I think that's very likely, after what's happened to Gussy's topper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy stood transfixed.

"That—that is my hat!" he gasped at last. "You—you wascal! You said that it would not be damaged!"

"Unless you damaged it yourself," corrected the pierrot. "I appeal to the audience if I did not say that?"

"Ha, ha, ha! You did!"

"He's got you there, Gussy!"

"You damaged it, Adolphus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus shook his fist at the conjurer.

"I regard you as a swindlin' wascal!" he yelled, picking up the hat. "You are an impostah, sir—a wank impostah!"

And the swell of St. Jim's marched away with the wreck of his silk topper, while the audience yelled with laughter.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Figgy's Triumph!

GENTLEMEN, if any member of the audience will kindly oblige me with a watch—a gold watch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will proceed to perform—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not taking any, thanks!"

"Not this evening!"

"Gussy," roared Kangaroo, of the Shell, "hand out your gold ticker, old man!"

"Weally, Kangy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Cutts!" The pierrot turned to the grinning Fifth-Former. Cutts had not been displeased by the joke on the swell of the Fourth. "Mr. Cutts, if you will kindly oblige me with your watch—"

"Catch me!" said Cutts.

"Very well," said the conjurer, "I will pass over that trick. Now, gentlemen, I am going to show you the great rope trick. This did not appear in the programme at the Wayland Theatre, and I think it will interest you very much. I shall require five assistants—juniors will not do."

"Ahem!"

"Blessed if I want to have a hand, anyway!" said Tom Merry. "The assistants may get off as well as Gussy's topper!"

"Yaas, wathah! The man is a silly ass!"

"Kildare, there's your chance!"

The captain of St. Jim's shook his head.

"Not Sixth-Formers," said the conjurer hastily. "Mr. Cutts and his friends will do very well. Members of the Sixth Form would not do, as—as they are too strong for this trick. Boys of the Fifth will do excellently. Mr. Cutts, will you oblige me?"

"That depends on what you want me to do," said Cutts grimly. "You're not going to get me to smash up any of my property!"

"This is quite a different trick; there will be no smashing. Indeed, I think you will very likely want to do some smashing at the conclusion, but I shall not permit it."

"Well, what is it?" asked Cutts.

"Come on the stage—you and your friends."

"All of us?" asked Lefevre.

"I require five."

"Well, I suppose it's up to us!" grunted Jones. "Come on!"

And the Fifth Form Entertainment Committee came forward. They were looking a little uneasy, and the audience watched with redoubled attention. One of the masked pierrots took a long rope from his tunic, and began to uncoil it.

"Gentlemen, the rope trick is very simple, but I guarantee that it will bring down the house," said the tall pierrot. "In the first place, the rope is looped round these five young gentlemen—"

"Oh, is it?" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—is it?"

"Hold on!" said Prye.

"I am not going to hurt you," said the conjurer reassuringly, as he looped the rope round the uneasy Fifth-Formers. "As you see, it is not tight."

The rope was passed round the waist of the Fifth-Formers, loosely. The pierrot made a slip-knot, and pulled it a little tighter. The five seniors were bunched together, looking very sheepish. The conjurer made a sign to his companions, and the Masked Trio all laid hold of the rope, and pulled it hard. The knot tightened, and the five seniors were roped together tightly.

Cutts turned red.

"Look here, I've had enough of this!" he said. "What are you up to?"

"Now your hands—" said the conjurer.

Cutts clenched his hands.

"You're not going to tie my hands!" he said stubbornly.

"Nor mine!" growled Prye.

"No fear!" grunted Gilmore.

"Well, it is not essential for the trick," said the conjurer gracefully, as he knotted the rope more securely. "Now, see if you can get free."

The Fifth-Formers essayed to free themselves. But it was in vain.

The knots on the rope were tied in awkward places, and very tightly, and the bunch of prisoners could not get at them.

They struggled and wriggled in the rope, keeping their feet with great difficulty as they did so, and after a few minutes they gave it up.

"You cannot get loose?" asked the conjurer.

"No!" growled Cutts.

"Untie us!" said Gilmore.

The conjurer shook his head.

"No; the trick is not finished yet." He drew a bag from under his loose tunic, and the other two followed his example. They were paper bags, and they were full of flour. Cutts eyed the pierrots uneasily.

"What are you going to do with that flour?" he demanded.

"Throw it over you, Master Cutts!"

"What!" yelled Cutts.

There was a yell from the audience.

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you dare to throw that over us!" yelled the five seniors together. "You villain! Stop it! Yow—oh—yaroooh—yow—yow!"

Swish, swish, came the flour from the bags, descending in a shower over the unhappy Fifth-Formers.

Cutts & Co. roared and wriggled and yelled, and lost their footing, and rolled in a confused heap on the stage.

Still the flour descended in showers, until the bags were empty. The Fifth-Formers wriggled on the stage, gasping and spluttering, and looking as if there had been a sudden fall of snow. The audience gasped and laughed.

Kildare rose to his feet.

"This is going altogether too far!" he exclaimed. "I don't understand this. What on earth do the fellows mean, unless they're dotty?"

The Masked Trio advanced to the edge of the stage.

"Gentlemen," said the tall pierrot, "I have an announcement to make! Pray lend me your ears!"

"I'll lend you a thick ear as soon as I get loose, you scoundrel!" came Cutts' voice, muffled with flour.

"Pile in!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I wergard this as extwaordinawy, deab boys."

"Gentlemen, there is a queer idea in the School House here that the School House is cock-house of St. Jim's. That is a most egregious error. The New House is cock-house of St. Jim's!"

"Wha-haaat!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Redfern.

"Why—why—"

"What the—"

"It was up to the juniors of this school to bring Cutts down from off his perch," went on the pierrot calmly. "Tom Merry made a mess of it, as I warned him he would!"

"You warned me?" yelled Tom Merry. "Why—what—who—"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's a jape!" yelled Blake excitedly. "A New House jape! I know his voice now—"

"Gentlemen, the School House kids failed, but we have pulled it off! Gentlemen, I have the honour to bid you good-evening! Show your chivvies, kids!"

The Masked Trio removed their masks.

There was a gasp in the crowded room, and then a yell of amazement!

"Figgins!"

"Kerr!"

"Wynn!"

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Kildare. "Why you—you cheeky young rascals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern. "Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

And the New House juniors, who had evidently been in the secret all along, roared:

"New House! New House!"

Tom Merry's face was a study. He understood it all now. It was not the real Masked Trio who had arrived in time to interrupt his performance. The real Masked Trio were still at Wayland. It was Figgins & Co. of the New House who had come in their guise!

"Oh," gasped Tom Merry at last, "my—my hat! We ought to have guessed—"

"Collar the rotters!" shrieked Monty Lowther. "Squash 'em! Bump 'em! Slaughter 'em! Jump on 'em!"

"This is where we mizzle!" grimed Figgins.

And the unmasked trio dashed through the door at the upper end of the stage. One minute later a crowd of School House fellows were shoving at it; but it was locked on the other side. Figgins & Co. were gone—and were safe in their own House before the School House crowd could get through the door.

