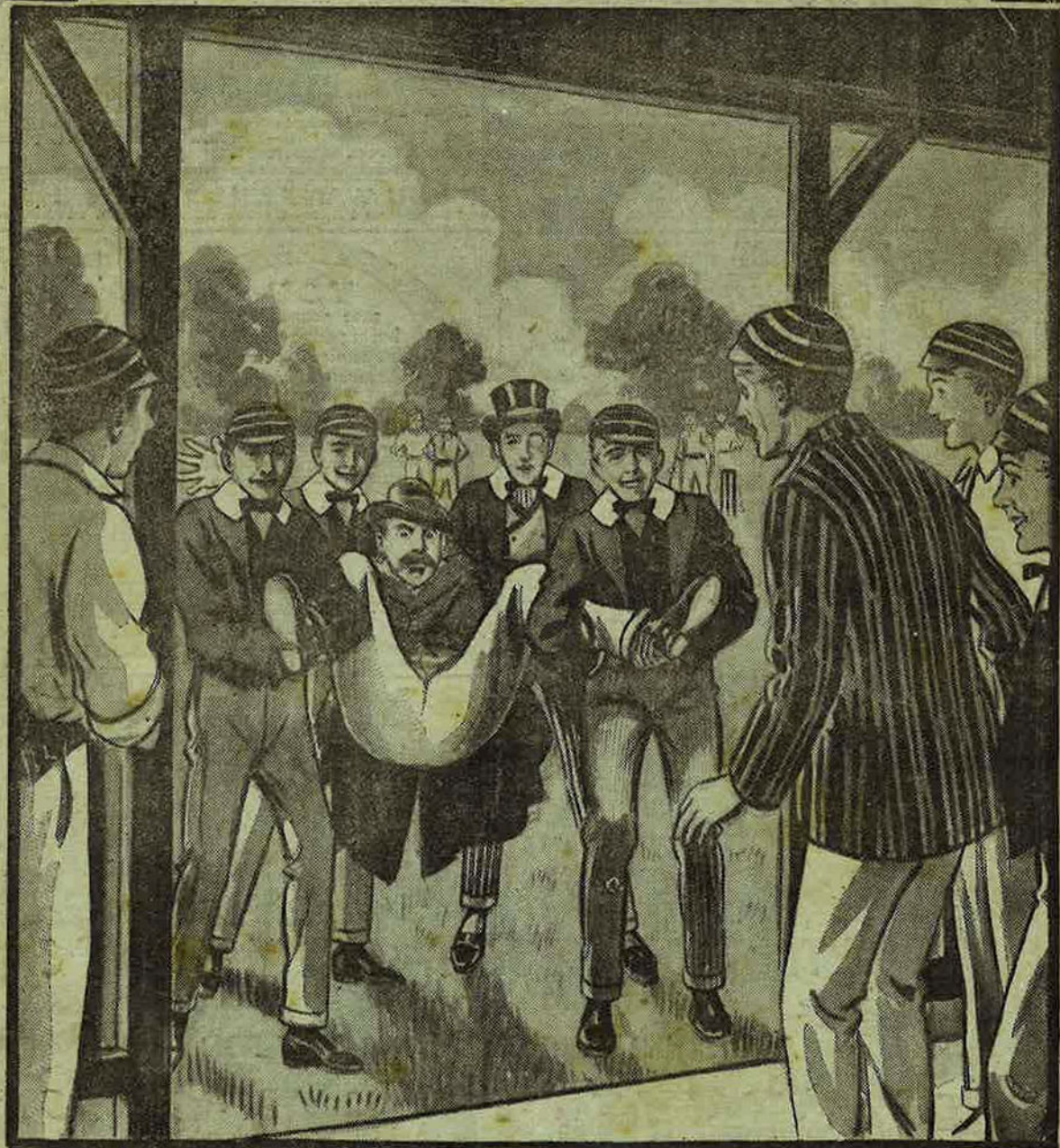


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Blake & Co. came panting up to the pavilion. The little sandy gentleman was struggling wildly in their grip, and they dumped him down in front of Tom Merry. "Heah you are, Tom Mewwy!" gasped D'Arcy. "We've bwrought him to you, deah boy!" (An amusing incident in the grand long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. in this issue.)

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TROUBLE FOR TOM!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Tom Merry & Co. halted as they passed down the steps of the School House. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his eyeglass and surveyed them in astonishment. "Bai Jove!" he said. "I am vewy glad to see you fellows wecognisin' the importance of one's personal attiah!" "Thanks awfully!" said the Terrible Three. (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER 1. The Very Best!

"SUNDAY toppers, I suppose?" said Monty Lowther.

"Certainly!"
"Best bags?"

"Of course!"

"And nice clean collars!" said Manners, with a sigh.

"And spotless ties!"

"And flowers in your jackets!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh crumbs!" said Lowther.

"Oh crikey!" said Manners.

They looked rebellious. Sunday toppers and their best bags, clean collars, and now neckties, seemed quite enough to Manners and Lowther. But to wear flowers in their jackets, that was the last straw.

But Tom Merry was firm. When Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell at St. Jim's, did anything, he did it thoroughly. He was doing it thoroughly now.

The Terrible Three were in the Shell dormitory in the School House. It was a bright and sunny spring afternoon—a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Outside, on the playing-fields, the first cricket practice of the season was beginning. But Tom Merry & Co. were not to urge the flying ball that afternoon. They were not to saunter by the gleaming, rushing Ryll, or to sip lemonade under the shady old trees outside the tuckshop. There was other and far more important business on hand.

That important business seemed to consist in dressing themselves in their very best clothes, and making themselves as neat and clean as new pins from top to toe. And the Terrible Three, who had a healthy schoolboy hatred for best

Next Wednesday:

"A DANGEROUS DOUBLE!" AND "PLAYING THE GAME!"

clothes, did not enjoy the process. But it had to be done, and they faced the dire necessity manfully.

Certainly they looked very alarming when they had finished dressing. There was not an old lady for miles around St. Jim's who would not have been delighted with their appearance. Only the flowers for their jackets were lacking—flowers did not grow in the Shell dormitory in the School House, of course. They had to be obtained elsewhere.

Monty Lowther surveyed himself in the glass as he held his bright and shining Sunday topper in his well-gloved hand.

"Oh crumbs!" he remarked once more. "Don't we look pretty!"

"We do—we does!" agreed Manners, with a grimace at his handsome reflection. "Where are we to get the flowers, Tommy?"

Tom Merry reflected.

"Must bone them in the Head's garden," he said. "The gardener may let us have some when we tell him we're meeting a lady visitor."

"And if he won't—"

"Then we shall have to help ourselves. Miss Fawcett likes to see dear little boys with dear little flowers in their dear little jackets," said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Look here," said Monty Lowther. "If we stand by you this afternoon when Miss Fawcett comes, you'll have to stick to me next week when my uncle comes to St. Jim's."

"Done!"

"And you're going to write my letter home this week, remember," said Manners.

"Agreed!"

"I suppose Miss Fawcett will be here soon?" said Monty Lowther, glancing at his watch. "If she takes a taxi-cab from Wayland, she can't be much later."

"Well, we're ready, all excepting the flowers."

"Blow the flowers!" murmured Manners.

"Sorry my watch is silver!" said Monty Lowther. "I might borrow Gussy's gold watch for the occasion. It will do us credit."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Never mind the watch. Come on! And mind, no larks! Don't give any of the fellows an excuse for biffing us."

"That would spoil the effect," grinned Monty Lowther, and he and Manners followed Tom Merry out of the dormitory.

They walked sedately, as became young gentlemen dressed in their very best. They made their way down the passage and down the stairs, and walked out of the School House. Many eyes were turned upon them as they went. The Terrible Three were not at all slovenly in their ways, but it was unusual to see them dressed to kill. Now, not the slightest speck of dust, not the faintest spot of ink, was to be detected on any of their immaculate persons.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form, was sunning himself on the steps of the School House. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was an elegant and fastidious youth, the glass of fashion and the pink of perfection in the Lower Forms. Even Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, was not so elegant as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But for once the swell of the School House was equalled, if not outdone, by the chums of the Shell. He started as he saw them, and raised his famous eyeglass to his eye, and surveyed them. The three Shell fellows halted, and submitted themselves to his inspection.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"Will we do?" asked Lowther politely.

"Yans, wathah! I am vewy glad to see you fellows recognis'n' at last the great importance of one's personal attah!" said D'Arcy approvingly. "You weally look quite respectable for once!"

"Thanks, awfully!"

"Praise from Gussy is praise indeed!" murmured Manners.

"But pway what's the little game, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus curiously. "Are you goin' to tea at the vicarage?"

"No fear! Not so bad as that!" said Lowther fervently; and his chums chuckled.

"My old governess is coming down to see me," explained Tom Merry—"Miss Priscilla Fawcett, you know. She likes to see us looking our best, and we like to please her. Lowther and Manners are standing by me like true pals."

"There isn't a greater test of friendship than standing by a chap when his relations come to see him," said Monty Lowther. "Tommy's going to stick to me when my uncle comes next week. One good turn deserves another."

"All we want is flowers for our jackets," said Tom Merry. "We're going to beg, borrow, or steal them. Gentlemen, now that we have passed the inspection of the arbiter of elegance, let's get on and interview the gardener."

"I wecommend orchids," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Orchids are wathah nobbaw. By the way, Figgins & Co. are pwoolin' wound in the quad, lookin' for twouble. Don't wun into them, or they may spoil your clobber. They are awful beasts, you know, in that way. Kerr knocked my beastly toppah off. I'd have mopped up the ground with him, only I was afraid of spoilin' my jacket."

"Thanks for the tip," said Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three descended the steps, keeping a wary eye open for Figgins & Co. of the New House.

For some time the old rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's had slept—or seemed to sleep. But it had broken out again, as if refreshed by its rest. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the famous Co. of the New House, were on the war-path again, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's dented topper bore evidence. If the New House Co. spotted the Terrible Three in their gorgeous raiment it was extremely probable that they would consider it their bounden duty to fall upon them, smite them hip and thigh, roll them in the dust, and sit on their Sunday toppers. So the chums of the Shell were very wary as they came out into the quad.

"There are the beasts—outside the tuckshop!" said Manners.

"Hook it!" said Tom.

They "hooked" it towards the Head's garden. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were disposing of cake and lemonade at the little table under the tree outside the school shop. They glanced at the Shell fellows, and seemed struck by their beautiful appearance, but they did not rise to the occasion. Tom Merry & Co. reached the Head's garden unpursued.

"Now for the giddy orchids!" said Manners.

They interviewed the gardener. A two-shilling piece changed hands, and three extremely handsome blossoms bloomed in the buttonholes of the Terrible Three. The celebrated Eric would have admired them very much as they walked away from the garden, feeling like lilies of the field, or Solomon in all his glory.

They directed their steps towards the school gates. There they were to await the arrival of Miss Fawcett. That kind old lady was to arrive by train from Huckleberry Heath, and she was expected to take a taxi-cab from Wayland Junction to St. Jim's. At the gates of the school Tom Merry & Co. would receive her in state. Tom Merry had a very sincere affection for his old governess, who had cared for him for more years than he could remember. It was really to please her that he had arrayed himself in his best, and therefore least comfortable, clothes, though he could not help regarding the matter in a somewhat humorous spirit. But his humorous spirits sank when the three were halfway to the gates.

"Oh, blow!" ejaculated Tom Merry suddenly.

Figgins & Co. had evidently finished their cake and lemonade, and regarded it as time for business. The three New House fellows sauntered into the path of the School House trio, and halted. They had pleasant grins on their faces.

"Here we are again!" remarked Figgins.

Kerr shaded his eyes with his hand, as if almost overcome by the splendour of the School House fellows. Fatty Wynn grinned a fat grin.

The Terrible Three reddened.

"Don't play the giddy goat now!" warned Tom Merry.

"My dear chap, we're simply overcome with admiration!" said Kerr. "They've been washing their faces, by Jove!"

"They've got on clean collars!" said Fatty Wynn.

"And nice shiny toppers!" said Figgins.

"May we look?" inquired Kerr.

"Look here—" began Lowther warmly.

"That's what we're doing. We can't help looking—only it dazzles us a bit. Nice flowers in our jackets, too!" continued Kerr admiringly. "Dear, dear! Have you been reading 'Eric; or, Bit by Bit'? Have you been mugging up the

G

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322

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Miss Fawcett placed one arm affectionately round Tom Merry's neck, and with the other hand she stemmed the flow of claret from his nose with her own handkerchief. "I am staunching your wound, my dear child!" she said gently. And the crowd of fellows who were standing round smiled. (See Chapter 2.)

"World of School"? Dear little boys! How your kind teachers would love you now!"

"Shut up, you silly ass!" roared Tom Merry. "We're going to—"

"Going to knock them in the Old Kent Road, I should think, judging by your clobber!" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"Ain't we looking?" demanded Kerr. "Of course, we won't come too near! Nasty common persons like us mustn't come between the wind and your nobility, as Shakespeare so feelingly puts it. Dear little lambs!"

"Sweet little pets!" murmured Figgins.

"It would be a shame to mop them up!" murmured Fatty Wynn, taking an orange from his pocket. "But I really think—"

"If you throw that orange, you fat dummy, I'll squash you!" roared Tom Merry, as the fat Fourth-Former took aim at his shining topper.

Whiz!
Squash!

The orange was decidedly ripe, and perhaps it had been softened a little by reposing in Fatty Wynn's tight pocket. It burst as it smote the topper. The topper flew off Tom Merry's head, with squashed orange clinging to it. That was too much for the captain of the Shell. In one second more, he was upon Fatty Wynn, regardless of his clothes. Fatty Wynn grinned as he closed with him, hooked him over, and they rolled to the ground.

About one second more was all that elapsed before Figgins

and Kerr and Lowther and Manners had closed in deadly strife.

"New House bounders—"

"School House duffers! Yah!"

"Take that!"

"Grooh! Take that!"

"Mop up the ground with the rotters!"

Bump! Bump!

Three pairs of struggling juniors rolled in the dust. The best clothes were in a fearful state by now. But the Terrible Priscilla Fawcett at that moment. They were only thinking Three were not thinking of their best clothes or of Miss of mopping up the ground with their old rivals of the New House. And they did it—the only unfortunate part being that they also were considerably mopped.

They did not hear the toot of a motor-horn in the road—they did not see a prim figure in a mid-Victorian bonnet that came in at the gates. They did not hear a feminine shriek. But a yell from the Kangaroo of the Shell, who was looking on with great enjoyment, warned Tom Merry.

"Here she is, Tommy!"

There was a cry of distress.

"Tom! Tommy! My darling Tommy!"

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "It's Miss Fawcett. Let go, Figgy, you ass, for goodness' sake!"

Three pairs of combatants separated as if by magic. Six dusty and dishevelled juniors jumped up to face the horrified gaze of Miss Fawcett.

Miss Priscilla had arrived. And after all their gorgeous preparations, that was how Tom Merry & Co. met her.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A DANGEROUS DOUBLE!"

CHAPTER 2.

Miss Priscilla is Shocked.

"TOMMY!"

Tom Merry panted. He had been a thing of beauty and a joy for ever only a few minutes before.

But what a change was there! The nice clean jacket was smothered with dust, and, moreover, ripped up the back. The nicely-brushed hair was wildly ruffled. The trousers were baggy and dusty. Three buttons had burst off the waistcoat. The collar looked like a limp rag, and hung by one stud. The flower was gone from the coat, and lay crumpled beside a dusty topper.

Manners and Lowther, in no better condition, blinked at Miss Fawcett. Figgins & Co., exchanging a horrified grin, beat a retreat. They felt that they were no longer wanted on the scene.

The Terrible Three had to stand their ground. Tom Merry put up his hand to his nose, from which a thin, red stream was flowing.

"Oh!" he said. That was all he could think of to say, for the moment.

Miss Priscilla Fawcett gazed at her beloved ward in horror. "Tommy!"

"Ahem!"

"My dearest child! You are wounded! Those dreadful young ruffians!" gasped Miss Fawcett. "Those—those dreadful hooligans! Oh, my dearest child!"

Tom Merry's flushed face turned redder. Miss Priscilla never could understand that her ward Tom Merry was growing up, and that he was quite a big fellow in the Shell Form, an athlete, a keen footballer and cricketer, and as healthy and fit as a boy possibly could be. To the kind old lady Tom Merry was still the dear little boy she had brought home from India at a tender age, and whom she had nursed through all his infantile illnesses. How she had seen him through the measles, and what anxiety she had suffered at that terrible time, was still a favourite and thrilling topic with Miss Fawcett. Tom Merry's health was the chief concern of her life now.

"My dear child, you are wounded! You are bleeding!"

"It's all right, dear!" murmured Tom Merry, exasperated by the chuckles Lowther and Manners were trying to suppress in vain. "I'm not hurt!"

"You are bleeding—your darling little nose—"

"Only a punch—it's all right!"

"Dearest Tommy, why will you fight with those dreadful rough boys?" said Miss Fawcett, almost tearfully. "Why do you not place yourself under the protection of your kind teachers?"

"It—it wasn't exactly a fight!" stammered Tom. "Only fun, you know."

"Fun! It seemed to me almost murderous!" said Miss Fawcett. "I shall ask the Head to punish that dreadful boy."

"No, you jolly well won't!" said Tom warmly. "It was only a House row, you know—we're always at it, and no harm done. Ow! Wharrer you doing?"

Miss Fawcett had placed one affectionate arm round his neck, and with the other hand she stemmed the flow of claret with her own handkerchief.

"I'm staunching your wound for you, my dear child."