In the wild excitement Cutts & Co. roared for help in vain for some time. They were untied at last gasping and spluttering, and they crawled away smothered with flour, followed by yells of laughter. There was no doubt that Cutts & Co. of the Fifth had been utterly and hopelessly done.

"Well, my only hat!" Tom Merry exclaimed, as the excited crowd surged out of the Form-room. "I never dreamed of it; Figgy must have got on to the wheeze somehow, and—"

"And spoofed you!" grinned Blake. "Didn't I tell you you'd better leave the wheeze to Study No. 6?"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Let's go over and see Figgy. He's done us brown; but he's done the Fifth browner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's cock-house of St. Jim's?" yelled Redfern.

"We are!" said Tom Merry promptly. "But Figgy's scored this time, and we own up!"

Figgins & Co. were looking out of their study window when the School House fellows came across the quadrangle. They waved black silk masks at the Terrible Three, and grinned.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, Figgy," he called out, "we're not on the warpath! Pax, you giddy impostor! You've done the Fifth, and we're going to stand you a feed, so come down, and if Fatty's got any room left after the pie and the tarts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn at once. "That was only a snack!"

And the School House and New House juniors fraternised most amicably in the tuckshop, while Cutts & Co. were cleaning flour from their clothes and themselves, and vowing vengeance upon the Masked Entertainers.

*Next Wednesday's splendid, long, complete school tale is entitled: "AT GRIPS WITH THE GRAMMARIANS!" by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.*

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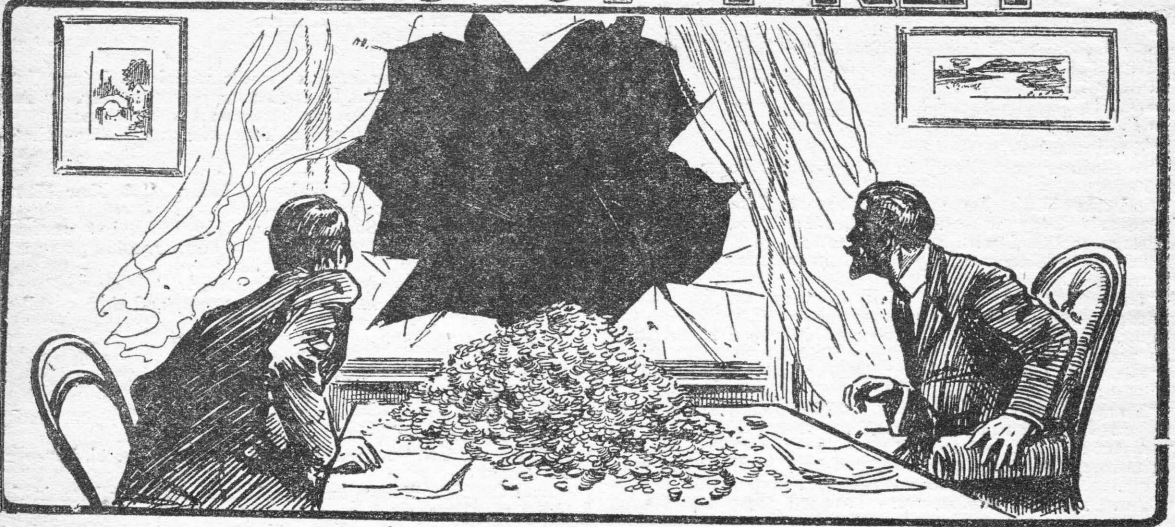
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# BIRDS OF PREY



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## WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

Nelson Lee, the world-famous detective, is devoting all his energies to the task of breaking the power of a gigantic criminal organisation, known as the Order of the Ring. The infamous secret society is under the leadership of a man who is known to all the members as "The Chief," but who also passes under the name of Mr. Stephen Meredith. His principal lieutenants are known as "The Squire," "The Doctor," and "Lady Ursula"—a beautiful young girl with the heart of a tiger.

With the intention of forcing him to join the Order, the Chief kidnaps Jack Langley, a young engineer, and Miss Aylmer, his fiancée. Jack proves obdurate, and so the two young people remain the captives of the Order. Their only hope of release comes from Nelson Lee, who is hot on the track of the Chief and his associates.

By a stroke of daring, Nelson Lee discovers and enters the retreat of his enemies, and succeeds in imprisoning Lady

Ursula and the Squire in a secret room in their own house. Ethel Aylmer is rescued and brought in safety to Sheffield. Then, accompanied by an inspector, the detective visits Penleven Grange, on the Cornish coast, to arrest Sir Philip Aylmer—Ethel's uncle—and a member of the Order of the Ring. The detective and his companion encounter the baronet in a narrow cliff-path, and with him are the Doctor and the Chief!

The Chief aims a terrific blow at Nelson Lee with a boat-hook, but the latter wards it off, and grasps the other end of the weapon. A tremendous struggle ensues, in which the Chief gradually begins to gain the upper hand. The point of the boat-hook presses against Nelson Lee, and he thinks his end is near, when the wooden shaft of the weapon breaks into two, and the Chief flounders down upon the detective.

(Now go on with the story.)

## The Escape of the Chief.

In the meantime, the inspector was not idle. Following Nelson Lee's example, the moment the moon was obscured by the clouds, he rushed to where he had seen the three men standing. More by chance than by design, he collided with Sir Philip, and knocked him backwards into the Doctor's arms. The latter promptly pushed Sir Philip aside, and sprang at the inspector's throat; but, with lightning-like rapidity, the inspector clenched his fist, and stopped his assailant's rush with a rasping blow in the mouth.

As the Doctor staggered back, the inspector darted after him, and dealt him a blow with his truncheon that stretched him senseless at his feet. At the same instant Sir Philip recovered his presence of mind, and flung himself upon the inspector from behind. With a lusty backward kick, the inspector forced him to release his hold, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, he spun round on his heel, swinging his truncheon as he turned, and caught Sir Philip a sledgehammer blow on the side of the head that sent him reeling towards the edge of the narrow path.

By a superhuman effort, Sir Philip recovered his balance in the nick of time; but ere he could collect his scattered wits—for the blow had partially dazed him—the inspector seized him by the throat, and forced him to his knees.

"Do you yield?" panted the inspector, with a threatening flourish of his truncheon.

"Yes, yes, I surrender!" moaned Sir Philip, who was shivering with fear.

"Then hold up your hands!"

Like a beaten cur, Sir Philip obeyed.

Click! His left wrist was encircled by a bracelet of steel. Click! His right wrist followed suit. Sir Philip was a prisoner!

Flushed with triumph, the inspector then turned round to render assistance to Nelson Lee. Unfortunately, however, his assistance came too late.

When the Chief fell on the top of him, the detective instantly clasped him round the neck, and yelled to the inspector to "give him a knock on the head" with his truncheon. At that moment, however, the inspector was engaged in repelling the Doctor's rush, and the detective's appeal for help was perforce left unanswered.

Nothing daunted, the detective fastened his hands on his assailant's throat, and endeavoured to roll him over on his back. As a matter of course, the Chief strained every nerve to prevent his captor accomplishing this, and so well did he succeed, that he not only managed to keep "on top," but at last contrived to tear the detective's hands from his throat, and plant one knee on his chest. It was at that moment that the inspector dragged Sir Philip down, and called upon him to yield.

Having pinned Nelson Lee to the ground, the Chief stretched out one hand, and groped for the iron-shod end of the boathook. Before he could find it, however, the

detective summoned up all his remaining strength, and dealt him a double-fisted blow on the chest that momentarily winded him. It was only for a moment, but in that moment the detective hurled him off, and flung himself on the top of him.

Game to the last, the Chief immediately grappled with his adversary in a desperate attempt to regain his lost advantage. Locked in each other's arms, they rolled and writhed on the narrow path, first one and then the other uppermost. Inch by inch they approached the edge, too madly excited to be conscious of their peril. Then all at once the ground seemed to sink from under them, and the next instant—just as the inspector turned round—they both rolled over the edge of the path, and vanished into space.

Luckily for both of them, the rocky ledge from which they fell was not much more than fifteen feet above high-water mark. Luckily, too, the tide was at the full, and the sea was perfectly calm, so that, instead of falling on to the rocks at the foot of the cliff, as would otherwise have been the case, they merely plunged into three or four fathoms of almost unruffled water. But even so, the shock which they received when they struck the surface of the water was quite sufficient to daze them for a time, and to cause them to relax their grip on each other's throat.

On this occasion the Chief was the first to regain his scattered wits, and struck out for the shelving beach, which stretched in a semi-circular curve between the two grim cliffs on each side of the cove. Before he had taken twenty strokes, the detective was in hot pursuit. He could not see the Chief, of course, for the moon was still hidden behind the clouds, but his quick ears caught the almost inaudible splash of the fugitive's overarm strokes, and by these alone he steered his course.

As soon as the Chief discovered this, he turned himself over on his back, and contented himself with floating for a while. A stiffish current ran across the little bay, and when this had carried him for some distance towards the opposite cliff, he turned once more, and struck out for the beach.

By that time the detective had abandoned the chase in despair. His adversary's cunning ruse had deprived him of all clue to the scoundrel's whereabouts; and, after spending several minutes in a vain attempt to pick up the scent, he followed the Chief's example, and struck out for the beach.

#### A Futile Chase.

Fringing the shores of the cove was the village of Penleven, which consisted of a straggling line of houses, facing the sea. In front of the houses was an ill-paved road, and in front of the road, divided from it by a low stone wall, was the steeply-sloping beach. The upper part of this beach was never covered by the sea, even at the highest tides, and in front of the wall was a long line of fishing-boats, and here and there a pleasure boat, drawn up beyond the reach of the waves.

When Nelson Lee had scrambled up the beach, and was climbing over the low stone wall, a gruff voice hailed him through the darkness, and a moment later a coastguard flashed a lantern in his face.

"Hallo! Who are you?" demanded the coastguard.

"Then he started back with an exclamation of amazement.

"Why, it's Mr. Lee the detective, isn't it?" he gasped. "You're the gentleman we rescued on the night when the Firefly was wrecked?"

"I am," said Nelson Lee, wringing the water from his dripping coat. "Like a bad penny, I'm always turning up, you see! But tell me, have you met anybody else along the beach?"

"Not a soul," said the coastguard.

"Well, I want you to keep a sharp look-out for the next half-hour, or so," said the detective. "You are probably aware that Sir Philip Aylmer had a couple of friends staying with him for the last ten days?"

"Yes. I've met them once or twice along the cliffs."

"Well, one of these men is the Chief of the Order of the Ring, and the other is the so-called Doctor."

"Never!"

"It's a fact. I came down here to-night to arrest Sir Philip Aylmer. I brought an inspector with me from Penzance, and whilst we were hunting for our man we suddenly came face to face with the two men I have named. The encounter took place on the path which runs down the cliff below Sir Philip's house. The inspector went for Sir Philip and the Doctor, and I went for the Chief. After a desperate struggle, we both rolled into the sea, where the Chief succeeded in giving me the slip. The probability is that he'll try to land on the beach here—if he hasn't done so already—and I want you to be on the watch for him. I can't stay myself, for I don't know how the inspector has fared, and I must hurry back and see if he requires my help."

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NEXT  
WEDNESDAY:

"AT GRIPS WITH THE GRAMMARIANS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,  
Order in Advance.

"All right, sir. I'll look out for the beggar!" said the coastguard. "What shall I do with him if I collar him?"

Before the detective had time to reply the moon burst suddenly through the clouds, and flooded the cove with light. The detective turned, and scanned the sea with an eager, circling glance. Then a startled cry burst from his lips.

"What is it?" gasped the coastguard, wheeling round.

"Look!" cried Nelson Lee, pointing towards the opposite end of the beach.

The coastguard looked. Then he, too, uttered a startled cry.

For the Chief had already effected a landing. He had dragged one of the smaller pleasure-boats to the edge of the sea, and was just in the act of launching it.

Quick as thought the detective vaulted over the wall which divided the road from the beach. The coastguard promptly followed his example, and an instant later they were tearing across the sands as fast as their legs would carry them. Long before they could interfere, however, the Chief had launched the boat, and had scrambled in; and by the time they reached the water's edge he was full twenty yards from shore, and was rowing like a Cambridge stroke in the final "burst" of a keenly-contested Boatrace.

"Shoot him!" yelled the coastguard excitedly. "Shoot him in the arm, and stop him rowing, and then we can launch another boat, and tow him ashore!"

"I wish I could," said Nelson Lee, as he flung off his dripping coat, and began to unlace his boots. "But I dropped my revolver in the struggle on the cliff—worse luck!"

"Then what are you going to do?"

By way of reply, the detective kicked off his boots, and waded into the sea. As soon as the water reached his waist he began to swim, using that powerful over-arm stroke so much in favour with racers. Of course, if the Chief had been an expert oarsman the chase would have been a hopeless one from the first. But Nelson Lee, with his customary quickness of perception, had seen that the Chief was only a clumsy amateur; and, consequently, he had every hope that he would be able to overtake him.

For a time his confidence appeared to be justified, for, although the Chief continued to row with undiminished vigour, the distance between the boat and the swimmer grew steadily less with every stroke. At last there was not much more than a couple of yards between them, and the detective was nerving himself for a final spurt, when all at once, without a moment's warning, the Chief adroitly shipped his oars, snatched up a heavy stone which had been placed in the boat as ballast, and flung it with both hands at his pursuer's head.

This manoeuvre was so utterly unexpected, and so swiftly carried out, that Nelson Lee, for once in a way, was taken off his guard. Ere he had time to dive the missile crashed into his face, inflicting an ugly wound in his brow, and filling his eyes with blood. Half-dazed by the shock, he ceased to swim, and began to sink. For a moment or two he churned the water in an aimless fashion, then he pulled himself together, and once more rose to the surface.

By that time the Chief had snatched up the oars again, and had put another twenty yards between himself and his pursuer. As already described, a stiffish current ran across the little bay, starting at the foot of the western cliff, curving across the bay, about a quarter of a mile from shore, rounding the base of the eastern cliff, and running strongly out to sea.