"Ow!"

"Dearest Tommy, tell me the name of the wicked boy who assaulted you. I must complain to the Head about this."

"Rats! I—I mean—I beg your pardon—but that's all rot." "Dearest Tommy!" urged Miss Priscilla. "You know how delicate you are! Your health causes me great anxiety. You might suffer seriously from these dreadful fights. You must tell me the wretched boy's name."

Fortunately, in the excitement and horror of the moment, Miss Fawcett had not recognised Figgins & Co.

A circle of fellows gathered round, watching Tom Merry and his old governess with great interest—and smiling.

Tom Merry's face was crimson.

He was very fond of Miss Priscilla, and he was very grateful for her action and her unending kindness towards him. But to be hugged and consoled with like a small child, in the open quad, amid a crowd of grinning fellows, was a fearful ordeal for the captain of the Shell.

Even Manners and Lowther, loyal as they were to their chum, could not help grinning.

From the back of the crowd came laughter and humorous remarks, which Miss Fawcett did not heed or even hear. But Tom Merry both heard and heeded them.

"The effusion of blood has abated," said Miss Fawcett, with great relief. "But you must see a doctor, Tommy!"

"But first tell me the name of that dreadful ruffian who was assaulting you. I insist upon it, Tommy darling!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Your little friends have also been savagely assaulted," said Miss Fawcett, with a commiserating glance at Manners and Lowther, who almost choked. "I am sure one of them will tell me the name of that wicked boy, so that I can inform Dr. Holmes."

"Shurrup, you chaps!" murmured Tom Merry.

"My dear madam," said Monty Lowther, in his blandest tone, "if you really insist upon knowing the name of the delinquent—"

"Indeed—indeed, I do!"

"Shurrup, Monty, you ass!"

"Thomas, my young friend, I am bound to give Miss Fawcett a name, if she insists upon hearing one," said Lowther solemnly. "I am surprised at you, Thomas."

"You—you ass—"

"What is the name, my dear little boy?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"I was just thinking of the name," said Lowther. "Lemme see. Fitzmuggins—Christian name, Cadwalader. There is no harm in Miss Fawcett telling the Head that you have been assaulted by Calwalader Fitzmuggins, Tom."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will remember that name," said Miss Fawcett unsuspectingly. "I shall certainly report it to the Head. What Form does the wretched boy belong to?"

"The—er—the Seventh!" said Lowther.

"Dear me!" murmured Miss Fawcett, in surprise. "I did not know there was a Seventh Form here—or, indeed, at any school. I understood that the Sixth was the highest Form!"

"Ahem!"

"However, I shall remember—Cadwalader Fitzmuggins, of the Seventh Form!" said the good old lady. "I shall certainly report his dreadful conduct to the Head!"

There was a yell of laughter from the listening fellows. Tom Merry could not help grinning. He wondered what the Head would think when he heard that remarkable name of a boy belonging to a non-existent Form.

"Now, you must see a doctor, my darling," said Miss Fawcett. "Come in and make yourself tidy, and I will take you to see Dr. Short!"

"B-b-but—"

"Now, don't raise any objections, Tommy dear. Your health is the first consideration," said Miss Fawcett firmly. "While you are making yourself clean and tidy I will see the Head, and report this dreadful affair to him. Come with me, dear!"

Tom Merry gave his chums a glance of hopeless dismay, and submitted to be led away towards the School House.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Gore of the Shell. "This beats the band! Dear Tommy looks as if he were enjoying himself—I don't think!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a nice old relation to drop on a chap!" grinned Levison of the Fourth. "Where does she live? Mummy Department in the British Museum, I suppose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Levison," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sternly, "I do not approve of speakin' of an old lady disrespectfully!"

"Go hon!" said Levison.

"I wegard it as caddish!"

"Rats! The old girl—"

"If you repeat your disrespectful remarks, Levison, I shall hit you!" said Arthur Augustus, his eye gleaming behind his monocle.

And as Arthur Augustus was a great fighting-man, when he could forget the importance of taking care of his clothes, Levison judged it better to say no more.

Tom Merry had disappeared into the School House with Miss Priscilla. Manners and Lowther followed him in, and found him in the Shell dormitory, bathing his nose. Miss Priscilla had gone to see the Head.

"Dearest Tommy, how does your little nose feel?" asked Lowther sympathetically.

Tom Merry glared over a wet sponge at his chum.

"You silly chump—"

"Hush! Don't use such dreadful expressions, my little duck!" said Lowther, in a shocked tone. "Your pretty little lips should not form such words! Yow—ow!"

The wet sponge flew through the air, and caught Monty Lowther under the nose. He roared.

"You—you fathead! Ow!"

"If you want the basin after it, you've only got to go on being funny!" said Tom Merry sulphurously.

ANSWERS

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"Grooogh!"

Monty Lowther decided to bathe a darkened eye instead of being funny any more.

"Where's Miss Fawcett?" asked Manners.

"Gone to see the Head!" groaned Tom Merry.

"And then you're going to the doctor?"

"Ow! I suppose so. I—I can't refuse, you know," said Tom ruefully. "Miss Fawcett is the kindest old soul in the world, and I wouldn't hurt her for anything! But—but it is horrid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at, you ass!"

"Never mind, Tommy. We'll come with you, and see the doctor, too," said Manners consolingly. "Buck up!"

"Look here, that isn't in the programme," said Lowther.

"You'll come!" said Tom warmly. "If you don't, I jolly well sha'n't stay with you when your uncle comes next week!"

"Oh, all right!" groaned Lowther. "I'm on! Next time your governess is coming to see you, for goodness' sake send her a telegram to say you're ill, or dead, or something! The fellows are all cackling like giddy hyenas!"

"Oh, let 'em cackle!" growled Tom.

And he resumed bathing his injured nose.

CHAPTER 3.

A Report to the Head.

DR. HOLMES rose to meet Miss Priscilla Fawcett as she was shown into his study. Toby, the page, who conducted her there, was suppressing a strong desire to grin. Toby knew how welcome Miss Fawcett's visits were to the Head of St. Jim's. Dr. Holmes had a great regard and esteem for the kind old lady; but there was no doubt that her visits brought a worried look to his scholastic brow.

Her concern for Tommy's health was quite unfounded. Tom Merry was probably the healthiest boy in the school. But there was no convincing her upon that point. And the Head had listened, with inward groans, to more than one account of that thrilling episode of the measles. But he greeted the good old soul with courtly politeness.

Miss Fawcett was in a state of great agitation. She accepted the chair the Head proffered, and sat down and fanned herself.

"I have received a great shock, Dr. Holmes!"

"Dear me! I trust you found your ward quite well, madam?" said the Head, with a lingering glance at the papers on his table.

His time was valuable.

"Far from it!" said Miss Fawcett. "I found him suffering from a fearful wound, inflicted by a rough boy upon his nose!"

"Bless my soul!"

"He was bleeding, and certainly suffering considerably, though he tried to make light of it, like the dear, brave child he is!" said Miss Priscilla. "I dislike the idea of punishment being inflicted upon children, Dr. Holmes, but I wish to ask you to inflict some slight correction upon the ruffianly boy who has assaulted my little one!"

"Yes, madam. Do you know his name?"

As a matter of fact, the Head had seen the scuffle from his study window, and he was perfectly aware that there was no damage done.

"Yes, fortunately I learned his name."

The Head frowned a little.

"You do not mean to tell me that Merry gave you the boy's name, and wished you to complain to me!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no; my darling boy refused to give me the name, from a mistaken sense of loyalty," said Miss Priscilla. "I obtained the name from another lad. The name is Fitzmuggins—"

"What!"

"Cadwalader Fitzmuggins, of the Seventh Form."

"The—the what?"

"The Seventh Form, Dr. Holmes."

Dr. Holmes passed his hand across his mouth to conceal a smile. It was only too clear that Miss Priscilla's informant had been a humorist.

"Will you care that dreadful boy, sir?"

"If that boy can be found, madam, I will certainly cane him," said the Head, considering that a very safe promise to make.

"Thank you so much. It will not be necessary to cane him very severely, perhaps," added Miss Fawcett, relenting somewhat. "Perhaps a few kind and gentle words would open his eyes to the enormity of his conduct, and bring about a change in his character."

"Perhaps," assented the Head.

"I am about to take Tommy to visit Dr. Short in the village. I am very anxious about his health, especially after this ferocious attack. You have no objection?"

"None whatever, madam."

"I have many times been anxious about Tommy's health. Ever since he had the measles—"

"Yes, yes!"

"At that time—that time of dreadful anxiety, I—"

"Perhaps it would be as well to take Merry to the medical man at once, madam," the Head suggested. "There is no need to lose time."

"How very kind and thoughtful you are, Dr. Holmes!" said Miss Fawcett, rising. "You are right—quite right!"

"I trust you will find all well, madam."

"I am very nervous about Tommy," said Miss Fawcett, as the Head escorted her to the door and opened it. "At the time he had the measles—"

"Toby, tell Master Merry that he is wanted!"

"Yessir!"

"At the time of the measles—"

There was no escape for the Head. Tom Merry had not come down from the dormitory yet. Standing in the draught in the open doorway, Dr. Holmes was given a full and thrilling account of Tom Merry's attack of the measles. He bore it like a Trojan. But he had never been so glad to see anybody in his life as he was to see the Terrible Three coming down the passage at last.

"Here is your ward, madam!" said the Head.

And he shook hands with Miss Fawcett and escaped into his study.

Miss Fawcett bore down upon the chums of the Shell.

"You look much better already, dearest Tommy!" she said affectionately.

"Yes, dear. And—and don't you think it really won't be necessary for me to see the doctor, after all?" asked Tom meekly.

Miss Priscilla shook her head.

"By no means. Please come with me, dear Tommy."

Tom Merry submitted to his fate. The Terrible Three walked out of the School House with Miss Priscilla. In the quadrangle, grinning glances followed them on all sides. Gore of the Shell came up and raised his cap to Miss Fawcett. Gore had screwed up his face into a solemn and serious expression with some difficulty.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Fawcett!"

"Good-afternoon, little boy!"

Gore made a grimace. He did not exactly like being addressed as a little boy.

"You will excuse my speaking," he said, "but we're rather anxious about Tom. I'm in his Form, you know, and we sleep in the same dormitory. I've often lain awake at nights thinking about Tommy's health."

Tom Merry gave Gore a glance that was almost homicidal. Miss Fawcett regarded him with affectionate interest.

"What a dear, kind little boy!" she exclaimed. "How pleasant for you to have such good, sympathetic schoolmates, my dear Tommy!"

"We're all rather worried about his health," went on Gore calmly. "When he coughs in the night it makes some of us cry, really."

"Coughs in the night!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla in great alarm. "Oh, my darling child, you have never told me of your cough!"

"I haven't got a cough!" roared Tommy.

"Dearest Tommy—"

"He won't let on to you, ma'am, because he doesn't want to frighten you about it," said Gore cheerfully. "He said to me only the other day: 'Georgie'—my name's Georgie, you know, but Tommy always calls me Georgie, and I always call him Tommy—'Georgie, I must keep this dark, or Miss Jawssett will be worried.'"

"Fawcett. You mean Fawcett."

"Yes, my mistake. But I thought it my duty to tell you, ma'am," said Gore. "When he coughs, it's simply heart-rending. I said to him: 'Dearest Tommy, it's your duty to tell Miss Corsett—'"

"Fawcett!"

"Yes, Fawcett. So I've told you, ma'am," said Gore. "And then the way he suffers from cold feet—"

"My poor, suffering darling!"

"I don't suffer from cold feet!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"The silly ass is only rotting! Come on!"

"And pains in the back!" went on Gore deliberately. "Sometimes I rub his back for him of a night with cycle-oil—I mean, with embrocation. He bears it like a martyr."

"Oh, Tommy, you have never told me!" said Miss Priscilla reproachfully.

"It isn't true!" yelled Tom.

"And then the tired feeling he suffers from, especially when it's time to get up in the morning," said Gore. "I

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think that's very serious. And the pains in his toes—severe and sudden pains—oh—ow—groo—yarooooop!"

Tom Merry's patience was exhausted. He hit out, and Gore rolled along the ground, suffering from severe and sudden pains himself. The pains were in Gore's nose.

"Tommy!" screamed Miss Fawcett.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry; and he grabbed Miss Priscilla's arm, and piloted her hurriedly across the quadrangle.

Gore sat up, with his hand to his nose, and gasped. There was a roar of laughter from the fellows who had been enjoying the scene. Gore had been very funny indeed, but the end of the little joke seemed the funniest part to the onlookers. But the fun of it was quite lost upon George Gore. The things he said, as he sat and held his nose, indicated a total absence of a sense of humour.

CHAPTER 4.

The Fortune-teller.

TOM MERRY & CO. were glad enough to get outside the gates of St. Jim's with Miss Fawcett.

The old lady was quite in a flutter of anxiety and astonishment, after witnessing that outbreak on the part of her dear Tommy. She could only attribute it to a state of nervous tension, brought about by chronic ill-health, and she was more anxious than ever that her dear Tommy should see the medical gentleman at once.

Miss Fawcett and the juniors walked down the lane in the spring sunshine. Halfway to the village they passed a gipsy encampment in an adjoining field. Two caravans stood there, and bony horses were cropping the grass, and dirty children played among the vans and horses. A brown-faced old woman was sitting on the stile, evidently on the watch for passing pedestrians. Her dark face, with its heavy black brows, looked out from under a red handkerchief tied about her hair. She slipped from the stile and came into the road as Miss Fawcett came by.

"Cross my palm with silver, pretty lady!" she began in a whining voice. "I can tell your fortune."

Miss Priscilla stopped.

There was a vein of superstition in the kind old lady, and in India she had seen wonderful things performed by the native fakirs. She did not want her own fortune told, but she would have been pleased to be enlightened as to Tom Merry's prospects, especially as regarded his health.

She felt in her purse for a piece of silver, and placed it in the gipsy's dusky and not over-clean palm.

"She shall tell your fortune, Tommy dearest," said Miss Fawcett. "Of course, I—I do not exactly believe in such things, but—but I should like to have your fortune told. It may help to guide me in taking care of your health."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.

"My dearest Tommy—"

"I can tell the past and the future," said the gipsy, fixing her glittering black eyes upon Tom. "If the young gentleman crosses my palm with silver—"

"My governess has done that already!" said Tom bluntly. As Miss Fawcett had given the old gipsy a two-shilling piece, and as he knew that fortune-telling was all humbug, he considered that the transaction had been quite well enough paid for.

"The young gentleman must cross my palm with silver himself, if I am able to tell his fortune," said the gipsy. The two-shilling piece had already disappeared into some recess of her rags.

"Please do so, Tommy."

"But it's all silly rot!" said Tom uneasily. He did not by any means relish the idea of having his fortune told by one who knew no more about it than he did himself. It was quite possible that the old gipsy would frighten Miss Fawcett with a prediction of some disaster or other, as fortune-tellers sometimes do.

"Yes; let's get on!" murmured Manners.

But Miss Fawcett was firm.

"You know I am very anxious about your health, Tommy, and you know you run dreadful risks playing rough games like cricket and football!" she said reproachfully. "Suppose this good person were able to warn you that you will have accidents if you play cricket this summer, then you will be able to avoid that rough game."

"I jolly well shouldn't!" said Tom.

"But if it is foretold—"

"It's all piffle! I don't believe a word of it!"

The gipsy's eyes glittered.

Although she was, of course, perfectly aware that her pretended art was humbug from beginning to end, she did not like that opinion expressed by others. She had already made up her mind that, if she did tell Tom Merry's fortune, it would not be a very cheering one.

"Never mind, let her tell your fortune, to please me," said Miss Priscilla.

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"Oh, all right!" said Tommy resignedly. "Of course, it's all piffle. But I don't mind if you want me to."

"Cross my palm with silver," said the gipsy.

Tom Merry grunted. As the whole thing was a swindle, he thought it had gone far enough. He had a threepenny-piece in his pocket, however, and he grinned as he handed it to the gipsy, and the black eyes glittered again.

"Give me your hand, young gentleman."

Tom Merry unwillingly extended his hand.

The gipsy took it and bent her head over it, her black eyes gleaming with malice. She made a solemn show of examining the lines in the palm.

Then she shook her head sorrowfully. Miss Priscilla watched her with growing alarm.

"Illness—danger—death!" murmured the gipsy.

"Oh dear!" said Miss Fawcett.

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.

"Piffle!" remarked Lowther. "Let's get on."

Tom Merry drew his hand away.

"No, no! Let her finish!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett in an agitated tone. "I must know the particulars as much as possible in order that the danger may be guarded against."

"But really—"

"Give her your hand, Tommy darling."

Tom yielded his hand again to the hard, horny, dirty fingers, the touch of which was by no means pleasant.

"Now, what do you read, my good woman?" asked Miss Fawcett anxiously.

"Disaster—danger—death!" crooned the gipsy spitefully. "There is illness—many illnesses—long and painful."

"Oh dear!"

"It's all bosh!" said Tommy angrily.

"And a sudden accident—ah, I see a round red ball—I see a form stretched on the earth, stiff and stark."

"Good gracious!"

"Rats!"

"That must be a cricket accident!" said Miss Fawcett, in great distress. "You must be careful not to go near a cricket-field this season, Tommy dear."

Tom Merry snorted.

"I see a great unknown danger," pursued the gipsy; "a dark peril that threatens the young gentleman. A stranger from across the sea—"

"I've heard that rot before!" remarked Lowther.

"A dark man—"

"Same old dark man!" murmured Lowther.

"Constant danger threatening the young gentleman," pursued the gipsy. "Only by watchfulness can the danger be escaped. The line of life is broken. It will be death or a narrow escape."

"My darling boy!"

"Give her a couple of bob, and have a better one, Tom," suggested Lowther.

"Shall I tell your fortunes, young gentlemen? Cross my palm with silver—"

"No fear!" said Manners promptly. "Not unless you make me a millionaire and a county cricketer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The gipsy hobbled back to the stile.

Miss Priscilla Fawcett's face was deeply crowded with anxiety. All her fears for the safety of her ward were magnified now. The illnesses she had feared—they were foretold by the gipsy now. And the unknown danger—the dark man—the stranger from across the sea? The good old lady was in a state of great mental distress as she walked on slowly towards the village with the juniors.

Tom Merry was feeling exasperated. The miserable future predicted for him did not trouble him in the least, as he had no belief whatever in the gipsy's powers of reading the future. But the distress in his old governess's face worried him—and he was worried, too, at the thought that he was going to be looked after now, to avoid all those imaginary dangers.

"It's all silly rot, you know, dear!" he assured Miss Priscilla.

Miss Priscilla shook her head.

"There is no telling, Tommy. What does Shakespeare say? There are more things in something-or-other than are dreamt of in your what-d'ye-call-it? I have often thought that those lines are very true," said Miss Fawcett seriously. "I fear that the future is very dark for you, my dearest child!"

"Oh, it's all piffle!"

"But I shall be here to guard you!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "From this moment I will devote all my thought and care and attention to your safety, my dear Tommy!"

Tom Merry groaned.

"You shall always be my first thought! I will take every precaution! You shall not play rough games, or expose yourself to any risk! Careful eyes shall watch over you, and if this unknown danger comes, we may escape it."

"My hat!"

Tom Merry was quite glad when they arrived at the village doctor's. He hoped that by the time that visit was over Miss Fawcett would have forgotten about the gipsy and her predictions. But he was destined to be disappointed.

CHAPTER 5.

Looking After Tom Merry.

DR. SHORT did not waste very much time over Tom Merry. He knew Miss Fawcett very well. When they left the doctor's Miss Fawcett shook her head sorrowfully. The medical gentleman's failure to find anything wrong with Tommy somewhat shook her faith in the wisdom of the medical profession generally.

Miss Priscilla was very silent and thoughtful as they walked back to the school.

The gipsy's prediction was weighing heavily upon her mind.

Tom Merry did not feel very cheerful.

The prospect of being watched over and looked after to an unlimited extent was not a cheering one.

Manners and Lowther were sympathetic, but they could not help grinning a little.

"An unknown danger—a dark man!" Miss Priscilla murmured several times. "My dearest Tommy, we must be very, very careful!"

Tom Merry grunted.

Respect for the kind old lady forbade him to express too plainly his opinion that her belief in the gipsy's fortune-telling powers was absurd. Besides, Miss Priscilla would not have been influenced by his opinion, anyway. She was worried and disturbed by the dark prospect threatening her beloved ward. It was only too clear that she was thinking out plans for safeguarding him from all sorts of imaginary dangers.

When they reached the school Miss Priscilla asked to see the Head again. The Terrible Three remained standing in the hall, Tom Merry looking the picture of dismay.

"Well, this takes the cake!" he observed at last. "What the dickens am I going to do? She is going to speak to the Head about it."

"Nice for the Head!" murmured Monty Lowther. "He must be—ahem!—delighted with these confidential chats."

And Manners chuckled.

That was, indeed, Miss Fawcett's intention. Dr. Holmes was improving the shining hour that afternoon by working upon the great, new edition of *Æschylus*, which occupied all his leisure moments, and which was to make a great sensation in the scholastic world some day. He groaned inwardly when Miss Priscilla was announced for the second time. But the distress in her face touched him.

"Surely the doctor—" he began.

"I am afraid Dr. Short does not fully understand my ward's constitution!" said Miss Priscilla. "He can find absolutely nothing the matter with him!"

The Head smiled.

"In that case, my dear madam, you may have every confidence. Dr. Short is a most capable man."

"It is not only that," said Miss Fawcett, sinking into a chair. "My dear boy is threatened with a great danger!"

"Danger?" repeated the Head, puzzled.

"Yes! An unknown danger threatens him—"

"Dear me! If the danger is unknown, how can you possibly be aware that it threatens him, my dear Miss Fawcett?"

"It has been foretold by a gipsy."

"Oh!"

"I have great faith in such things," said Miss Priscilla. "I remember that in India I often found that the fakirs were able to foretell happenings in the future."

"Surely, my dear lady, it is difficult to believe such things!"

"But I can give instances, Dr. Holmes! On one occasion, I remember that my purse was stolen, and a fakir was able to describe the exact spot where it was hidden. I had offered a very liberal reward."

The Head smiled again.

"My dear Miss Fawcett—"

"I hope I am not taking up your time, Dr. Holmes, and I should be sorry to cause you any trouble, as you are probably a very busy man," said the good lady. "But I am very anxious about my ward. The gipsy has foretold misfortune, danger, and accidents on the cricket field."

"Dear me!"

"May I ask you, therefore, that Tommy may be very specially looked after? Will you see that he does not play cricket this season, and does not go outside the school gates? I cannot think of any other precautions at present, but if I do I will write to you. I am sure you will respect my wishes."

Dr. Holmes looked very grave. He was somewhat inclined

to laugh at the absurd superstition of the old lady; but it was evidently a very serious matter with Miss Priscilla, and he looked grave instead.

"But that will be somewhat hard upon the boy, Miss Fawcett," he said. "Of course, if you make this request, I shall regard your wishes, as he is your ward. But it will be a great disappointment to him not to play cricket."

"Better than a terrible accident, sir!"

"And to be confined within gates will be very unpleasant for him."

"But to avoid a dreadful danger, Dr. Holmes, a little restriction of liberty is better than falling into a fearful danger!"

"Ahem! Yes; but if you are resolved upon this—"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then I shall do as you wish, madam, certainly."

"I shall think over what other precautions can be taken," said Miss Priscilla. "I think that perhaps it may be best to employ a private detective to watch over his safety. Could you possibly accommodate such a person in the school, Dr. Holmes? Of course, I am prepared to defray all expenses."

"Bless my soul! I—I really think that is quite unnecessary, madam!" stammered the Head. "I do really think that that is going too far!"

"But in so dreadfully serious a matter, sir?"

"Ahem!"

"However, I will consider further upon that point, and write to you," said Miss Priscilla.

"Very well."

"I shall go away to-day with a heavy heart," said Miss Fawcett, rising. "In case of anything happening to my ward, you will, of course, communicate with me at once by telegraph?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"You will also keep him under your special attention, I hope?"

"Ahem!"

"And perhaps you might speak to all the masters on the subject, so that they can take a special interest in him and his health," said Miss Priscilla.

Dr. Holmes tried hard not to smile.

"And the elder boys, who are in authority—consults, you call them, I think—some human title—"

"The prefects?" suggested the Head.

"Yes—the prefects. Perhaps you could call them all together, and explain to them that dear Tommy requires very special care."

The Head pictured to himself such a prefects' meeting for such a purpose, and he almost gasped at the idea.

"I—I assure you, madam, that—that everything shall be done that is necessary for your ward's well-being," he said faintly.

"Thank you so much, Dr. Holmes! I was sure that I could depend upon your kindness," said Miss Priscilla gratefully.

And she took her leave of the Head. Tom Merry was touched by her troubled look when she rejoined him, and he suppressed his intense exasperation, with a manful effort.

"You're going to have tea in the study?" he asked.

"Yes, my dear."

And Miss Priscilla was escorted to the study in the Shell passage, and Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, came along to tea. But it was not the usually merry meal Miss Priscilla was grave and pre-occupied. Her talk ran upon Tom Merry's supposed danger, and she exhorted the Fourth-formers to help in keeping a watchful eye upon him. Blake & Co., astonished as they were by the peculiar request, promised that they would.

"Thank you so much, my dear little boys!" said Miss Priscilla. "I have asked the Head to guard you, Tommy."

"My hat!" said Tommy.

"You will not play cricket—"

"What!"

"Or cycle—"

"Eh?"

"Or go outside the school gates—"

"Great Scott!"

"And I am going to engage a private detective to look after you—"

"Holy smoke!"

"And perhaps this dreadful danger may be escaped," said Miss Priscilla.

Tom Merry said no more. Words failed him. He was plunged into the deepest depression of spirits during the remainder of the teatime, and his face was far from being as sunny as usual when he walked to the station with Miss Fawcett to see her off.

When he came back to the school he found the Co. waiting for him, smiling.

Tom Merry did not smile. He did not feel like smiling. He glared.

"Well, what's the joke?" he demanded gruffly.

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"You are," said Blake cheerfully. "Oh, Tommy!"
"Poor old Tommay!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"We're going to watch over you like—like the giddy apple of our eye!" grinned Digby.

"Would you like me to set Towser to keep guard over you?" asked Herries kindly.

"We'll get a special bandbox to keep him in," suggested Monty Lowther. "This Side Up, With Care, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's long-pent-up exasperation broke out at last. He charged at the grinning juniors, hitting out right and left. They scattered before the charge, still laughing like hyenas, and Tom Merry strode away to his study in a state of great wrath.

CHAPTER 6.

Something for Tommy.

TOM MERRY did not look cheerful the next day. Football was over at St. Jim's, and the summer game was about to begin, and the fellows were already very keen on cricket practice.

Tom Merry, as captain of the junior eleven, was naturally quite as keen as the rest. But cricket was barred for him.

The Head had called him into his study, briefly told him of his governess's wishes, and informed him that for the present he was not to share in the games, or to go outside the school bounds.

There was no help for it.

Tom was intensely exasperated, but he could only obey the Head's orders. Indeed, the Head had mentioned the matter to Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Kildare was to see to it that Dr. Holmes's orders were carried out.

When the juniors went down to cricket practice after lessons that day, Tom Merry went with them, but not to play.

He stood leaning moodily on the pavilion wall, while the other fellows were at practice, watching them.

If this kind of thing continued, he would have to resign his place as captain of the junior eleven, and that would be a heavy blow. Jack Blake was quite willing to take it on, as he kindly explained; but that was no comfort to Tom Merry. He wanted to captain the eleven, and he wanted to play cricket. In spite of his deep affection for his old governess, and his gratitude to her for her many kindnesses, for once he was almost angry with Miss Priscilla.

It was really too bad.

He watched the cricketers at practice with a moody brow, and their condolences afterwards did not console him—they rather added to his exasperation.

He walked back to the School House with Manners and Lowther and Kangaroo, the latter three being in their flannels, and ruddy and cheery from the cricket-field.

"Poor old Tommy!" said Manners sympathetically. "I know this is rotten for you!"

"Oh, don't call me poor old Tommy, or I shall punch your head!" growled Tom crossly. "I'm getting fed up with it!"

"What about the cycle spin we're going to have on Saturday?" asked Lowther. "Won't you be able to come, Tom?"

Tom snorted.

"Of course I can't come! I'm gated!"

"It's rotten!"

"Oh, rotten isn't the word. I don't know how I'm going to stand it," said Tom miserably. "I feel fed up, right up to the chin."

"It's all kindness, you know," grinned Kangaroo. "Miss Priscilla is like Hamlet—'I must be cruel, only to be kind,'—you know."

"Oh, rats!"

"Thus bad begins, but worse remains behind," said Lowther, finishing the quotation. "There's the private detective to come yet. I wonder what he'll be like?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" growled Tom.

"There's a parcel for you at Taggles's lodge, Merry," said Levison of the Fourth, meeting the chums of the Shell as they came up to the School House. "Looks like a consignment of tuck."

Levison's manner was unusually agreeable. Any fellow who received a hamper from home was sure of receiving at the same time polite attentions from Levison of the Fourth.

"Oh, good!" said Monty Lowther. "Just in time for tea, too!"

"We'll come and help you open it, Tommy!" said Kangaroo generously.

Tom Merry brightened a little.

"Good! Come on!" he said.

And they directed their steps towards the porter's lodge, Levison of the Fourth accompanying them. They found Fatty Wynn of the New House outside Taggles's lodge, and his look showed that he was waiting for them. Fatty Wynn had almost an instinct for hampers. He grinned most agreeably at Tom Merry, having apparently forgotten the trouble of the previous day.

"Big parcel for you, old chap!" he said.

Tom Merry looked at him.

"Old chap—ch?" he remarked. "You were punching my nose yesterday afternoon. Look at it now!"

"Well, look at my eye, if you come to that," said Fatty Wynn agreeably. "No malice borne for a House row, I suppose? We were bound to rag you, when you were dressed up to the nines, you know."

"Good! And we're bound to rag you, though you're not dressed up to the nines," said Tom Merry. "Bump him!"

"Here, I say! Hold on—"

"We're holding on, ain't we?" chuckled Monty Lowther, catching Fatty Wynn's plump ear.

"Yow-ow! Cheeso it! I say—"

Bump!

"Yah!" roared Fatty Wynn, as he descended upon the ground. "I say—Yah! Leggo! Yo-op!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him again!" said Tom Merry. "If I can't play cricket it's some satisfaction to bump somebody. Give him another!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bump!

Fatty Wynn wriggled out of the hands of the School House juniors and fled.

Tom Merry & Co. entered the porter's lodge. A large and carefully-wrapped parcel was lying on Taggles's table, addressed to Tom Merry. Tom recognised the handwriting of Miss Fawcett.

"It's from my guardian," he said.

"Good old soul!" said Manners. "She's a good sort! Rather too strong on medicine and looking after a chap; but her heart's in the right place."

"Yes, rather!" said Levison. "Some of her home-made jam, perhaps. I suppose you'll hand out a jar or two round, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry was silent.

A dreadful suspicion had flashed into his mind as he looked at the parcel.

The juniors had concluded, as a matter of course, that it contained tuck; but Tom Merry had his doubts.

Miss Priscilla had told him before she left that she would send him several things for his health, and he wondered whether those things for his health were contained in the parcel.

"Not going to keep the whole whack for yourself, I suppose?" demanded Levison, mistaking Tom's silence.

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, I call you a greedy rotter if you do!" said Levison warmly. "If it's the home-made jam, it's ripping! I've had some before."

"Some that you boned out of our study?" growled Manners.

Levison did not appear to hear the remark.

"Open it, Merry!" he urged. "Let's have a look, anyway!"

"Oh, bosh! There's no hurry!"

If the parcel contained medicine, ointment, pills, and so forth, Tom Merry did not want to open it in the presence of Levison of the Fourth. He did not want to have the matter made a standing joke in the School House.

"Well, I think—," began Levison.

"Never mind what you think!" said Tom brusquely. "You clear off!"

"What!"

"Clear off! Don't you understand?"

Levison glared.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Outside!" said Monty Lowther, pushing Levison towards the doorway. "You are too numerous. Scat!"

"You rotters—"

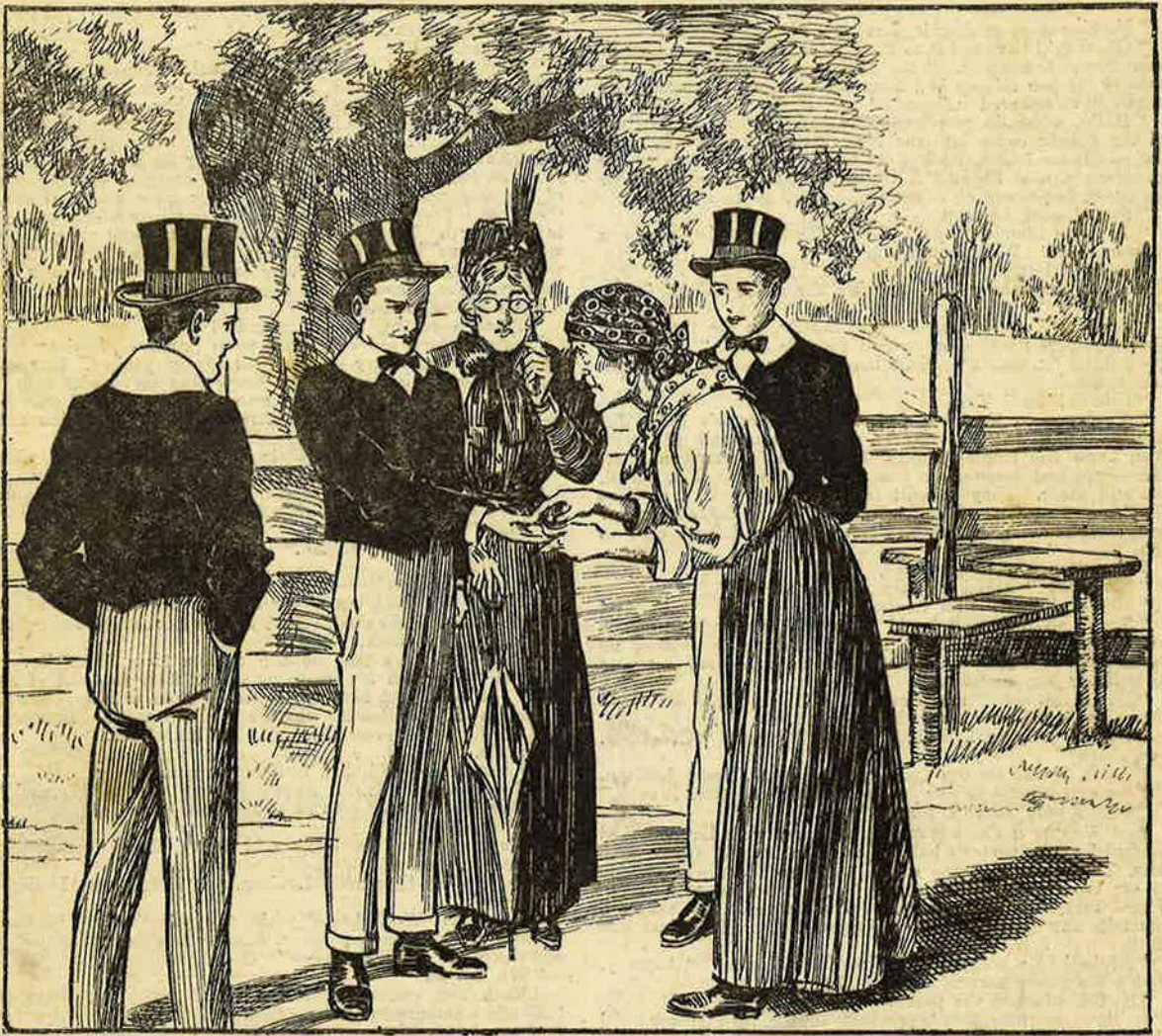
"Buzz off!"