The Chief had already taken advantage of this current in his previous attempt to escape, and his object now was to get the boat into the current before the detective overhauled him.

Once in the grip of the current, he knew that he would be able to defy all further pursuit.

The detective knew this, too, and as soon as he had shaken off his stupor, he shot through the water like a pike in pursuit of a trout. Inch by inch he gained on his frantic and perspiring foe, till at last, on the very edge of the current, he put forth a final effort, and brought his head on a level with the stern of the boat.

Once more the Chief whipped in his oars, and snatched up something at his feet. This time it was the rudder, which, as is usually the case with pleasure-boats that have been beached, was lying in the bottom of the boat.

The moment he stooped to pick it up the detective dived, expecting another stone. Whilst he was still under the water he propelled himself towards the drifting boat—which was already beginning to feel the influence of the current—and when he rose to the surface again he was less than half a yard away.

With a low, fierce cry of triumph he stretched out his hand to grasp the gunwale of the boat, intending to capsize it. At the same instant the Chief leaned over the edge of the boat, and dealt him a furious blow with the rudder,

Nothing daunted, the detective clutched the gunwale, but a second blow on the back of the hand caused him to relax his grip, whilst a third blow on the top of his unprotected head deprived him for the moment of all consciousness. It was only for a moment, but in that moment the Chief snatched up the oars once more, and sent his boat into the very middle of the current.

Game to the last, the detective promptly set out in pursuit. But for every foot that the current carried Nelson Lee it carried the boat at least a yard. Try as he would, the detective could not even hold his own. In spite of all his efforts, the gap between himself and the boat grew rapidly wider and wider; and at last, with a deep-drawn sigh of mortification, he abandoned the chase in despair, and struck out for the shore.

In the meantime the coastguard had launched another boat, and was rowing out to his assistance; but by the time the boat came up to Nelson Lee the Chief was passing the grim, gaunt cliff at the east end of the little bay.

"Follow him!" gasped Nelson Lee, as he scrambled into the boat.

"It's no use, sir," said the coastguard, shaking his head. "He's got too good a start."

The detective dashed the water from his eyes, and turned to look at the racing skiff. At the same instant the Chief stood up, and waved his hand in mock farewell. Then, with a suddenness that was positively startling, the man retired behind the clouds, and darkness swallowed him up.

### In the Lion's Den.

We must now return to Inspector Pollock, whom we left on the cliff below Penleven Grange. As the reader may remember, he had stunned the Doctor with a single blow from his truncheon, and had slipped the handcuffs over Sir Philip Aylmer's wrists. He had then turned round to assist Nelson Lee; but, even as he had turned round, the Chief and the detective in their reckless struggle, had rolled across the narrow path, and had fallen into the sea.

Then, seizing Sir Philip by the arm, the inspector dragged him to the bottom of the path, and peered into the darkness, in a vain attempt to discover some trace of Nelson Lee and the Chief. Failing to see any sign of them, he retraced his steps to the top of the cliff—accompanied by Sir Philip, of course—and roused the servants at the Grange.

In a few hurried words—words which filled them with surprise and consternation—he told them what had happened, and showed them his warrants. Leaving Sir Philip in their charge, he then descended the cliff again, in company with the butler and the groom, and carried up the Doctor.

By the time they reached the Grange the Doctor had completely recovered consciousness, and as soon as the inspector had handcuffed him and had locked him up in one of the rooms along with Sir Philip, and had got two of the servants to mount guard over them, he set out for the village, with the object of arousing the fishermen and instituting a search for Nelson Lee.

On the outskirts of the village, however, he encountered the detective and the coastguard, who were on their way to the Grange.

"Thank Heaven you're safe!" cried the inspector, wringing the detective's hands. "I'd given you up for lost! But what's become of the Chief?"

"He's escaped!" said the detective bitterly. "How have you fared?"

"Got 'em both!" said the inspector laconically. "They are now in the dining-room at the Grange. In another hour they'll be in the cells at Penzance. But how did the Chief escape?"

The detective told him, and when he had finished his tale the inspector said:

"Then, by Jove, there isn't a moment to be lost! He can't travel far in a pleasure-boat. He's bound to land somewhere in this neighbourhood. We must immediately wire a description of him along the coast."

"You are too late," said Nelson Lee, with a smile. "As soon as we landed we knocked up the village postmaster, and he is now engaged in telegraphing to all the towns and villages between here and Penzance."

"Good!" said the inspector. "You don't believe in letting the grass grow under your feet, I see. But what are you going to do now? I must drive back to Penzance with my prisoners, of course; but it would be madness for you to come with me in your present condition. That wound on your head wants looking to, and you need a change of clothes."

"True," said Nelson Lee. "I was coming up to the Grange to see how you had fared, and then I was going to call on the Penleven doctor. He attended me once before,

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you know—on the night when the Firefly came ashore. However, there's no need for me to go to the Grange now, of course, so I shall go straight to the doctor's and get this cut attended to."

"And after that?"

"I shall beg a night's lodging at Trevangar Hall."

"Is that the big house on the opposite cliff?"

"Yes. Viscount St. Aidan, who lives there, was very good to me when I was here before, and pressed me to make his house my home whenever I was in this neighbourhood. So I shall take him at his word."

"Shall I see you again before you leave?"

"I doubt it. Unless I get news of the Chief—which I don't in the least expect—I shall return to London by the first train in the morning."

With these words he shook the inspector by the hand, and turned back towards the village. The coastguard accompanied him as far as the door of the doctor's house, and then returned to his duties. Half an hour later, with his head artistically bandaged, the detective was standing at the door of the viscount's cosy "den" at Trevangar Hall.

"Mr. Nelson Lee," said the footman, as he ushered the detective in.

The viscount sprang to his feet, and greeted the detective with a cry of mingled surprise and delight. As soon as the latter had explained the object of his visit, the viscount promptly provided him with a change of clothes; and then, over a friendly glass of "real Glenlivet," the detective briefly told his host of the stirring adventures through which he had passed in the course of the previous twenty-four hours.

"If only I could have captured the Chief," he said, in conclusion, "my triumph would have been complete. At the same time, I cannot reasonably complain. The Squire and Lady Ursula are in custody at Sheffield. The underground mint is in the hands of the police. Ethel Aylmer has been set at liberty. The Doctor and Sir Philip are on their way to Penzance in charge of Inspector Pollock. And all this has been accomplished between two o'clock this morning and half-past eleven to-night. On the whole, therefore, I think I may claim to have done a good day's work."

"A magnificent day's work!" said the viscount enthusiastically. "You have dealt the Order of the Ring a smashing blow, from which it will never recover. Two of its leaders are already under arrest—thanks to you—and the third will probably be laid by the heels before many hours have passed."

The detective shook his head.

"I'm afraid there's not much hope of that," he said. "I know the Chief of old. He hasn't his equal for wriggling out of a tight position. I shall be delighted, of course, if he is captured; but at the same time I shall be very much surprised."