"You cads—"

Bi!ff!

Levison of the Fourth retired from the porter's lodge on his neck. He landed outside with a yell, and picked himself up, black with rage. Then he hurried away in the direction of the New House.

"What's the little game?" asked Manners in surprise, looking at Tom. "Why don't you open the parcel, Tom?"



The gipsy took Tom Merry's hand, and bent her head over it, her black eyes gleaming with malice. Miss Fawcett watched her with growing alarm. "Illness—danger—death!" said the gipsy. "Oh dear!" groaned Miss Priscilla. "It's all piffle!" growled Lowther. "Let's get on!" (See Chapter 4.)

And why shouldn't Levison see the tuck? No harm in giving the blessed cadger a pot of jam."

"There isn't any beastly jam in it!" growled Tom. "I believe it's only some doctor's muck for my health."

The juniors' faces fell.

"Oh crumbs!"

"What rotten luck!" said Kangaroo. "I'm off!" And the Cornstalk junior walked away. He did not want any medicine.

"Better look in and make sure," said Lowther. "It might be tuck, you know."

Blagg, the postman, came in at the gates, and he stopped at the lodge.

"Letter for you, Master Merry!" said Blagg.

"Thanks!"

The letter was from Miss Fawcett. Tom Merry opened it, and then silently handed it to his chums to read. It ran:

"My darling Tommy,—You will receive a parcel from me to-day. It contains the medicines I promised you, and some ointment for your poor little nose, and some embrocation for that dear kind, dear boy Gore to use when he rubs your back next time. I hope you are well, and taking great care of yourself. I am seeing about engaging the detective to-day. There are instructions upon the bottles and boxes for taking the medicines and the pills. Take care of your dear health, my darling child.

"Your affectionate nurse,

"PRISCILLA FAWCETT."

"P.S.—Take care that you do not get your feet wet.

"P.P.S.—Tell Gore that your back should be rubbed gently."

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" said Monty Lowther. "May I smile, Tom?"

"If you do I'll punch your silly head!" said Tom Merry.

"Thanks! I'll go outside and smile, then," said Monty Lowther cheerfully; and he hurried out of the lodge, and then his smile could have been heard across the quadrangle.

Manners was grinning; he could not help it.

"What are you going to do with the giddy parcel, Tommy?" he asked.

Tom grunted.

"Leave it here. Taggles can have it. Perhaps the medicines will do him good. Or he can give them to his dog. Brrrrrr! Come on!"

The chums of the Shell left the porter's lodge, leaving the big parcel lying on the table. Manners was grinning, but Tom Merry's brow was clouded. He was, as he had said, fed up—right up to the chin! But the end was not yet.

CHAPTER 7.

Levison's Whack!

"A REGULAR spread!" said Fatty Wynn.

He addressed Figgins and Kerr.

The chums of the New House were in their doorway. Fatty Wynn was confiding to Figgy and Kerr his uncommon woes. Instead of a share in the consignment of tuck from Huckleberry Heath, Fatty Wynn had had only a bumping, and he felt injured—and hungry. He was distinctly annoyed.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A DANGEROUS DOUBLE!"

"No chance of raiding it, I suppose?" said Figgins.
 "Oh, they'll have got it to the School House by this time!" said Fatty dolorously. "No chance of getting at it, the beasts! If you fellows had been there before they came, we might have collared it."

"Hallo, what do you want?" asked Figgins, as Levison of the Fourth came into the New House. Levison being a School House fellow, he had no business on that side of the quadrangle, and Figgins & Co. prepared to bump him for his cheek in presenting himself uninvited in their quarters.

"Pax!" said Levison.
 "Pax be blowed!" said Fatty Wynn. "They've been bumping me! We'll bump him!"

"I didn't bump you!"
 "Well, the others did, and it's the same thing. Collar him!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Levison hastily, as the three New House juniors made a movement towards him. "I've got a good thing on, and I've come here to let you fellows into it. It's a raid."

"Pile in!" said Kerr.
 "You've seen that big parcel in the porter's lodge for Merry?" said Levison eagerly. "It's cram full of tuck! You know the ripping things Tom Merry's guardian sends him—cake and home-made jam, and things like that. Well, it's still there. They haven't taken it away yet. I suppose they're leaving it for Taggles to carry to the School House; but Taggles is in the stables now. If you fellows care to join me—"

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.
 "No larks?" asked Figgins suspiciously.
 "Honest injun!" said Levison.
 "That's all very well," said Kerr, with a searching glance at the cad of the Fourth. "I don't like a chap backing up against his own House. Looks to me as if Levison is trying to pull our leg, somehow."

"Come and see!" said Levison. "If the parcel isn't still there, you can bump me as hard as you like!"
 "So we jolly well will!" agreed Figgins. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Mind, I take an equal share of the stuff!" said Levison. "Four shares—one to me, and you promise to hand it over."
 "That's only fair. It's a go."

And Figgins & Co. left the New House with Levison, and hastened to the porter's lodge. Taggles was still absent, and Mrs. Taggles was in the school shop, so there was no one to say them nay. The Terrible Three were not to be seen. There were some School House fellows in sight, but they did not take any special notice of Figgins & Co. The coast was clear.

"Looks like a soft thing," remarked Figgins. "Anyway, here's the giddy parcel! Lay hold!"

The Co. whisked the parcel off the table and fled. In three minutes they were back in the New House, and there had been no pursuit. For once, evidently, the Terrible Three had been caught napping. Levison followed them into the house, his eyes glittering. He was as pleased to play a trick on the Terrible Three as to receive his anticipated share of the tuck.

"Get it up to the study!" said Figgins. "Come on, Levison, you're going to have your whack."

The parcel was carried up to Figgins's study and set upon the table. The four juniors gathered round it eagerly.

"They'll be surprised if they go back for their giddy parcel now!" grinned Figgins. "We'll send them over the empty jam-jars later as a souvenir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get it open!" said Fatty Wynn, almost feverishly. "I'm frightfully hungry. I had hardly any dinner. Old Ratty looked at me when I had my third helping, and I had to stop. I've been peckish all the afternoon. I've had nothing since dinner excepting the saveloys and the cake and the apples and a few jam-tarts."

"You must be perishing!" said Figgins. "Here goes!"

He cut the cords—there were many cords round that carefully-wrapped parcel—and the juniors' eager fingers began to unroll the thick brown-paper. There were many rolls of it round the contents, whatever they were. Evidently Miss Priscilla considered the consignment a very valuable one, and moant to run no risks with it. Indeed, there was so much wrapping that the juniors began to wonder whether the consignment was really worth raiding, after all. The contents were certainly not so extensive as they had anticipated.

"Hallo!" said Figgins suddenly.
 The first object to come to light was a cardboard box. It contained a bottle, and in the bottle was a thick brownish liquid. They looked at the label on the bottle, and with queer feelings read:

"Dr. Slobber's Pink Potion For Peakly Persons."

"My hat!" said Kerr.

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"Medicine!" said Figgins.

"Oh crumbs!"
 "Must be some grub as well!" said Levison anxiously.
 "Get it all out!"

Kerr grabbed up another cardboard box. It was full of little boxes, and on the lid of each little box was a label:

"Dr. Slobber's Purple Pills For Chronic Coughs."

Figgins & Co. were looking less happy by this time. Levison was looking furious. The juniors dragged out the rest of the contents of the parcel, and they were scattered over the table. There were bottles galore, each carefully packed in cardboard. There were pills of all sorts and sizes, there were various kinds of ointment, there were some thick woollen socks, and a chest-protector. There were some more articles of the same sort, but there was no sign of tuck.

Fatty Wynn groaned.

"What a rotten, beastly swindle!"
 Figgins turned a deadly glare upon Levison. Levison was as annoyed and angry as the New House juniors. But the latter knew Levison, and they knew that he was as full of tricks as a monkey. They not unnaturally suspected that he had deliberately planted this consignment of medicine and pills upon them as a joke.

"So this is one of your little larks, is it?" said Figgins.

"Awfully funny thing to pull our leg like this—what?"

"What!" exclaimed Levison, taken aback by that unexpected accusation. "I didn't know—"

"Rats!"

"Any more than you did!"

"Bosh!"

"I swear I didn't—"

"Cheese it! Stop him!" roared Figgins, as the cad of the Fourth made for the door. Kerr caught Levison by the collar, and whirled him back.

"Levison fancies that he can do the New House," said Figgins. "I think it's up to us to get that idea out of his head. It might get him into trouble sooner or later. We've agreed to give Levison his whack out of this parcel. I propose that we forthwith proceed to give him his whack."

The Co. chuckled.

"Look here—" began Levison, in great alarm.

"We promised him a fourth part of this giddy muck," said Figgins. "It's up to us to keep our promise."

"Yes, rather."

"He can have the lot," said Fatty Wynn generously.

"Give him the lot."

"Let me go!" roared Levison. "I tell you I didn't know—"

"Shurrup! We'll begin with the pills," said Figgins.

"There seem to be four dozen boxes. Levison is entitled to one dozen, as a fair share—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Each box contains twelve pills," went on Figgins.

"That's a hundred and forty-four pills for Levison. Do you feel equal to taking one gross of pills now, Levison, or will you reserve some for future occasions?"

Levison turned almost green at the thought. A hundred and forty-four of Dr. Slobber's Purple Pills taken in one dose would certainly have caused him serious inward disturbance.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "I tell you—"

"Try one, and see how you like it," said Figgins, taking a purple pill from a box. "Open your mouth and shut your eyes, you know."

"Yow! I won't!"

"Open his mouth!" said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn and Kerr opened Levison's mouth. The cad of the Fourth struggled in their grasp, but he was powerless against the two sturdy New House juniors. His jaws were forced open, and Figgy dropped the pill into his mouth, and he was compelled to swallow it. He gasped and spluttered wildly.

"Have some medicine to wash it down?" asked Figgins.

"Grooogh!"

"You can have some of the Pink Potions for Pining Patients, or some of the Fearsome Fluid for Frabjous Fat-heads."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep that bottle away!" shrieked Levison.

Figgins shook his head.

"You've got to have your whack," he declared. "Now I'm going to pour this medicine down your neck, inside or out, just as you like."

And he poured.

Levison could not close his mouth, as Fatty Wynn had inserted a ruler between his jaws. But he dodged and wriggled his head violently. The result was that the greater part of the medicine went down the outside of his neck. It was probably better outside than inside, but it felt decidedly uncomfortable. Enough of it trickled down Levison's throat, however, to show him what the taste was like. It was not nice.

"Had enough?" asked Figgins.

"Grooh-hooh! Yes."

"Take the rest outside or inside?"

"Yow!"

"You've got to take it," said Figgins. "But we'll give you choice of sides—outside or inside! Now!"

"Ow! Outside!" gasped Levison.

"Right-ho!"

Figgins cheerfully emptied the bottle upon Levison's head. It was a thick, sticky medicine, something like cod-liver oil in consistency. It matted Levison's hair, and ran down his neck, and stuck to his collar and the inside of his shirt.

"Have some more?" asked Figgins, taking up another bottle.

"Groogh! No! Leggo!"

"You haven't had all your whack yet?"

"Lemme go!"

"Well, as he doesn't want his full share, he can clear off," said Figgins. "Let the rotter go! Perhaps this will put him up to a wrinkle about playing little jokes on the New House. Seat!"

Levison was released; and he staggered out of the study, gasping, leaving Figgins & Co. roaring with laughter.

CHAPTER 8.

Figgins Makes the Arrangements.

"GREAT Scott! What's the mattah with Levison?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the cad of the Fourth in great astonishment, as Levison came into the School House.

Levison did not look well.

Figgins had mercifully spared him the whole of the "whack" he was entitled to, but the pill and the medicine were making him feel decidedly queer inside, and the sticky brown fluid adhering to his hair and face made him look very queer outside.

"I trust you are not ill, Levison, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Go and eat coke!" was Levison's grateful reply.

"Weally, you know—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Levison tramped away upstairs in a fury. He met the Terrible Three in the upper passage, and they stared at him.

"What the deuce has happened to you?" asked Monty Lowther.

"You rotters!" howled Levison.

"Eh?"

"You knew there was only filthy medicine in that parcel—"

"Why, he's soaked with giddy medicine!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement. "I know the niff of it. Ha, ha, ha! Have you been raiding that parcel, Levison?"

"You rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell roared. Levison rushed away to the Fourth-Form dormitory to clean himself. The Terrible Three, who had just come in from the tuckshop with supplies for tea, went grinning into their study. They had laid the tea-table, and were busily engaged in making toast, when Toby the page put his head in at the door.

"Master Merry—"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry.

"Parcel for you, sir."

And Toby laid a parcel on the table. It was the one the juniors had left in Taggles' lodge, but it was opened now, and bundled together again in some confusion.

"Master Figgins gave it to me to bring to you, sir," said Toby, with a grin. "He said I was to tell you it has been opened in mistake—in mistake for tuck, was Master Figgins's words, sir. And he returns it with thanks, sir, and 'opes as Master Levison enjoyed the pill and the pink potion, sir."

And Toby vanished, still grinning.

"Well, we've got it after all," said Tom Merry, surveying the consignment of fearsome medicines with great disfavour. "I suppose those New House bounders took it for tuck, and raided it. Rather a sell for them, anyway. Now, what are we going to do with the beastly things?"

"Directions on the labels," said Monty Lowther. "You take the pills three at a time before going to bed."

"Rats!"

"And the pink mixture is one large tablespoonful after meals."

"Ass!"

"The embrocation is for Gore to rub your back with."

"Shut up, you silly fathead!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry seized the parcel, and hurled it into the corner of the study. There was a crash of medicine bottles.

"That settles that!" he growled. "The maid can clean it away in the morning. Let's have tea, and if you say 'medicine' again I'll biff you!"

And the Terrible Three sat down to tea in the study.

Tom Merry wore a worried look. He had disposed of the medicine and the pills—not internally. But he could not dispose of the restrictions on his liberty, and he would not be able to dispose of the private detective when he arrived. Perhaps that very evening the wretched man would appear on the scene, with a mission of guarding Tom Merry against imaginary dangers. Tom could imagine the howls of laughter that would go up from the whole house when that proof of Miss Priscilla's solicitude appeared. It would be a standing joke in the House, and in the New House, too. The New House fellows, certainly, would not miss such an opportunity for chipping. Tom Merry was naturally sensitive to ridicule, and he simply writhed at the prospect.

After tea the chums of the Shell strolled down to the cricket-ground, where some practice was still going on. Figgins & Co. were there, and they grinned affably at the School House fellows.

"Got your medicine all right?" asked Figgins.

"Shut up, you fathead!"

"Well, I only want to know, you know. By the way, is it a fact about the private detective?" asked Figgins, with great interest.

Tom Merry reddened.

"What private detective?" he growled.

"Well, the fellows are saying—"

"Blow the fellows!"

"But they are saying—"

"Blow what they are saying!"

"Certainly! Blow anything you like!" said Figgins amiably. "But the chaps are saying that your old governess has employed a private detective to look after your health."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter. Manners and Lowther joined in it; they could not help it. Tom Merry's face became crimson.

"You silly chump!" he snapped. "It's not to look after my health, and you know it. Miss Fawcett has been frightened by a silly gipsy fortune-teller about some silly danger, and that's what the silly detective is for."

"Then he's really coming?" asked Kerr.

"I suppose so!"

"Oh crumbs! To-night?" asked Figgins.

"I don't know."

"Well, that beats the band!" said Figgins. "Where is he going to be put? Will he sleep in the dorm, to watch over your sweet slumbers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or are you going to keep him in the bike-shed, or chain him up with Towser?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry did not reply—but he rushed at Figgins. His temper was too sorely tried. Figgins & Co. fled, laughing.

Tom Merry turned to his chums with an exasperated look.

"I'm not going to stand it!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you silly fatheads, what are you cackling at?"

"Ahem! I—I didn't mean to cackle!" said Monty Lowther. "I—ha, ha—I'm awfully serious. It's a serious—ha, ha!—matter. When the detective comes—ha, ha!"

"Oh, go and eat coke! Look here!" said Tom Merry, lowering his voice. "I can't stop Miss Fawcett sending the detective. But I'm going to make him sick of his job."

When he gets here, you fellows have got to stand by me, and we'll make him sit up to such an extent that he'll get sick of it and bunk."

"Rely on us!" said Manners. "It's the only way. But fancy having a private detective shadowing you across the quad—"

"And sitting beside you in the Form-room—"

"And keeping guard over the dorm—"

"And watching you in and out of the tuckshop—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry snorted, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets and strode away. He was feeling more fed-up than ever. His own chums persisted in looking upon the matter from a humorous point of view, but it did not seem at all humorous to the unhappy victim of Miss Priscilla Fawcett's affectionate solicitude. And Tom Merry would have been still more exasperated if he could have heard the remarks that passed among Figgins & Co. in the seclusion of their own study in the New House. Figgins was grinning ecstatically over a brilliant idea that had come into his head.

"I've got it!" he announced.

"Got what?" asked the loyal Co., seeing that a great wheeze was coming.

"Tom Merry's expecting a giddy detective—"

"Well?"

"He may arrive this evening—"

"Well?"

"But he hasn't arrived yet—?"

"No."

"Well, why shouldn't he arrive?" asked Figgins. "Eh—what? You remember playing the detective in our sketch—Sheer-rot Holmes, Kerr, old fellow? You could play it again—what—and call upon Tom Merry and present your card—what?"

A yell of laughter rang through Figgins's study. The Co. were "on" to that idea at once. For the next half-hour Figgins & Co. were very busy.

CHAPTER 9.

According to Instructions.

TOM MERRY at the study table doing his preparation. Manners and Lowther were similarly engaged. There was silence in the study. Tom Merry's brow wore a gloomy frown. Manners and Lowther were as serious as they could be. They sympathised with their unfortunate chum; but they could not help seeing more humour in the unfortunate situation than Tom Merry could possibly be expected to see.

Tap!

Tom Merry looked up with a grunt. He expected to see some junior with humorous remarks to make on the subject of the patent medicine or the private detective.

"Come in, fathhead!"

The door opened.

A little man, in a black frock-coat that was shiny at the seams, stood in the doorway, and blinked into the study through a pair of large, black-rimmed spectacles.

The Terrible Three rose to their feet in surprise. They had not expected a visitor from outside at that hour, and the little man was a stranger to them. Who he was, or what he was, they could not guess. He looked somewhat like an undertaker's assistant, and they certainly had no business with undertakers. He wore a drooping moustache of a mouse colour, and his hair was of the same hue, and rather long. His face had a sort of scholarly pallor, save for the tip of the nose, which was decidedly red, and seemed to hint at a propensity for strong drink. His hands were covered with black gloves, and in one of them he carried a rusty-looking silk hat. Genteel poverty seemed to be the chief characteristic of the unexpected visitor. He blinked at the Shell fellows through the big spectacles, and they stared at him.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "You've come to the wrong shop, sir. Do you want to see the Head or the House-master?"

"I expected to find Master Merry here," said the stranger, in a somewhat wheezy voice. "I understand that this is his study!"

"I'm Tom Merry!" said the captain of the Shell.

"But—"

The gentleman in black smiled gently.

"You do not know me, of course."

"No."

"Pray allow me to present my card!" The little man fumbled in the tail-pocket of his frock-coat. "Dear rie! I have left my card-case in my office. I came away in rather a hurry on receiving Miss Fawcett's telegram."

Tom Merry started.

"Miss Fawcett's telegram?" he exclaimed.

The little man rubbed his black-gloved hands.

"Yes, sir. You were surely expecting me?"

"Expecting you?"

"Yes. Did not your aunt—I understand that Miss Priscilla Fawcett is your aunt—"

"She isn't," said Tom. "She used to be my governess, and is my guardian now."

"Ahem! Quite so! Did not your guardian inform you that a private detective would arrive here shortly, to take care of you?"

"Ye-es, but—"

"My name is Tagg—J. Tagg, private detective," explained the little man. "Quite at your service, Master Merry."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I have had great experience in the service of the nobility and gentry!" Mr. Tagg further explained. "Missing wills discovered, wives and husbands watched, evidence on any side of any question collected at the shortest notice—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"But my present business is to guard you from danger, my young friend," said J. Tagg. "I understand that you are threatened—ahem!—with some terrible peril."

"Oh, that's all rot!"

"Ahem! May I take a seat? Thank you!" said J. Tagg, taking Tom Merry's chair. "Now, tell me all about it."

"There isn't anything to tell," said Tom Merry, suppressing his exasperation. "Miss Fawcett has been frightened by a silly old gipsy, that's all!"

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of

the complete stories contained in **CHUCKLES,** 1st.

"Ahem! My instructions are that you are threatened with some deadly danger, and it is my duty to watch over you day and night," said J. Tagg impressively. "I am compelled, of course, to carry out the instructions received from my employer."

"But—I tell you—"

"I shall not leave your side for a single moment," promised J. Tagg. "When this fearful danger comes, there shall be two of us to face it."

"There isn't any danger!" howled Tom Merry.

"If you young gentlemen are busy now, I will sit quietly here while you play—or work, whichever it is," said Mr. Tagg imperturbably. "Perhaps you could oblige me with a little supper, as I am hungry?"

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. Manners and Lowther were grinning, and Tom Merry was in a state of mind approaching fury.

"Look here," began Tom Merry. "I'm not going to stand this, Mr. Tagg! I won't be watched! I won't be looked after! Savvy?"

"My instructions—"

"Blow your instructions!" said Tom forcibly. "I don't want to be rude, but I won't have it—see? If you follow me about there will be trouble!"

"In that case," said Mr. Tagg sternly, "I shall have to appeal to your Housemaster, sir. I must do my duty."

"Better take it quietly, Tommy!" murmured Lowther. "If he speaks to Railton, Railton will order you to put up with it. Can't be helped."

Tom Merry set his teeth. It certainly looked as if it could not be helped; but he did not mean to submit to such a state of affairs, all the same.

However, he was hospitable, angry as he was, and he opened the study cupboard to find some supper for Mr. Tagg. The remnant left over from tea made a very good supper, and Mr. Tagg disposed of it with evident satisfaction, while the Shell fellows finished their preparation. When prep was over they rose to go down into the common-room. Mr. Tagg rose also.

"You'd like to stay here and rest a bit?" Tom Merry suggested.

J. Tagg shook his head.

"I must come with you, wherever you go," he said.

"Now, look here—"

"I have my duty to do. Please do not compel me to appeal to your Housemaster!" urged Mr. Tagg. "My instructions—"

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry stamped out of the study, followed by his grinning chums, and the calm and imperturbable Mr. Tagg. Mr. Tagg's appearance in the Shell passage drew some attention.

Several fellows wanted to know who he was, and when it was learned that he was the expected private detective, come to watch over the safety of Tom Merry, there was a ripple of chuckling from one end of the passage to the other.

Tom Merry's face was crimson as he went downstairs, the private detective keeping beside him as closely as his shadow. Kildare of the Sixth spotted them at the foot of the stairs, and he glanced at Mr. Tagg in surprise, and came towards them.

"Who's this merchant?" Kildare asked, without ceremony.

"It's late for receiving visitors, Merry!"

"He's Tagg!" groaned Tom.

"Tagg! What Tagg? Who?"

"A detective!"

"Oh, my hat! Miss Fawcett's detective?" ejaculated Kildare.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare retreated, laughing. Cutts of the Fifth and some more Fifth-Formers were chatting in a group close at hand, and they burst into a roar of merriment. Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming, and his cheeks were burning. He had never felt so ridiculous and so angry in his life before. He walked furiously into the common-room, and the little man in black followed him, and there was a buzz among the juniors there.

"Here comes the giddy detective!"

"Tom Merry and Sherlock Holmes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 10.

Follow Your Leader!

TOM MERRY glared at the hilarious juniors. A roar of laughter rang through the juniors' common-room.

Mr. Tagg seemed a little surprised at it. He blinked round at the juniors through his enormous spectacles, appar-

ently at a loss. Tom Merry's face was crimson. The news of the detective's arrival had spread, and fellows were pouring in from all quarters to see him. Fags of the Third Form came swarming in, as well as Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows. The common-room was crowded.

"Well, this beats the band!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "How do you do, Sherlock Holmes?"

Mr. Tagg blinked at him.

"Excuse me, my name is not Sherlock Holmes!" he wheezed.

"My mistake: I meant Sexton Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My name is Tagg—J. Tagg," explained the detective.

"I am here to guard Master Merry from danger."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Should danger threaten this young gentleman," continued the private detective, with a dramatic gesture, "J. Tagg is here to throw himself into the breach."

"Bravo!"

"Suppose two dangers threatened?" suggested Monty Lowther. "I suppose you would be ready to throw yourself into a pair of breaches?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall defend my client with my life!" pursued Mr. Tagg.

"Let this secret and hidden enemy come forth—"

"You're ready to deal with him if he comes forth?" asked Jack Blake.

"Yes, ready at any moment."

"But suppose he comes fifth?"

"Ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, this is weally a vewy remarkable state of affairs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the shabby gentleman in black. "I have nevah heard of a chap bein' watched about in school by a private detective. But, of course, the gentleman must be allowed to do his dutay. Aftah all, he will keep you out of lots of scwapes, Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Also, it is rather funny!" grinned Gore of the Shell. "It's as good as a cinematograph, and cheaper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry flung himself into an armchair by the fire. Mr. Tagg wheeled another chair up beside him, and sat down. The sight of the shabby detective in black sitting beside the captain of the Shell, watching him, made the juniors shriek again.

Tom Merry could not stand it. He jumped up, and strode out of the common-room, leaving the juniors yelling. But he did not leave Mr. Tagg. That gentleman followed him out of the common-room and down the passage, evidently determined to stick to him like a bloodhound to a trail.

At the end of the passage Tom Merry turned upon him fiercely.

"Look here, keep away!" he exclaimed. "I tell you I won't stand it!"

"My dear young gentleman—"

"I'm fed up! If you follow me again, I'll punch your silly head!"

Mr. Tagg backed hastily away.

"My dear Master Merry—"

"Clear off!"

"I have my duty to do. If you offer violence, I shall have no resource but to appeal to your Housemaster," said Mr. Tagg firmly. "Pray try to realise how matters stand, and allow me to do my duty. You are in terrible danger—"

"I'm not! There isn't any danger!"

"I have my instructions—"

"Hang your instructions! Leave me alone!"

Tom Merry strode to the stairs. Mr. Tagg followed him resolutely. Tom Merry was evidently not to be allowed to get out of his sight. Tom turned savagely on the stairs, his temper strained past breaking-point. Perhaps it was fortunate that Manners and Lowther came hurrying up at that moment. Lowther grasped his irate chum, and held him back.

"Hold on, Tommy! Don't get waxy!"

"I'm not going to stand that silly idiot following me about the house!" roared Tom.

"He's only doing his duty!" urged Manners.

"Rot! Bosh! Rubbish!"

"My dear young gentleman—" began Mr. Tagg.

"I won't stand it!" said Tom Merry sulphurously. "If he follows me another step, I'll biff him on the napper, and chance it!"

"Shall I call the Housemaster, Mr. Tagg?" called out Levison of the Fourth.

The kind and amiable Levison was always ready to do Tom Merry an ill turn.

"You see, Tommy," whispered Lowther, "it's no good bringing Railton here. The Head must have given Miss

Fawcett permission to send the detective. It's no good kicking over the traces, old kid. Take it quietly!"

"I tell you—"

"And I'll get rid of him for you," murmured Lowther, in Tom's ear. "We've only got to make him feel fed-up with his job, you know, and he'll clear!"

Tom Merry calmed a little. That was a resource, certainly.

"Come on, Tommy!" said Lowther, in a louder voice. "Follow on behind, Mr. Tagg—do your duty, you know. Don't lose sight of Tommy!"

"Certainly, I shall not lose sight of him," said J. Tagg promptly. "I have my instructions to keep him constantly in sight!"

The Terrible Three went upstairs, and Mr. Tagg followed, and a dozen or more juniors followed Mr. Tagg, eager to see the fun. They all expected Tom Merry's temper to break out sooner or later, and a "scrap" between the captain of the Shell and the private detective would be worth watching.

Tom Merry paused in the Shell passage, but Lowther led him on. They ascended the upper stairs, and passed the dormitory, and went still higher. Tom and Manners were a little puzzled, but they allowed Lowther to guide. Higher upstairs they went, and Lowther stopped at the door of the top box-room.

It was an apartment used as a lumber-room, and was half full of old boxes, disabled chairs, and articles of that kind. As the room was never used or visited, it was considerably dusty, and spiders had made their homes there in large numbers, and huge webs were extended in all directions. Lowther opened the door, and his chums halted.

"Come in!" said Lowther, deftly changing the rusty key to the outside of the lock, screening that action carefully from the view of Mr. Tagg behind.

The juniors understood then, and they grinned. They walked into the old, dusty room, and Mr. Tagg walked in after them. Outside, on the landing, a crowd of fellows collected, wondering what was going to happen. The general impression was that Tom Merry had led the unsuspecting detective to that retired spot in order to "biff" him. But there was no sound of "biffing" in the old room.

Mr. Tagg remained near the door, as Lowther lighted the gas. Perhaps he was not so unsuspecting, after all. Manners and Lowther stepped out of the room, but Tom Merry remained in it, and Mr. Tagg remained in the doorway, watching him.

"What's the little game?" demanded Kangaroo of the Shell, in wonder.

"You'll see!" murmured Lowther.

He made a sign to Manners. The two juniors made a sudden rush, and Mr. Tagg received a shove from behind that sent him staggering into the box-room. Tom Merry was ready to receive him. He gave Mr. Tagg another shove, and the private detective sat down among the lumber with a grunt.

In the twinkling of an eye Tom Merry was outside the box-room, and the door was shut, and the key turned in the lock. Monty Lowther calmly and cheerfully extracted the key and put it into his pocket.

There was a roar of laughter. The private detective had certainly been very neatly trapped. A sound of falling furniture could be heard as the unfortunate gentleman scrambled up among the lumber.

There came a loud knocking on the inside of the door, and the handle was wrenched at from the inside—in vain!

"Let me out! Open this door at once, Master Merry!"

"Not this evening—some other evening!" said Tom coolly.

"I shall complain to your Housemaster! I shall—"

"You've got to get to him first, Mr. Tagg! You're going to stay there all night, and all to-morrow, too, unless you promise to leave St. Jim's at once!"

"Impossible! My instructions—"

"Then you can stay there! Good-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Master Merry! Boy! I shall shout for help—"

"Shout away!" said Monty Lowther, with a chuckle. "Nobody will hear you from here, Mr. Tagg. That's why we brought you to the top of the house. Go it!"

"My dear young friend—"

"Good-night!"

Tom Merry & Co. departed, going cheerfully downstairs. The imprisoned Mr. Tagg hammered furiously on the door; but the sound of the hammering died away as the juniors descended flight after flight of stairs. Tom Merry went back to the common-room in a more cheerful frame of mind. He had disposed of the private detective, for the time, at least. He wondered what Mr. Tagg was thinking, as he remained shut up in the box-room among the dusty lumber. He little guessed.

CHAPTER 11.

A Surprising Discovery.

LEIVISON of the Fourth knocked at the door of Mr. Railton's study, after a glance up and down the passage to make sure that he was not observed. He did not wait for the School House master to tell him to come in, but entered immediately after knocking. Mr. Railton, who was smoking an evening pipe, glanced round from his comfortable easy-chair.

"Well, Levison?"
Levison closed the door. He did not want to be observed in Mr. Railton's study. Sneaking to a Housemaster was not approved of at St. Jim's, and Levison would have been in great danger of a dormitory ragging if he had been spotted there.

"If you please, sir," said Levison, "there's something going on that I think you ought to know about."

Mr. Railton raised his hand.
"You know that I do not approve of tale-bearing, Levison," he interrupted icily.

Levison flushed.
"Yes, sir, I know, but this is serious."

"I do not think you need continue, Levison."
"Then the man will stay shut up in the box-room all night, sir," said Levison. And he turned to the door.

As he fully expected, those words caused a change in the House-master's manner.

"What is that, Levison? A man shut up in the box-room? What do you mean?"

"They've shut him up, sir, and they're keeping him there. I thought a master ought to know about it, sir, in case—"

"Who is shut up in the box-room?"

"The detective, sir."
"The detective!" said Mr. Railton, in astonishment.

"What detective? What are you talking about, Levison?"

"Miss Fawcett's detective, sir—a Mr. Tagg. Miss Fawcett has sent him here to watch over Tom Merry. You remember, sir?"

Mr. Railton started.
"I have heard something of this, but do you seriously tell me, Levison, that a detective has arrived?"

"Yes, sir."
"And he has been shut up in a box-room?"

"The top box-room, sir. He's hammering at the door now, but he's too far off for anybody to hear him.

Lowther's taken the key away, or I should have let him out. They're going to keep him shut up there all night."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Railton, rising. "This must be seen into at once. I hope you told me this merely from a sense of duty, Levison. I do not approve of tale-bearing, but it is certainly a serious matter. I shall see into it at once. You may go."

Levison vanished, satisfied that he had put a spoke in the wheel of the Terrible Three. Mr. Railton could hardly fail to punish them for trapping the detective and shutting him up in the lumber-room, and in any case, Mr. Tagg would be released, and would begin shadowing and worrying Tom Merry again.

The School House master ascended the stairs. The School House was an old, rambling building, and the top box-room was in an exceedingly out-of-the-way place. Mr. Railton was a little out of breath when he reached it.

There was no doubt that there was a prisoner in the room. Loud knocking fell upon the Housemaster's ears as he came up, and it proceeded from the interior of the box-room. A voice was calling through the keyhole.

"Let me out, you sweeps! You rotters! Let me out!"

Mr. Railton paused in astonishment.
"Dear me! That does not sound like a detective!" he murmured. "And the voice sounds quite boyish, too. I wonder—"

"Open this door, will you, you bounders!"