"You think he will escape?"

"I do."

And the detective was right. He rose betimes next morning, and made his way to the village post-office. He wired to Penzance, and to all the surrounding towns and villages. But the answer was the same from all of them. Nothing had been seen of the Chief, or of any man, or any boat, answering to the detective's description.

"Well, any news of him?" asked the viscount, when Nelson Lee returned to the hall.

"None," said Nelson Lee. "As I expected, he has made his escape."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to London."

"Have you any definite plan, or are you merely going to wait until something turns up?"

"I have a plan. You remember my little adventure at Danzy's model lodging-house?"

"When you had to make your escape by jumping into the River Thames?"

"Yes. When I hauled myself out of the river, I was accosted by two men, one of whom I recognised as a former member of the Dolphin crew. His name was Knight; and as all the Dolphin's crew were members of the Order of the Ring, it follows as a matter of course, that Knight was a member. He recognised who I was, and offered to give me shelter for the night, evidently intending to betray me to his confederates. I accepted his offer, and accompanied him to his house. About eleven o'clock he pretended to remember that he had an appointment at the docks, and begged me to excuse him. As soon as he had left the house, I promptly followed his example, and ultimately shadowed him to a second-rate club, known as the Raglan, in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road. Whilst I was waiting for him to come out, a brougham rattled up, and a few minutes later the Chief and the Doctor came out of the club and drove off to the station.

"Now, it seems to me to be more than a mere coincidence that three men—Knight, the Chief, and the Doctor—all of



whom I know to be members of the Order of the Ring, should all be members of the Raglan. To put the matter in a nutshell, I shrewdly suspect that the Raglan Club is neither more nor less than the headquarters of the Order of the Ring."

"Then do you propose to summon the police, and raid the place?"

"No. Before I can ask the police to interfere, I must first obtain some proof of the truth of my suspicions. What I propose to do, therefore, is to disguise myself, and to keep an eye on the club for a day or two—perhaps even to enter it, if I see a favourable opportunity—and so find out how far my suspicions are justified."

In accordance with this plan, the detective left Penleven by the morning train, and arrived in London in the course of the afternoon. After a lengthy interview with the officials at Scotland Yard, he returned to his rooms in Gray's Inn Road, and disguised himself as a hawk of penny toys. A red-cotten handkerchief tightly tied round his head effectually concealed his bandages, and added not a little to his slovenly and woe-begone appearance.

From nine o'clock until midnight he plied his trade in the slummy back street in which the Raglan was situated. Every man who went into the club, every man who came out, was subjected to a keen and penetrating scrutiny, with the result that the detective recognised one as the constable who had assisted the Squire to escape, another as the former steward of the Firefly, and a third as "Mr. Stephen Meredith's private secretary."

At midnight the club began to empty, and in another quarter of an hour the last of the lights had been put out, and the place was enshrouded in darkness. A few minutes later the door opened, and Black Bruno, the caretaker, appeared—evidently with the intention of taking a stroll.

He removed the key from the inside of the door, and thrust it into the keyhole on the outside. He stepped out into the street, closed the door, and locked it. Then he thrust the key into his pocket, and walked away in the direction of Tottenham Court Road.

"Now's my chance!" muttered Nelson Lee, who was ensconced in an archway on the opposite side of the street. "This burly Italian giant is evidently the caretaker, and now that he has gone out, the place will be deserted. I'll slip in through one of the back windows, and—"

Suddenly he paused, for at that moment a foreign-looking individual, evidently a sailor by his dress, walked up to the door of the club, and rang the bell. Bruno was then about twenty yards away; but, for some reason or other, he happened to look round just then, and, seeing the man at the door, he turned on his heel and came back.

"Hallo! Who are you, and what do you want?" the detective heard him ask.

The sailor said something in a low voice, which the detective could not catch. Black Bruno started, and held out his hand. The sailor fumbled in his pocket and produced a letter, which Bruno snatched from his hand with ill-concealed eagerness. For a moment or two longer the two men conversed in whispers; then the sailor took his departure, whilst Bruno unlocked the door and entered the club again.

What was the meaning of this curious scene? Who was the foreign-looking sailor? Why had he come to the Raglan at that late hour? Why had Bruno started when the man had first addressed him? What was the letter which the sailor had brought? Why had Bruno gone back into the club immediately after receiving it?

Such were a few of the questions which chased themselves through the detective's brain as he stood in the archway opposite the club. By-and-by he saw a light spring up in the basement, and a few minutes later he saw a second light appear in one of the windows at the top of the house. The light in the basement remained where it was, but the second light kept dodging about, first in one room and then in another, for all the world as though someone were moving about the house with a lighted candle in his hand.

What did it mean?

### "Help! Help!"

When nearly an hour had elapsed, the detective's curiosity could stand the suspense no longer. By hook or crook he must see what Bruno was doing; he must find out the meaning of that wandering will-o'-the-wisp of a light.

The Raglan stood at the corner of two streets—or rather, at the corner of a street and a narrow, dirty lane. The detective crossed the street, and glided down the lane. About fifteen yards from the corner he came to a wooden door, which apparently led into the yard at the back of the club. Upon trying the handle, he found that the door was locked;

but by the aid of a bunch of keys he speedily picked the lock and let himself in.

He then found himself in a stone-flagged yard, surrounded on three sides by high brick walls, the fourth side being formed by the back of the house. All the windows of the latter were in darkness; and after waiting for nearly ten minutes without discovering any signs of life, he crept up to one of the lower windows, forced back the catch, threw up the sash, and cautiously squeezed himself through.

For weal or woe he had entered the lion's den!

"Are you the man they call Black Bruno? If you are, I have a letter for you from the president of your club."

Such were the words the sailor had addressed to Bruno—the words the detective had not caught.

Bruno started, for "the president of your club" could only mean the Chief.

"Where is it?" he asked, holding out his hand.

The sailor produced the letter, and handed it over.

"Where did you meet the Chief—I mean the president?" asked Bruno.

"At Cherbourg," said the sailor. "He was brought into that port by a French fishing-boat from somewhere in the Channel. Our steamer was just on the point of sailing for London when he landed, and he gave me that letter and a ten-pound note to bring it to you."

"Have you to take an answer back?"

"Oh, no! I don't suppose I shall ever see the gentleman again."

"Then I'll wish you good-night!" said Bruno. "I'm anxious to see what the letter's about."

The sailor accordingly took his departure, and Bruno unlocked the door and re-entered the club. Having carefully locked the door, he went down to his sitting-room in the basement, and lit the gas. Then he broke the seal of the envelope and spread the letter out upon the table.

It was written in the secret cipher of the Order of the Ring; but Bruno was perfectly familiar with the key, and had no difficulty in translating it. It ran as follows:

"Dear Comrade,—All is lost—for the present, at any rate. Lady Ursula, the Squire, and the Doctor are all in custody, and I have only just managed to escape arrest by the skin of my teeth. England is too hot for me just now, so I am going to take up my quarters with our comrades in Paris for a while. In the meantime, the Raglan is a standing danger to us, for if once Nelson Lee gets into the place, and discovers those books and papers in the safe, the Order of the Ring will be utterly and eternally ruined. I have decided, therefore, that it will be best to make a clean sweep of the place and all it contains, including Jack Langley. In other words, I want you to set fire to the place, and burn it to the ground.