Mr. Railton tapped on the outside of the door, and coughed.
"Oh, you've come back, have you, you blighters?" came the voice from within. "Open this door, will you? I've been here an hour."

"Who is there?" called out the Housemaster.
He heard a gasping exclamation. The thumping on the inside of the door died away. A startled voice inquired from within:

"Who's that?"

"I am Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of this House."

"Oh erkray!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, will you kindly request Tom Merry to let me out, sir? I have been—or—the victim of a practical—er—joke! No harm done, but I should like to be released—ahom!—as quickly as possible."

"I will speak to Master Merry at once."

Mr. Railton descended to the Shell passage, and knocked at Tom Merry's door.

"Oh, clear off, whoever you are, can't you?" came Tom Merry's exasperated voice.

Mr. Railton opened the door.
The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. were there, roasting chestnuts over the fire, and eating them. They jumped up as they saw the Housemaster, and Tom Merry turned very red.

"Oh, sir! I—I beg your pardon!" he stammered. "I—I didn't know it was you, sir."

"It appears that someone is locked up in the top box-room," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"The—the top box-room, sir?"

"Yes."
"Indeed! I—I wonder whom it can be, sir!"

"The key has been taken away," said Mr. Railton grimly.
"I have an impression that the key is here. Perhaps you know where it is, Lowther."

"I, sir!" ejaculated Lowther.
"Yes. Have you the key about you?"

"Ahem! H'm!"

"Kindly answer my question, Lowther."

"As a matter of fact, sir, I—I have," said Lowther.

"And as a matter of fact, you juniors locked this man up in the box-room—is it not so?" Mr. Railton demanded.

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. It was only too clear that some tall-tale had been at work, and that they were discovered.

"Ahem! You see, sir—" began Manners lamely.

"Is it so, or is it not so?" asked the Housemaster.

"Ahem! Yes, sir."

"Very good. Follow me!" said Mr. Railton.

The Terrible Three followed the Housemaster from the study and up the many flights of stairs. The box-room was quite quiet when they reached it. Mr. Railton inserted the key in the lock and turned it.

He threw the door open. The gas-jet was burning in the box-room, and by its light the private detective could be seen. He was sitting upon an empty trunk, and he blinked at them through his big spectacles as they entered.

"Who is this man, Merry?" Mr. Railton asked, his searching glance resting upon the spectacled face of the prisoner, who rose to his feet, still blinking.

"Mr. Tagg, sir," said Tom reluctantly.

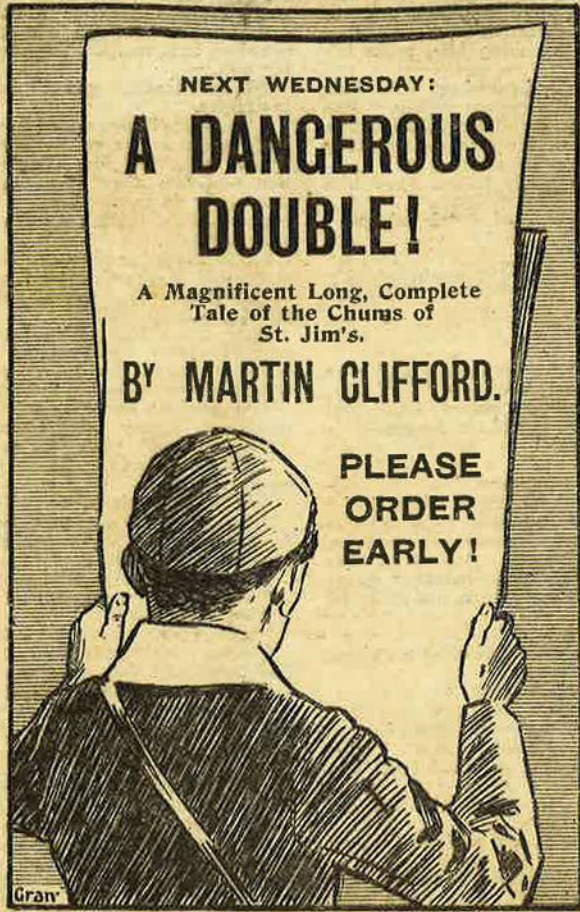
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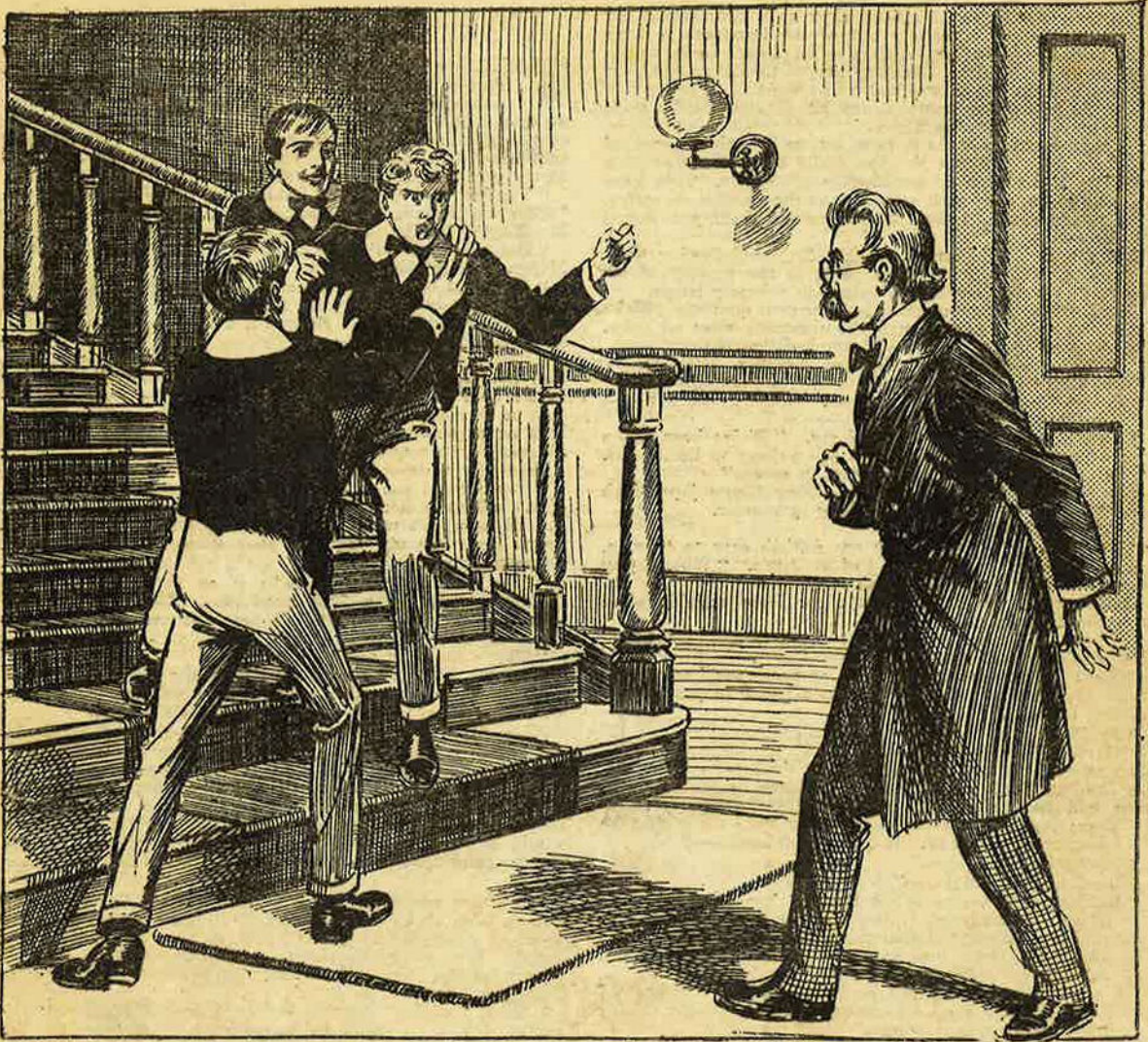
A DANGEROUS DOUBLE!

A Magnificent Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.

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PLEASE ORDER EARLY!





When Tom Merry saw that Mr. Tagg was following him up the stairs, he turned round savagely. Lowther grasped Tom Merry, and held him back. "I won't stand it!" said Tom Merry sulphurously. "If he follows me another step I'll biff him one on the napper and chance it!" (See Chapter 10.)

"A beastly detective, sir—I mean, a private detective," said Lowther.

"We only shut him up to keep him quiet, sir," said Manners. "He was worrying us like—like anything, sir."

"Mr. Tagg, if that is your name, will you kindly explain who you are, and what you are doing here?" said Mr. Railton, his eyes still searchingly fixed upon J. Tagg. "When I came upstairs, you were speaking in a manner more suitable to a schoolboy than to a middle-aged man. You may also explain how it is that your hair grows all on one side of your head, and over one ear."

Mr. Tagg's hand went up to his hair, and he dragged it straight, instinctively. He realised that the wig must have been disarranged when he was shoved over in the box-room, and as there was no looking-glass there he had not observed it. The Terrible Three uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"He's got a wig!"

"I—I—" stammered Mr. Tagg.

"You may remove that wig, my boy," said Mr. Railton calmly. "I think I am aware of your real identity."

"Boy!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"The voice I heard proceeding from this room was remarkably like that of Kerr of the Fourth Form," said Mr. Railton.

"Kerr!" yelled the Terrible Three.

"I suppose this—ahem!—detective did not show you any credentials," said Mr. Railton, his face breaking into a smile.

"Nunno, sir! We—we took his word for it!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Take off that wig and moustache, Kerr, also the spectacles."

Mr. J. Tagg obeyed.

Then, in spite of the make-up on his face, the chums of the Shell knew him.

"Spoofed!" howled Monty Lowther.

"Bump him!" roared Tom Merry, forgetting for the moment the presence of the Housemaster. And the Terrible Three rushed upon Kerr.

"Merry!" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"Ahem! Yes, sir."

"Kindly restrain yourselves. I thought I knew your voice, Kerr. Also I am aware of your peculiar talent for impersonation," said Mr. Railton. "What is the meaning of this absurd trick, pray?"

Kerr grinned involuntarily.

"Well, sir, Tom Merry was expecting a detective, and as the chap didn't seem to come, we thought it a pity he should be disappointed, so—so—so— It was only a lark, sir."

"A very absurd joke," said Mr. Railton. "I suppose these boys shut you up here believing you to be really what you represented yourself to be."

"I suppose so," grinned Kerr. "I—I was getting alarmed, as it's nearly bedtime, and I've got to get back to my House."

"You had better go back to your House at once," said Mr. Railton drily. "I shall not punish you for a joke. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!" said Kerr.

The Terrible Three looked at Kerr as if they would eat him as he walked cheerfully out of the box-room. Kerr winked one eye at them pleasantly as he passed, secure in the presence of Mr. Railton, and they longed to charge him over and bump him, but it was not to be done.

Kerr disappeared downstairs, and Mr. Railton fixed a stern glance upon the Terrible Three.

"I shall excuse you, as it turns out to be only a practical joke," he said. "But if this had really been Miss Fawcett's detective, I should have punished you severely. Take care that you do not play such a trick upon the genuine detective, if he should come. I shall be very severe with you if you do. You may go."

And the Terrible Three went, Mr. Railton following them downstairs, with a stern brow. But in the privacy of his own study the Housemaster indulged in a hearty laugh.

The Terrible Three returned to their own quarters. Blake & Co. were still there, though the chestnuts were all gone. The chums of Study No. 6 had improved the shining hour.

"Well?" said the Fourth-Formers together.

"Spoofoed!" growled Lowther.

"It was Kerr!" snorted Manners.

"Kerr!" yelled Blake.

"Yes, Kerr!" growled Tom Merry. "We've been taken in, but Railton spotted him. He was yelling to be let out. He was afraid of being late for bed, it seems."

"Bai Jove! Then it was only a New House jape, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in wonder.

"Yes; that's all."

"Gwout Scott! You fellows are wathah easy to take in, and no mistake!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "What a pity I wasn't heah when the boundah came!"

The Terrible Three bestowed a far from amiable glare upon the cheerful Gussy.

"What difference would that have made, fathend?" Lowther demanded.

"Oh, I should have spotted him at once, you know! He would find it wathah hard to take in a fellow of judgment—a fellow like me!"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You would have been spoofoed just the same as we were, you frabjous jay! Besides, you saw him in the common-room, and didn't spot him!" said Tom Merry excitedly.

"Yaas; but I was weally takin' your word for it that he was all sewene, you know. If I had been heah—"

"Chump!"

"Weally, you wothah—"

Railton's ordered us to let the real 'tee alone when he comes," said Tom Merry. "We're not to touch a hair of his giddy head. I think you fellows might undertake to handle him, though. Duck him in the river, or something, and make him glad to get away from St. Jim's."

"Rely on us!" said Blake heartily. "Anything short of wilful murder. He can't be coming to-night, though. Sorry I wasn't here when Kerr came."

"What difference would that have made?" howled Lowther.

"Oh, I should have spotted him, of course!"

"Silly ass!"

"I think I should have spotted him, too," said Digby, with a thoughtful shake of the head.

"I'm sure I should!" said Herries, with a nod. "But these Shell chaps are not up to snuff. Fancy letting a New House bouncer take them in like that!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as uttally widio!"

"You—you—you—"

"Hallo, bedtime!" said Blake, rising. "We'll be off. Next time Kerr comes along playing the giddy goat, Tommy, we'll be on hand, and you can rely on us to spot him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of Study No. 6 took their departure. The Terrible Three snorted. They were firmly convinced that Blake & Co. would have been equally deceived, under the same circumstances. But Blake & Co. were not disposed to admit that in the least. The Terrible Three made their way to the Shell dormitory, and found that the story of Kerr's impersonation was known to all the Shell. A howl of laughter greeted them, and their frowning brows only made the laughter the louder, and the Shell fellows roared, till Kildare came in to put the lights out. And after that, for a long time, chuckles were heard proceeding from many beds, while the Terrible Three lay in silent wrath, only too painfully conscious of the fact that they had been utterly, completely, and hopelessly "done."

CHAPTER 12.

Not to be Taken In.

THERE was a letter for Tom Merry in the morning.

It was from Miss Priscilla Fawcett. It expressed a hope that the medicine and the pills had done him good, and informed him that the good lady had succeeded at last in engaging a reliable detective, a Mr. Blum, and that Mr. Blum would arrive at St. Jim's that day. Tom Merry groaned dismally as he showed the letter to his chums.

"The genuine article at last!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Poor old Tommy! Anyway, he won't be quite so bad as Mr. Tagg. Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what are we going to do with him?" groaned Tom Merry. "The fellows will all simply howl!"

"I suppose they will. We can't drown him, or hang him, or boil him in oil, or take him out and lose him," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Blessed if I know what to do with him. Better grin and bear it."

"I've got an idea," said Manners. "Suppose you find that old gipsy, and tip her to tell you another fortune—a better one. They don't mind what fortunes they tell, so long as they get the tin, you know. Miss Fawcett is coming here again on Saturday afternoon, and you could have her all ready with a new yarn."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The blessed old cat piled it on on purpose, because I didn't believe in her rot!" he said. "I don't think she'd do it. Besides, it's no go. The gipsies have moved on. I heard Kangaroo say they had gone when he went down to Rylecombe yesterday."

"It'm! That rather knocks it on the head," agreed Manners. "It was a jolly good idea. Blessed if I know what's to be done, excepting to get the chaps to rag Mr. Blum till he's glad to clear off."

"That's the only way, I suppose."

And the Terrible Three went into the Form-room that morning revolving in their minds various schemes for dealing with Mr. Blum, private detective, when he arrived.

Jack Blake & Co. were also thinking about the private detective. Blake had an idea that Figgins & Co. had not finished with their wheeze yet. It would be quite easy for Kerr, who was a past-master in the art of impersonation, to make himself up in a different manner, and arrive as the real detective. After being spoofoed once, the Terrible Three would never suspect that the second arrival was also a spoofer, and they would take him at face value, as Blake put it.

"It's easy enough to spoofer those Shell kids," said Blake, with a wise shake of the head. "Figgins & Co. can fool them all along the line, you know, as easy as falling off a form. It's up to this study to keep our end up. If it wasn't for this study, the School House might as well go to the giddy bow-wows at once."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Of course, any of us would have spotted Kerr at once!"

"Of course we should!" said Herries. "And we'll jolly well spot him at once if he tries it on again!"

"That's the idea," said Blake. "Of course, we want to be careful not to make a mistake. When a new detective comes hopping along we'll look him over, and if there's anything suspicious about him, we'll jump on him and show him up—what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums of No. 6 were very much on the qui viva that day. Relations were a little strained between them and the Terrible Three, owing to the Fourth-Formers' cocksureness on that subject, and Tom Merry had not spoken to them that morning, so they knew nothing of Miss Fawcett's letter. After morning lessons Lowther and Manners went down to the cricket-field to practise, and Tom Merry went with them to watch. Tom's state of exasperation was growing. He wanted to be on the cricket-pitch, and it was intensely irritating to have to stand there and watch the other fellows at practice without being able to touch bat or ball himself.

Blake & Co. sauntered in the quadrangle with their eyes very much open. They encountered Figgins and Fatty Wynn outside the tuck-shop, and grinned as they noted the absence of Kerr. The three New House fellows were generally inseparable, and Blake & Co. were convinced at once that Kerr's absence meant something.

"Hallo!" said Blake affably. "Where's Kerr? Not detained?"