"As the safe is a fireproof one, you had better open it, and scatter the books and papers about the floor, so as to make sure that they will all be destroyed. The lock, as you know, is a combination lock, so there is no key. The word which opens the safe was changed at our last meeting. It is now 'Absolo.'

"Fire the place to-night, if you possibly can, and then come over and join me at our French establishment in the Avenue de la Reunion.—Yours in haste,

"THE CHIEF."

Like all the members of the Order of the Ring, Black Bruno had the most unswerving faith in the wisdom of the Chief. No thought of questioning the Chief's decision ever entered his mind. It was enough for him that the Chief had commanded him to burn the Raglan to the ground; and, without a moment's hesitation, he promptly set to work to carry out his orders.

Having collected an armful of shavings and paper, he lit a candle, and went upstairs. With the help of the shavings and the paper, together with a miscellaneous assortment of lumber, he constructed an enormous bonfire just outside the door of the attic in which Jack Langley was imprisoned. He did not light it just then, but went down to the landing below, and prepared another bonfire there. A third was built in the meeting-room, a large room on the first floor, at one end of which stood a massive iron safe. A fourth was erected in the billiard-room on the ground floor.

When his four bonfires were completed, the Italian proceeded to drench them all with paraffin. He then went up to the attic again, where the young engineer, all unconscious of his coming peril, was fast asleep on a heap of straw. An iron ring had been riveted to one of his ankles, and to this a short steel chain had been affixed, the other end of the chain being fastened to an iron staple in the wall.

"Wake up, my friend; wake up, and hear the joyful news!" said Bruno, shaking him roughly by the arm.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD,  
Order in Advance,

"What is it?" yawned Jack, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"I've been ordered to set you free," said Bruno.

"To set me free!" cried Jack, suddenly becoming wide awake. "No, no! It cannot be true! You are mocking me!"

The Italian laughed, and rubbed his hands.

"What I tell you is perfectly true," he said. "This very night your long imprisonment comes to an end. I am going to give you your liberty. Can you guess how I am going to do it?"

Jack shook his head.

"Well, listen, and you will hear," said Bruno, with a diabolical grin.

He stepped to the door, and struck a match. He flung it on the bonfire, which immediately burst into flames.

"That's how I am going to set you free!" he said, putting his head in at the door again. "Good-bye! I haven't time to stay and witness your release!"

He strode past the blazing heap, and hurried downstairs. He applied a lighted match to the second bonfire, and rushed down to the meeting-room. He was just about to fire the third of his oil-soaked piles of lumber, when his eyes fell on the safe.

"Per bacco! I've forgotten to open the safe!" he muttered to himself.

He sprang to the safe, candle in hand, and began to adjust the letters of the combination lock. He had got as far as "Abs—" when a sharp metallic click fell on his startled ears; and, on turning round, he found himself face to face with Nelson Lee, who was covering him with his revolver.

"Hands up!" said the detective sternly.

But the words had scarcely crossed his lips ere Bruno suddenly flung the candle straight into his face.

Half blinded by the melting, scalding wax, the detective staggered back, and the next instant, with a roar of triumph, the Italian hurled himself upon him, and bore him to the ground.

Nothing daunted, the detective dropped his revolver, and grappled with his burly foe in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter. Over and over they rolled on the floor, the din of their furious combat mingling with the hiss and the roar of the blazing heaps upstairs. For a time the detective appeared to be gaining the upper hand; but at last, with a herculean effort, Black Bruno rolled him over on his back, and fastened one sinewy hand on his throat.

Planting one knee on the detective's chest, the Italian whipped out a clasp-knife, and opened the blade with his teeth. He raised his hand to strike, and even as he raised it the detective heard, above the crackling of the flames, Jack Langley's wild, despairing cry:

"Help! Help!"

The effect was little short of magical. Up to that moment the detective had not even suspected that Jack Langley was imprisoned in the Raglan, and the sound of Jack's voice—the knowledge that the young engineer was in deadly peril—acted upon Nelson Lee like a sudden electric shock. It galvanised his flagging energies into life again, and filled him for the moment with a wild and savage burst of strength that was absolutely irresistible.

With one terrific sledge-hammer blow he knocked the knife from Bruno's hand, and sent it flying across the room. With a second blow he loosened half the Italian's teeth, and caused him to relax his grip. Then he hurled his burly foe aside, leaped to his feet, and snatched up his revolver. Clubbing the weapon, he dealt Black Bruno a blow behind the ear that stretched him senseless at his feet. Then he rushed to the window and threw up the sash.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three times in rapid succession he fired into the air, and awoke the startled echoes of the silent street.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Three times he yelled at the top of his voice. Then he sprang over Bruno's prostrate form, and darted from the room.

### Fighting the Flames.

Bruno, as the reader may remember, had built a bonfire in the billiard-room on the ground floor, a second in the meeting-room on the first floor, a third on the landing on the second floor, and a fourth outside the door of the attic in which Jack Langley was imprisoned. He had intended, of course, to fire them all before he left the club, but after he had set fire to the one outside the attic door, and the one on the second-floor landing, and before he had time to light the one in the meeting-room, the detective had tackled him in the manner already described, and had put a stop to his incendiary proceedings.

These bonfires, as the reader may also remember, were constructed of shavings and lumber, saturated with paraffin.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 262.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,  
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"  
Every Friday.

It will readily be understood, therefore, that when once they were lighted they not only burnt with extraordinary fierceness, but were practically inextinguishable.

As a matter of fact, by the time the detective reached the landing on the second floor, the bonfire there was a roaring mass of white-hot flames, whilst the wooden floor, the banister of the staircase, and even the stairs themselves, were already ablaze in a dozen different places.

Swiftly, yet cautiously, the detective picked his way across the burning landing, and rushed to the foot of the attic stairs.

The fire which Bruno had kindled outside the attic door was blazing with even greater fury than the one on the landing, and the narrow space at the top of the stairs was a veritable inferno of smoke and flame.

In other words, between himself and the attic door was a six-foot wall of madly-whirling flames.

And before he could reach Jack Langley, whose cries for help had now given place to feeble, stifled groans, he must fight his way through this roaring belt of flame.

No one could have blamed him had he shirked the perilous task. But no such thought ever crossed his mind.

With the utmost coolness he whipped off his coat, and wrapped it round his head. Then he stumbled up the blazing stairs, charged through the thick of the hissing flames, and pitched head first into the attic, his clothing scorched and smouldering, but otherwise unscathed.

Luckily for Jack, the flames had not yet spread into the attic, but the room was full of blinding, suffocating smoke; and as soon as Nelson Lee had scrambled to his feet, he groped his way to the window, with the object of opening it. To his dire dismay he found that the window had been boarded up on the inside; but, nothing daunted, he set to work with savage desperation to wrench the boards away. By the time he had wrenched the last away, and had opened the window to its widest extent the flames were curling through the doorway, and were creeping across the worm-eaten floor like darting, wriggling snakes of fire.

At the sight of Nelson Lee, the young engineer, who had been lying on a heap of straw in the furthest corner of the room, roused himself, and rose to his feet.

"A file! A file! Have you a file?" he gasped, when Nelson Lee sprang towards him after opening the window.

"I haven't," said the detective. "Why do you ask?" Jack uttered a groan of despair, and pointed to his ankle, on which was a tightly-fitting iron band. Then he lifted up a strong steel chain about three yards long. One end of the chain was fastened to the band around his ankle, and the other was firmly secured to an iron staple in the wall.

"It's no good if you haven't a file!" said the young engineer despairingly. "You can't save me!"

"I can try, at any rate!" said the detective doggedly.

He grasped the chain with both hands, about three feet from the staple, and planted one foot against the wall. He pulled and tugged till the veins stood out on his forehead like knotted cords. But it was all in vain. In spite of all his efforts the staple stubbornly refused to yield. And in the meantime the flames were making such rapid headway that by the time he abandoned his attempt they were half-way across the attic floor.

"It's no good!" groaned Jack again. "You've done your best, but you can't accomplish the impossible! You're only risking your life by remaining here. Save yourself before it's too late!"

"Never!" said the detective between his clenched teeth. "We'll sink or swim together!"

He whipped out his revolver and examined it. It had been loaded in every chamber when he had entered the club, but three of the chambers had been emptied through the meeting-room window, in order to arouse the neighbouring inhabitants. There were three full cartridges left.

He placed the muzzle of the weapon quite close to the wall, and fired at the wooden plug into which the staple had been driven. His first shot merely chipped a corner of the plug. His second cracked it across the middle. His third reduced it to a mass of splinters.

Thrusting his empty revolver into his pocket, he seized the chain and gave it another vigorous tug. Twice he tugged without success. At the third attempt the staple began to yield. At the fourth it came out, and Langley was free!

Free! The word seemed almost a mockery. The whole of one end of the attic was already in possession of the flames. The floor was on fire in half a dozen places—the ceiling in half a dozen more. The doorway, the landing outside, the staircase, and the landing below were wrapped in one continuous sheet of lurid flame. To reach the stairs—even to reach the attic door—was an absolute impossibility. To remain where they were meant certain, speedy death.

"The window!" gasped Nelson Lee. "We must try the window! It's our only chance of escape!"

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial in next Wednesday's "GEM" Library.)

# STORYETTES.

## THE REASON WHY.

The teacher was trying to impress on his more or less promising scholars the necessity for learning all they could about birds, for an examiner was shortly to journey down to test their knowledge.

When the inspector arrived, and chose the ostrich for his subject, the master grinned with pleasure, for he had been lately driving into them all the interesting points about this bird. Things had gone very well until the inspector asked a question which spelt "cane" unless it was properly answered.

"Why does Mrs. Ostrich leave her eggs buried in the sand?" asked the inspector, with a pleasant smile. "Yes?" he said to a bright young spark who held up his hand, and for whose sake the master trembled.

"Please sit," said the bright boy, "Mrs. Ostrich don't want 'em; she uses custard powder."

## DIFFERENTLY EXPRESSED.

Little Percival had a deep and all-absorbing thirst for knowledge, and it was chiefly on this account that his Aunt Jemima took such an interest in him.

On this particular occasion the afternoon was wet, and she took the opportunity of giving him an instructive lecture, for the subject of which she chose "heirlooms."

"An heirloom, Percival," she observed, "means something that has been handed down from father to son—But why are you looking so thoughtful?"

For Percival's expressive young face had taken on a look of deep and interested meditation.

"Well, auntie," he replied slowly, "I was only thinking that 'heirloom' is a very strange name for my trousers."

## NOT RESPONSIBLE.

Times were hard, the winter was well forward, and jobs were difficult to get. But Mr. Jobbins, the successful Progressive candidate of the Municipal Elections, was known to all those who were out of work as a man who generally found employment of some kind for the unemployed brigade. One day he was approached by one of his retainers, with a tale of hard luck and a request for help.

"Didn't I promise you a job with the snow-shovelling gang?" he demanded. "I'm not a man to go back on my word, you know!"

"But, please, sir," said the unemployed one ruefully, "it ain't snowed yet!"

"Well," exclaimed Jobbins petulantly, "I can't help that! D'ye think I'm runnin' the weather bureau? Get away, man, and wait!"

**FREE** FOR SELLING ONLY 12 1d. PACKETS OF FAMOUS HAPPY HOME SEEDS.

LARGEST PENNY PACKETS IN THE WORLD.

We give each reader of this paper a handsome prize simply for selling or using 12 Penny Packets of our famous Happy Home Seeds

We have reduced our 2d. and 3d. Packets of Flower and Vegetable Seeds all to 1d. per packet, in order to still more popularise them. All you need to do is to send us a postcard with your full name and address, and we will send you per return post a collection of guaranteed seeds; use or sell the packets of seeds at 1d. per packet within 28 days (we trust you), and we will reward you according to terms on our new Prize List. All prizes free—Ladies' and Gent's

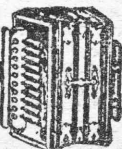
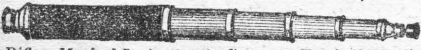
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83-87, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.



## A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

A. Park, P.O. Box 2576, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a reader age 15.

Miss V. Enderby, 31, Blanche Street, St. Kilda, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 18-19, living in any part of the world.

Miss D. Thompson, Zercho's Business College, 157, Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader who is acquainted with Pitman's shorthand.

E. J. Dixon, Alma, 252, Liverpool Street, Darlinghurst, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with an American or Canadian girl reader, age 17-18.

E. I. Gunn, 18, Sutherland Road, Armadale, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl Gemite, age 16, living anywhere in the United Kingdom.

J. J. Stafford, c/o Welch Perrin & Co., G.P.O., Box 219, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers.

Miss I. Owen, c/o Mrs. J. McNaughton, Martindale St., New South Wales, Australia, wishes to exchange postcards with readers living in Canada and Ireland.

J. Leary, 27, High Street, N. Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader living in England, age 13 or 14.

J. Woodward, 110, Liverpool Street, Hobart, Tasmania, wishes to correspond with a reader living in England, age 16.

S. J. Martin, Box 153, G.P.O., Adelaide, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Birmingham, England, age about 16.

Miss B. Mobbs, Bentinck Street, Ballina, Richmond River, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English boy and an English girl reader, age about 14 or 15.

J. Dan, River Street, Ballina, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with English girl readers, age about 17-18.

E. A. Webb, Box 135, G.P.O., Sydney, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, age 16-17, living in England.

T. Turner, Redbank, Annie Street, Torwood, Milton, Brisbane, Queensland, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Burton-on-Trent, England.