"Lines!" explained Figgins, with a chuckle. "He spoofoed you fellows beautifully last night, but Ratty's given him lines for being late in the House."

"He didn't spoofer us, Figgay!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "He spoofoed the Shell chaps, but we should have spotted him at once."

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CHUCKLES, $\frac{1}{2}$ D. THE CHAMPION COLOURED PAPER. EVERY SATURDAY.

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"Bow-wow!" said Figgins derisively; and he went into the tuck-shop with Patty Wynn.

Blake winked at his comrades.

"Where's Kerr?" he murmured. "What?"

"Figgins said he was doing lines," said Herries.

"He didn't say he was doing lines. He simply said 'lines,'" replied Blake sagely. "Figgy doesn't tell whoppers. He simply said 'Lines,' and left us to jump to conclusions if we liked. Of course, he wants us to think that Kerr is in the study grinding out lines for Mr. Ratcliff. But he isn't—not half."

"Wathah not!"

"That was to account for Kerr being out of sight," Blake went on, with a chuckle. "My idea is that a chap about Kerr's size will turn up in a new rig, calling himself something or other, to spoof the Shell chaps over again."

"Shouldn't wonder!" agreed Dig.

"My dear kid, it's a dead cert. You listen to your Uncle Blake," said the chief of Study No. 6 patronisingly. "Kerr could spoof the Shell chaps every day for a week; but he can't spoof your uncle. Not much."

"I should certainly refuse to be spoofed. Let's keep an eye on the New House, deah boys, and spot the wottah when he comes out in his new wig."

"He won't have a new wig," said Herries, with a shake of the head. "More likely to have an old one. It would look more natural."

"Weally, Hewwies, I did not mean a wig. I meant a wig—a new wig-out, you know."

"Gussy means his new rig!" chuckled Blake. "It's only his beautiful accent. But we're not going to watch the New House. That's no good. Kerr won't come out of his own House disguised as a giddy detective, you duffer. He'll come up to the school gates as bold as brass. Of course, he's gone out, and he's shoving on his disguise somewhere outside the gates, as it's daylight now. Last night he was able to slip out of the New House without anybody spotting him, but he couldn't do that now. My idea is that he'll come walking up to the gates. Perhaps he'll come in a cab—just like his nerve."

"Pewwaps you are wight," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"No 'perhaps' about it. I am right," said Blake calmly.

"No good watching the New House. We'll just hike down to the gates, and keep our peepers open there."

"Wight-ho!"

The four chums sauntered down to the school gates. There they lounged idly, waiting for something to turn up, like the celebrated Mr. Micawber. If Kerr's absence from his usually inseparable chums meant that he was playing a new trick, it could not be long delayed, for in less than half an hour the dinner-bell would ring, and Kerr would have to turn up in the New House then. The Fourth-Formers could not have long to wait. And, as a matter of fact, before they had been ten minutes on the watch, Blake uttered an exclamation, and pointed along the white road in the direction of Ryelcombe.

"Look there!"

A little man in a rusty black frock-coat was coming up the road. He wore a bowler hat, which did not wholly conceal spiky hair of a sandy colour. He had a moustache, which was a deep brown in hue, and seemed to glint a little in the sunshine. That it was dyed was evident even at a distance.

"Looks as if he's coming here," remarked Digby.

"You bet! He's coming here right enough. Just about Kerr's height!" grinned Blake.

"Seems to me an inch or two taller than Kerr," said Herries, after a careful survey of the approaching stranger.

"Elevators in the boots, of course," said Blake. "I've seen Kerr, when he's been made up, looking a good three inches taller than usual."

"Yes, that's so."

"Blessed if I don't think he's got the same coat on," said Blake. "He was wearing a coat just like that, anyway. He's got a bowler instead of a topper, but, of course, he would make a change like that. He's got sandy hair this time—good kind of wig for disguises. And look at that moustache—dyed."

"But why should he dye a false moustache?" asked Herries.

Blake grunted.

"To change the colour, ass. He hadn't a false moustache of the colour he wanted, so he dyed that one. See?"

"I suppose you're right, Blake."

"You leave it to your uncle," said Blake. "I'll bet you that's the man. Anyway, we'll soon see by what he says."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors, while apparently interested only in the landscape, kept sharp eyes upon the stranger as he came up. Blake was inwardly feeling a little anxious. He had so confidently pronounced the sandy stranger to be Kerr in disguise, that it would be rather a blow if the man passed on without stopping. Unless the sandy stranger stopped at the school gates,

announcing himself as Miss Fawcett's detective, Jack Blake would have to sing very small indeed.

But Blake was not disappointed. The sandy gentleman stopped at the gates, and raised his bowler hat politely to the juniors and addressed them.

"Is this St. James's School, young gentlemen?" he asked, in a somewhat squeaky voice.

Blake exchanged a glance of triumph with his comrades.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "Do you want to see someone here?"

"Yes—Master Merry. Perhaps one of you young gentlemen is Master Merry."

Blake could not help grinning. Fully convinced that the sandy gentleman was Kerr of the New House in a new disguise, he felt that it was really too rich for the impostor to pretend to take one of them for Tom Merry.

"No, he isn't here," said Blake. "I'll find him for you, sir, if you like. What name shall I tell him?"

"Blum—Mr. Blum!" said the stranger.

"Oh, good. Perhaps you are the detective?" Blake suggested, with another wink at his chums. The stranger nodded.

"Exactly. Miss Fawcett has sent me here, as you seem to know all about it."

"Good! You are going to look after Tom Merry, Mr. Tagg—I mean Blum?"

"Yes."

"Guard him from all sorts of dangers, and shadow him up and down, and round about?" Blake went on cheerfully.

The sandy gentleman looked a little puzzled.

"My instructions are to look after him," he said. "If you will have the kindness to let me pass—"

The Fourth-Formers had lined up in the stranger's way. He was looking considerably perplexed, and the juniors could not help thinking how well he did it. But they were not to be taken in—not they.

"Shall we take you to Tom Merry?" Blake asked politely.

"Thank you very much."

"Good egg! We'll take you! Collar him!" shouted Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers rushed upon the sandy stranger. He was utterly unprepared for that sudden attack, and he was bowled over at once. He went down with a wild yell, and the four juniors grabbed him, swung him into the air by his legs and shoulders, and rushed him into the quadrangle.

"Leggo!" roared the stranger. "Are you mad? What does this mean? Release me at once! What—what—what—oh—yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "We know you, you ass! Did you think you could spoof us a second time. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What—what—"

"Bwing him along, deah boys. We'll take him to Tom Mewwy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And heedless of the sandy stranger's wild struggles and frantic expostulations, the juniors rushed him away headlong towards the cricket-field.

CHAPTER 13.

Quite Genuine.

TOM MERRY was leaning against the pavilion, watching his chums at practice.

He was not looking very cheerful.

The merry click of bat and ball rang over the playing-fields, and the shouts of the juniors; but Tom Merry was out of it.

A sudden shout from the fellows round the field drew Tom's attention away from the players.

"Hallo, hallo!"

"What the dickens—"

"What's the little game?"

Four juniors were rushing at top speed towards the cricket-field, and in their midst was what appeared to be a waving mass of arms and legs. The cricketers ceased play in astonishment, gazing at the curious apparition. Tom Merry detached himself from the pavilion. There was a general shout of astonishment.

Blake & Co. came panting up to the pavilion. The little sandy gentleman was struggling wildly in their grip, and they had had some little trouble in transporting him bodily from the school gates to the cricket-field. But they had arrived at last. They dumped him down before Tom Merry, and he lay gasping like a newly-landed fish.

"There he is!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! We've bwought him to ycu, Tom Mewwy!"

"We spotted him for you," Digby explained. "He would have taken you chaps in again, but he couldn't take us in."

"No fear!" said Herries emphatically.

Tom Merry stared at the juniors, and at the gasping

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stranger. The latter was apparently trying to get his second wind, and he could not speak.

"What on earth's the game?" exclaimed Tom Merry, astounded. "Who's that?"

"Ha, ha! Can't you guess?"

"Blessed if I can, unless—" Tom stared harder at the sandy stranger. "Unless it's the detective."

"Kerr, you ass!" chortled Blake.

"What!"

"It's Kerr, playing the same old game."

"By Jove!"

"Kerr!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, coming off the field. "Do you mean to say he's got the cheek to try to spoof us over again?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Blake, grinning. "And he'd have spoofed you, too, only we kept an eye open. It's up to us to see that the School House isn't spoofed. As for you Shell chaps—"

"Grooh, goooh!" came from the floored gentleman. "Oh, I will complain to the headmaster of this! Grooh! You shall be punished—ow!—for this outrage. Yow!"

"Still keeping it up, Kerr, old man?" said Blake. "Go it! Perhaps you'll convince us you are not yourself presently—perhaps!"

"Pewwaps!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Ow! I have been assaulted!" gasped the sandy gentleman. "I shall—ow!—complain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who are you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"My name is Blum. I am a detective. Grooh!"

"Mr. Blum!" exclaimed the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"Yes. Grooh!"

"My hat!"

"Were you expecting a detective named Blum?" asked Blake, looking puzzled.

"Yes," said Tom. "And you—"

"How did Kerr know? That's the name he gave us when he came up to the gates," said Blake. "He's got the name all right, anyway. How did he know?"

"He didn't know!" roared Tom Merry.

"But he must have known. He gave us that name when he came," said Digby. "Blum was the name he gave, right enough."

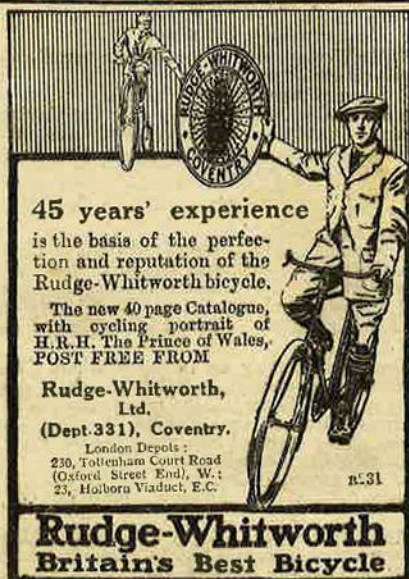
"Grooh! My name is Blum—"

"Oh, don't keep it up when you're bowled out, Kerr!" exclaimed Herries. "Don't you understand that we've spotted you, and we know who you are? You may as well own up now, you fathead! We'll have that wig off for a start."

And Herries grasped the sandy hair, and tugged at it forcibly. There was a yell of anguish from the sandy stranger. The hair did not come off.

"Great Scott! How on earth has he fixed it on?" exclaimed Herries, in astonishment. "It's as tight as if it were growing on his napper, by George!"

"Ow, ow! Let go!" shrieked Mr. Blum. "Oh! Ow! Yow! Leggo!"



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He hit out furiously at Herries, and Herries rolled over in the grass, letting go. Mr. Blum rubbed his disarranged hair ruefully. He seemed to feel hurt.

The juniors were shrieking with laughter now. It was only too clear that that hair was Mr. Blum's own hair, and was growing on his head. Study No. 6 had made a little mistake.

"Bai Jove, that's his own hair, you know!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in dismay.

"Then he's dyed it," said Herries, getting up. "Kerr hasn't sandy hair, and that's sandy."

"It isn't Kerr!" yelled Tom Merry, staggering against the pavilion wall, almost in convulsions. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha! It's not Kerr, you clump!"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake uneasily. "Of course it's Kerr! Didn't he come up and say he was a detective? Doesn't that settle it, you ass?"

"Yaas, wathah; but—but—"

Monty Lowther grasped Blake by the shoulder, turned him round, and pointed to three juniors who were hurrying towards the spot, evidently attracted by the disturbance. They were Figgins & Co., of the New House—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. Blake stared at them, his jaw dropping.

"Kerr!" he stuttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kerr!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove!"

Figgins & Co. came up smiling. Kerr was evidently there, in the flesh. Stains of ink on his fingers seemed to indicate that he had really been doing lines.

"Hallo! Who's that?" asked Figgins, staring at the sandy stranger, who was sitting in the grass and gasping away as if for a wager.

"I—I—I thought it was Kerr!" stammered Blake, realising at last that there had been a mistake. "Kerr, you beast, where have you been?"

"I've been in my study, doing lines," said Kerr, in surprise. "Ratty gave me lines for being late last night. I got in after the house had been locked up, and—"

"Why, I told you Kerr was doing lines," said Figgins. "Don't you remember—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! There seems to have been wathah a mis-apprehension, deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sandy stranger staggered to his feet. He was still gasping. He smoothed down his ruffled garments, and brushed back his ruffled hair, and looked round for his hat. Wally D'Arcy of the Third had captured the bowler hat in the quad, and was using it as a football.

It came sailing through the air, and Monty Lowther kindly caught it and presented it to the stranger—in a somewhat damaged condition. Mr. Blum punched it into shape, and set it on his sandy head. His face was very angry, which was not surprising considering the way he had been handled.

"I shall complain to your headmaster of this!" he said.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If you are really Mr. Blum—"

"I am certainly Mr. Blum! I gave my name to these boys, and they promised to take me to Master Merry. I did not anticipate—"

"I am Tom Merry. It was all a mistake!" explained Tom, choking back his merriment. "They thought you were spoofing them, you know. We were spoofed last night by a chap who pretended to be a detective. They'll apologise."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus immediately. "I considah that we owe the gentleman an apology, deah boys. Pway pardon us, sir! We acted under entire mis-apprehension. We took you for quite anothah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, Mr. Blum!" murmured Blake. "It—it was a mistake."

"Please excuse them, Mr. Blum," said Tom Merry. "They are only fags, you know, and they haven't much sense."

"Why, you ass—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I do not quite understand how such a mistake can have arisen," said Mr. Blum frigidly. "However, I am willing to say no more about the matter, if you wish it, Master Merry."

"Thanks!"

"I wish to see the headmaster," said Mr. Blum, with considerable dignity. "I have to present my credentials."

"Come with me," said Tom.

And he led the detective away towards the School House. Blake and Co. looked at one another in a sickly manner.

The rest of the juniors were yelling with laughter. Figgins & Co. were almost in hysterics.

"Well, it was his own fault!" growled Blake at last.

"He shouldn't have a dyed moustache."

"He weally shouldn't have a moustache at all," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Moustaches are quite out of date. It was certainly his own fault!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop cackling!" said Blake crossly. "Come away, you chaps! I'm not going to stay here and listen to a set of silly geese cackling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of Study No. 6 beat a retreat from the cricket-field, looking very red and very sheepish. The cackling followed them till they were out of hearing. When they were in the School House, Jack Blako found himself the centre of three distinct and deadly glares. Herries and Digby and D'Arcy agreed that it was all Blake's fault—and, indeed, Jack had been just a little cocksure from the beginning.

"You ass!" said Herries, in measured tones.

"You chump!" said Digby.

"You fwabjous-duffah!" said D'Arcy.

Blake snorted.

"You were as mistaken as I was, you silly chumps!," he said indignantly. "As a matter of fact, now I come to think of it I didn't feel quite sure it was Kerr at all—"

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Only you fellows seemed so certain about it," went on Blake.

That was too much for Study No. 6. With one accord Blake's three followers fell upon their leader, and grasped him, and bumped him to the floor. Then they walked away, somewhat relieved in their minds, but leaving the unfortunate chief of Study No. 6 in a frame of mind to which mere words could not possibly give expression.

CHAPTER 14.

Kerr to the Rescue!

M R. BLUM, private detective, was installed at St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes had, as Lowther put it, swallowed him whole!

What the Head thought about the matter the juniors did not know. He did not confide his reflections, naturally, to fellows in the Shell. It was pretty easy to guess that he didn't like it; but the great respect he had for Miss Fawcett probably made him conclude that he could not refuse her request, and doubtless he hoped that she would soon come to see the absurdity of it, and would remove the man.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blum was provided with a room. He was a quiet and inoffensive man, certainly, and not in the way. He did not undertake to shadow Tom Merry about as the facetious J. Tagg had done. Probably he knew that he owed his present "job" to the absurd fears of a nervous old lady, and he was willing to give as little trouble as possible. He sat at his window and smoked while the juniors were in the Form-room that afternoon—somewhat to the disappointment of fellows who had hoped to see him mounting guard over the Form-room door, or spying in at the window.

Mr. Blum was, indeed, so inoffensive that Tom Merry relented from his scheme of making his life a burden at St. Jim's, so that he could clear off. Mr. Blum probably would not have been induced very easily to clear off. He was receiving a good fee for doing nothing at all, and it was a job that suited him.

He did not bother Tom in any way—so far as that went. It was the utter absurdity of the matter that bothered the Shell fellow. As soon as the School knew that there was a private detective in the house watching over Tom Merry there was a general roar of merriment, which seemed as if it would never die away. It was a standing joke, and Tom was chipped on the subject till he was sore and savage. Even Manners and Lowther could not be quite serious about it, and that day Tom Merry "slanged" his chums more than he had ever slanged them before.

The matter had to end somehow, Tom Merry felt that; but how to end it was a mystery.

He was still gated—still debarred from playing cricket and cycling. The position was growing intolerable. On Saturday afternoon, too, Miss Priscilla Fawcett was coming down to the school again, to spend the half-holiday there. She was nervous and anxious, and she had informed Tommy that she would keep him under her own eye as much as possible, and come down to the school very often, at any amount of inconvenience to herself.

Inconvenience to Tom Merry did not enter into her con-

sideration. His disregard of the supposed danger Miss Priscilla attributed to sheer boyish recklessness, and it made her all the more determined to take every care of him.