C. Cook, 339, Humfray Street, Ballarat, E. Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles.

L. J. Cloonan, Inverell, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader in England, age 16.

W. Saunders, c/o Morris, Fletcher, and Jensen, Solicitors, 43, Queen Street, Brisbane, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, about 15 years of age.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

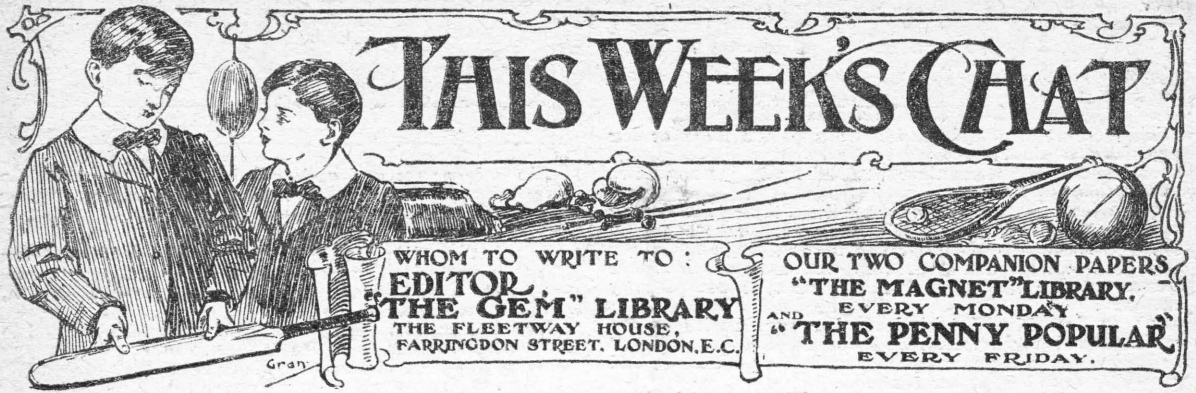
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 262.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,  
Order in Advance.

NEXT  
WEDNESDAY:

"AT CRIPS WITH THE GRAMMARIANS!"

## OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

**"AT GRIPS WITH THE GRAMMARIANS!"**

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The above title will tell my readers what to expect in our next splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's. The ancient college and the more modern Grammar School plunge whole-heartedly into a renewal of their friendly rivalry, and jape succeeds jape in quick succession. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, opens the ball with a brilliant impersonation of the new Form-master at the Grammar School, but Gordon Gay, Frank Monk & Co., are rather too wide awake for the swell of St. Jim's, who is compelled to retire in confusion!

However, after a daring invasion of St. Jim's on the part of Gordon Gay, Tom Merry plans a counter-stroke, which effectually retrieves the honour of St. Jim's.

**"AT GRIPS WITH THE GRAMMARIANS!"**

is full of fun and excitement from beginning to end, and can only enhance Martin Clifford's already brilliant reputation as a "top notch" school story writer.

**"Introduced to 'THE GEM' by our Headmaster."**

Though the prejudice which at one time undoubtedly existed—mainly through ignorance of the true nature of their contents—against "The Gem" Library and its companion papers has almost entirely died out, cases do crop up now and then when, according to the evidence of readers, headmasters of schools, parents, or other persons of authority, still continue to confuse our grand little story-papers with those very "penny dreadfuls" whose evil influence it is our special aim to stamp out.

Under the circumstances, therefore, I am naturally always glad to receive evidence of an opposite nature, borne out by the voluntary testimony of my readers.

A good example of this sort of welcome evidence is furnished by a letter which I recently received, as published below, where my correspondent and his friend actually made their first acquaintance with what is now their favourite paper on the recommendation of the headmaster of their school. This is what my Manchester chum writes:

"Manchester.

"Dear Editor,—I have been a reader of 'The Magnet' and 'Gem' for about two years, and I have never read a better boys' or girls' paper. Nearly all the lads in our class at school were readers of 'The Gem,' and more than once we got the cane for reading it during lessons. I was first introduced to 'The Gem' by our headmaster, who, while he was away on his holidays, had had a few copies given him. He read them, and was very amused at Tom Merry & Co.'s pranks, and when we went back to school after the holidays, he divided the copies between me and my chum.

"I think the Correspondence column is a very good idea, but some of the advertisers do not put their ages. Could you ask them to do this?—From

"A MANCHESTER CHUM (F. D.)."

Many thanks for your letter, F. D., which furnishes one more proof of the contention I have always made—namely, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, where the persons in authority mentioned above have *actually read* "The Gem" Library and its companion papers for themselves, they have to admit—and do so cheerfully, as a rule—that our bright little papers contain nothing that the most carping critic can take exception to. In regard to the matter

my Manchester chum mentions in the latter part of his letter, it is certainly more convenient for correspondence where advertisers in "The Gem" Free Correspondence Exchange give their ages, but I hardly think it is necessary to make this a hard-and-fast rule of the Exchange.

**Replies in Brief.**

Miss D. Hollis (B'ham). I am sorry I cannot insert your request. The only way you can get into correspondence with a boy reader of the "Gem," is to answer an advertisement which appears in the "Exchange" column.

J. Cunningham (Kilkeel).—The Correspondence Exchange is reserved entirely for the advertisements of Colonials. You can, however, open correspondence with one of these by writing to one of the addresses given each week in the Exchange Column.

W. A. Strapp (Sussex).—Mr. Sydney Drew regrets he is unable to supply you with the stories you asked him for.

**FIRST-CLASS EDUCATION FREE.**

How Clever Readers May Win a Free School and University Career.

(Continued from last week.)

The poor but hard-working lad who has sufficient brains and perseverance to win a scholarship or scholarships at one of the endowed schools mentioned last week, should not find it a difficult matter to go on to a first-class University career. He will start by competing for a scholarship at the Varsity college which he intends to enter. This "schol." will be worth anything from £30 to £100, but the usual one is about £60. As there are generally ten such, on an average, each year at each college, he has excellent chances of getting one.

If the youth gets such a scholarship, worth about £60, and also receives a £40 one, at least, from his school, he will have thus £100 per annum guaranteed. And then he comes into the purview of the County Council where he has resided. Nearly every such council in the land gives scholarships to help boys going to the Varsity, and this sum varies from £30 to £70. Let us suppose, again, that the boy gets an average one of £45. He will thus be sure of £145 annually whilst up at Oxford or Cambridge.

Now, how does that compare with his actual expenses there? It will cover all necessary expenses at most of the Cambridge colleges, and even Oxford—which may be reckoned about 10 per cent. dearer, as a rule—will have at least eight colleges where such a boy can pay all his way on just over £150 per year. So that the poorest lad may be thus assured of not feeling the pinch during his three years or more at the University.

Moreover, a clever scholar, once he gets to Oxford or Cambridge, can enter for special scholarships and exhibitions open to the men there, which will materially enhance his income yearly.

In addition to these, there are also outside agencies, such as the various London Companies, etc., which give useful scholarships and assistance to needy and deserving men, once they have got to the University. But I have not reckoned these as amongst the actual sources of income for the average clever poor lad, as these Companies usually give their money purely from influential and personal recommendations.

And then, of course, open to the Colonial or foreign boy, there are the Rhodes scholarships, which, being worth £300 a year, solve at once all the problems of living at Oxford.

THE EDITOR.