On Saturday morning Tom Merry spotted Mr. Blum taking his constitutional in the quadrangle, and he snorted wrathfully at the sight. The sight of Mr. Blum always made the other fellows chuckle, but it roused Tom Merry's wrath. Mr. Blum raised his bowler hat to the captain of the Shell as he passed. That was the full extent of his keeping guard over Tom Merry.

Figgins & Co. came sauntering across the quad, and they chuckled at the sight of Mr. Blum, and chuckled again when they saw Tom Merry's gloomy face.

"How is the giddy 'tee going?" asked Figgins affably.

"Go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry impolitely.

"Does he give you your medicine of a night?" asked Kerr.

"Oh, shut up!"

"And rub your back?" asked Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"Look here, you New House rotters—"

"Pax!" said Figgins amicably. "Tommy, my son, we feel for you! We know it's rotten. We sympathise with you!"

"We do!" said Fatty Wynn. "We does!"

"It is rotten!" said Tom Merry, unclenching his hands and groaning. "Can't you fellows give me some advice? I don't know what to do, but it can't go on. It's too utterly ridiculous! I shall be cackled to death! Besides, there's the cricket coming on, and I must practise. And I'm gated for all half-holidays! Look here, Kerr, you're a cute Scotch beast; can't you think of something?"

Kerr grinned.

"I have thought of something," he answered.

Tom Merry's face brightened. It was well known that Kerr was the brains of the New House Co., and Tom Merry had great respect for his keen wits. If anybody could think of a way out of a difficulty, Kerr could.

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry. "If you could help me out of this awful bizney, I'd—I'd stand the biggest feed you've ever seen! Honest Injun!"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "It's a go! Pile in, Kerr! I'll help you do the shopping, Tom Merry. I'm rather a dab at that!"

"But what's the idea?" asked Tom.

"We've been thinking it over," said Kerr. "We feel for you—we do really! Miss Fawcett has been scared by a silly old gypsy, telling her rot about your fortune—isn't that so?"

"That's it!" said Tom lugubriously. "She believes in that silly piffle, you know!"

"You can't tip the gypsy to tell another fortune—"

"Manners suggested that; but they're gone," said Tom. "Besides, I don't suppose the old spoofer would have done it, anyway!"

"You could dig up another gypsy to tell a new fortune."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I've thought of that too," he said. "But there isn't another gypsy in the neighbourhood. These blessed spoofers come and go; and that gang are gone, and goodness knows when some more will come along! That's no good!"

"Suppose we find one, to see your governess this afternoon, and prime her with a good yarn to tell?" suggested Kerr.

"That would work the oracle, but it can't be did! I tell you, there aren't any more gipsies in the place. I've inquired!"

"We can make one," said Kerr calmly.

"Make one?"

"Exactly. Do you remember a certain Mr. Tagg, who called on you the other night?"

Tom Merry reddened.

"Oh, cheeso it!" he said. "If you're going to be funny—"

"Sober as a judge!" said Kerr. "The fact is, we regard it as our duty, as cock-house of St. Jim's, to look after you School House chaps, and get you out of your little scrapes."

"You silly ass—"

"Ahem! I mentioned Mr. Tagg as a hint of what I mean. You took me for a giddy private detective, and there's no reason why Miss Fawcett shouldn't take me for a giddy gypsy fortune-teller!" said Kerr coolly.

Tom Merry jumped.

"Oh, my hat!"

"See the wheeze?" grinned Figgins. "We've thought it out—or, rather, Kerr's thought it out—for your benefit, Tommy, my boy. Kerr can make up as anybody. I bet you he'd take in any meeting if he went as Lloyd George or Winston Churchill. Making up as a gypsy would be as easy as rolling off a form to Kerr. Of course, you School House chaps couldn't work it; but Kerr—"

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"My only hat!" said Tom Merry breathlessly. "What a thumping wheeze! You—you really think you could do it, Kerr?"

"Don't you think I could?" said Kerr.
 "Well, yes, you can do those things," admitted Tom Merry.
 "I've always said that there was one chap in the New House who could act. Only one, of course."

"Look here—" began Figgins.
 "That's all right," said Kerr. "I'll do it. When is your governess coming?"

"Three train at Rylcombe this time."
 "Good! You meet her at the station, and walk here with her. In the lane she meets a gipsy, who tells fortunes!" grinned Kerr. "I've got all the things among our theatrical props, and we can take them out in a bag; and I'll make up in the wood, and be ready for you at the stile!"

"Hooray!"
 Tom Merry rushed upon Kerr, and fairly hugged him. The Scottish junior had found a way out—the only way! True, success was not certain, but there was a good chance. And the means were certainly justifiable, to undo the harm done by the lying prediction of an impostor!

"Oh, ripping!" gasped Tom. "You're a good chap, Kerr—a giddy friend in need! If you pull this off, I'll never forget it!"

"And you won't forget the feed, either?" asked Fatty Wynn, rather anxiously.

Tom Merry laughed.
 "No fear! You fellows trot along to my study at tea-time. Miss Fawcett is going to have tea with us, and she's sent me a good remittance already. We'll fairly make things hum this time—if you pull off this wheeze!"

"Rely on us!" said Figgins. "The New House don't make mistakes! Being cock-house of St. Jim's, you know—"

"Bow-wow!" said Tom Merry good-humouredly.
 He didn't mind if Figgins called the New House cock-house of St. Jim's, so long as the Co. rescued him from his trouble.

Manners and Lowther looked at Tom in surprise when he came in to breakfast. Tom's face had completely lost its worried look. He was looking decidedly cheerful—quite his old self, in fact.

"Hallo! Somebody left you a fortune?" asked Lowther.
 "Or has the giddy detective slipped downstairs and busted his neck?"

"Neither," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But Kerr's found a way out. Hooray!"

He explained, and Manners and Lowther burst into a roar. The Terrible Three went in to breakfast in high good humour. Blake & Co. observed their unusually good spirits, and after breakfast they wanted to know the reason. Tom Merry cheerfully explained.

"Good wheeze!" said Blake. "If it works! I'll tell you what, Tom Merry—it had better be left to me! Those New House chaps will make a bungle of it; but I really think I could do the thing in topping style!"

"Thanks awfully—"
 "Don't mench!" said Blake. "I'll do it!"
 "No, you won't!"
 "Eh?"

"Kerr's the man!" said Tom Merry blandly. "Thanks all the same!"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "As a matter of fact, I don't really think it's much of an idea, after all, when I come to think of it. Rather rotten, in fact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am not quite sure that I approve of it, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass thoughtfully upon the Terrible Three. "I am not at all satisfied, weally!"

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Of course, that knocks the whole thing on the head at once—I don't think!"

"You see, it might be wegarded as deceivin', you know—"

Tom Merry reddened.
 "You ass!" he exclaimed. "It isn't deceiving—it's un-deceiving! That old crone made Miss Fawcett feel scared by telling her a pack of lies! All Kerr's going to do is to undeceive her!"

"Bai Jove, you are wight!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

"Undah the cires, I approve!"

"Then everything in the garden is lovely!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Without the approval of Gussy, of course, nothing could be done! You are quite, quite sure that you approve, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy."
 "For this relief, much thanks!" said Lowther; and he gently knocked Arthur Augustus's silk topper off and walked away.

Arthur Augustus made a rush to rescue his topper, which Manners had kindly kicked about a dozen yards away, and then he glared round in wrath.

"You uttah wottahs! I will give you a feahful thwashin' all wound! Where are those wottahs gone?"
 They were certainly gone.

CHAPTER 15.

All Serene.

MISS PRISCILLA FAWCETT alighted from the train in Rylcombe Station.

Two juniors came across the platform to meet her. Manners and Lowther raised their hats simultaneously, and very politely. Tom Merry was not there. He had not been allowed to come. The "gating" was still in force. Tom Merry could not leave St. Jim's. So Manners and Lowther had come to the station alone, to meet Miss Fawcett and escort her to the school—quite unsuspecting of what was in store for her.

"Is my dearest Tommy quite well?" was Miss Fawcett's first question, as she shook hands with the juniors.

"Quite well, ma'am," said Lowther.

"First chop," said Manners.

"Has his cough been better?"

"It's quite gone, ma'am."

"And the pains in his poor little back?"

"Not a sign of them!"

"Dear me! That is indeed good news. It must be due to taking regular doses of the Purple Potion and the Pink Powder!" said Miss Fawcett. "I suppose Tommy has not finished the medicines yet?"

"Ahem! I think they're quite finished!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Already! Then he must have been taking a great deal," said Miss Fawcett, a little surprised. "However, Dr. Slobber says that the more that is taken, the more certain the patient is of recovery. Dear Tommy! I am so anxious to see him. Of course, he has not come out. I specially requested the Head—"

"He wanted to come to the station, ma'am, but he was gated," explained Lowther. "So he's waiting for us at the school gates. So is—ahem!—I mean, we shall find him there."

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"I am so anxious to see him!" said Miss Priscilla. "It is very kind of you, dear boys, to meet me at the station. Let us lose no time."

"This way, ma'am!"
And the Shell fellows escorted Miss Fawcett out of the station. They walked down the High Street of Rylcombe, and came out into the lane. Miss Fawcett was not a fast walker, but she made all the speed she could. She was very anxious to see her darling Tommy, and to ascertain with her own eyes the effect of Dr. Slobber's medicines, pills, and powders upon his youthful frame.

If Tom Merry had, indeed, swallowed that consignment of medicines, pills, and powders, the probability was that he would never have been alive to greet his old governess; but it was quite true, as Lowther said, that the things were finished. They had been finished on the day of their arrival—most effectively.

"And no danger has befallen my dearest Tommy?" Miss Priscilla asked, as they walked on towards St. Jim's.

"Nothing at all, Miss Fawcett," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Of course, Mr. Blum is looking after him in topping style. So are we all!"

"Everybody in the school is taking an interest in the matter, ma'am," said Manners, with equal solemnity. "There isn't a fellow in the School House, or the New House either, who hasn't spoken to Tom on the subject."

Miss Priscilla beamed.
"What dear, good, kind boys!" she exclaimed. "Of course, they all like Tommy, and take an interest in his health. That is only natural."

"Ha, ha—groogh—hooh!"
Miss Fawcett looked anxiously at Lowther.

"Have you a cough, my dear little boy?"
"Ahem! No!" gasped Lowther. "Only a—a—a sort of—of—it's all right. There's St. Jim's, Miss Fawcett!"

Monty Lowther had very nearly burst into a roar of laughter, but he had changed it to a cough just in time. The idea of all St. Jim's taking a tender interest in Tom Merry's health struck him as funny.

St. Jim's was in sight now. As they came up towards the gates they caught sight of Tom Merry standing there with Figgins and Fatty Wynn. They were chatting with a somewhat weird-looking gipsy croone.

Miss Fawcett glanced at the gipsy with interest. She bent almost double, and leaned upon a knobby stick. Her face was the colour of a berry, and her thick black hair was in heavy ringlets about her head, crowned with a red handkerchief artistically twisted. Under a green skirt peeped out the edge of a striped petticoat and a pair of large feet.

"Cross my palm with silver, pretty lady!" murmured the gipsy, in a whining voice. "Let me tell the fortune of your little boys!"

Manners and Lowther stared blankly at the gipsy. If she was not a real gipsy, certainly the get-up was perfect. They looked at Figgins—and Figgins closed one eye for a moment. Then the two Shell fellows smiled.

"Oh, stuff!" said Tom Merry, playing his part well. "I've had my fortune told the other day. Don't want another. How are you, dear?" And he kissed his old governess. "Come in, and never mind the fortune-teller!"

"Cross my palm with silver!" whined the gipsy again. "I can tell the future—I can tell the past!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom. "Chuck it!"
"My dearest Tommy," said Miss Priscilla mildly, "you should be polite!"

"Oh, all right!" said Tom, with an air of resignation. "Let her tell my fortune again if she likes. Hold on, though. Suppose she tells the past first—then we can be sure she knows something about the future."

"That is really a good idea," said Miss Priscilla.

"Cross my palm with silver—"
Tom Merry placed a sixpence in the brown hand.

"Now pile in!"
"Your hand, young Gorgio!"
Tom extended his hand, and it was taken in the brown fingers. The gipsy bent a dreamy glance upon it.

"The past is to me an open book!" the gipsy said slowly. "I see a strange, far country—palm-trees—jungle—a burning sun!"

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla, much impressed. "You remember that you were born in India, Tommy, and I brought you home a mere child."

"Marvellous!" said Monty Lowther.

"I see a great ship—a rolling ocean—great expanses of blue water," the gipsy went on; "a little child with his nurse on the deck of a great ship!"

"Wonderful!" said Manners. "You came in a ship from India when you were a kidlet, Tom. You didn't walk, any way!"

"Shurrup!" said Tom. "This is a serious matter. What more can you tell me about the past, old lady?"

"I see a house amid green gardens," crooned the gipsy, "a wide heath, with hills in the distance. I see a little child playing in the gardens. All this I read—ahem!—in your hand. A little boy is growing up under the loving eyes of his old nurse, who has become his guardian. Do I tell you true?"

"Quite true."
"Amazing!" gasped Figgins.

"Extraordinary!" said Fatty Wynn.

"It is indeed most extraordinary and amazing!" said Miss Fawcett. "I am very glad we have encountered this gipsy. She may be able to tell us precisely what dangers you have to expect in the future, Tommy darling!"

"I hope so," said Tom. "Go on, kid—I mean ma'am!"
The gipsy went on in crooning tones.

"The child grows older—he is sent to school. First to one school, and then to another. He becomes captain of his Form!"

"Tom Merry is captain of the Shell!" said Figgins. "You see, she knows all about it."

"His health causes his kind guardian great anxiety!" went on the gipsy. "She sends him large quantities of medicine, which are disposed of immediately."

"Exactly the facts!" said Monty Lowther.

"Can you tell us something more?" asked Miss Priscilla, with bated breath. She was hanging on the gipsy's words by this time. Certainly the old croone was showing a marvellous knowledge of Tom Merry's past.

"I can tell you much more, lady. The boy—this boy—has rivals in the school—friendly rivals in another House. He wishes his own house to be cockhouse, but in that he fails. His rivals in the other House beat him hollow all the time, and give him the kybosh!" said the gipsy.

"Quite true!" said Figgins and Fatty Wynn simultaneously; but the Terrible Three glared in wrath at the gipsy.

"That's all rot, of course," said Manners hotly.

"Pure piffle!" said Lowther.

"Of all the silly asses—" began Tom Merry.

"Hush, Tommy! You must not speak like that to her!" said Miss Priscilla chidingly. "Where are your manners, my dear child! Go on, please—go on, my good soul! Tell us something of the future now!"

"Yes, get on with the washing!" growled Lowther.

The gipsy scanned Tom Merry's hand with great attention. "I see a danger threatening," she crooned—"a great danger!"

"Ah!" said Miss Priscilla breathlessly. "This agrees with the prediction of the other gipsy, Tommy. Can you say precisely what the danger is, my good lady?"

"The boy is in danger of losing his health—"

"Ah! It is as I feared—"

"There is no other danger. The stranger from over the sea—that is disease—the dark man—that is death—but both may be avoided!"

"How avoided?" exclaimed Miss Priscilla eagerly. "That is what we wish to know."

"By taking plenty of open-air exercise, and playing all sorts of games," said the gipsy, still scanning Tom Merry's palm. "The young gentleman must play cricket in the summer, and football in the winter."

"Oh dear!"

"He must cycle and run and swim and play games as much as possible. The more he spends outside the school bounds the better."

"Oh!"

"And then the danger will pass. But there is no other way!" said the gipsy.

"Goodness gracious!" said poor Miss Priscilla. "I have been taking entirely the wrong means to safeguard you, Tommy darling."

"One more thing!" said the gipsy. "The young gentleman must not be specially watched. No one must be employed to watch or look after him. That is likely to bring about the very trouble you would wish to avoid."

"Bless my heart! I will dismiss the detective at once!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla, agitated. "How very, very fortunate to discover that! But is there no sign of a cricket accident, my good person? The other gipsy foretold—"

"The line of accident is mixed with the—the line of cricket!" murmured the gipsy, with eyes still fixed on Tom Merry's palm. "But the accident can only come through not playing cricket. If the young Gorgio gives up playing cricket the accident may come, but not otherwise."

"My dearest Tommy, you must play cricket regularly. I hope you will be able to accustom yourself to playing that rough game!"

"I'll try," said Tom Merry heroically. "I'll do my best

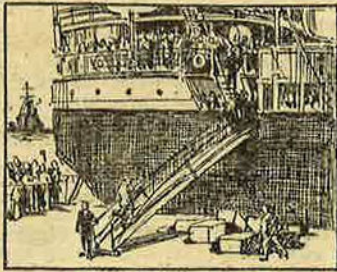
(Continued on page 26.)

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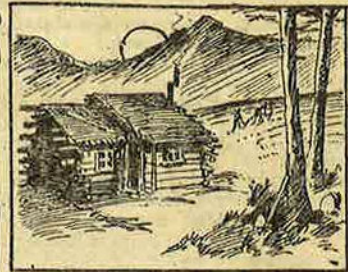
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'OFF TO CANADA

THIS WEEK:
Climatic Conditions.
Prospects in the West.
Some Personal Experiences.



A HOMESTEAD IN ALBERTA

Western Canada is divided up into many districts, and these vary so greatly in regard to climatic and other natural conditions that it is practically impossible to describe or deal with them collectively. In the Middle West, that is, in parts of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, we find prairie land, and the weather is apt to be to extremes. Hot and dry in summer, and cold and often very windy in winter, the Middle West is, nevertheless, one of the finest wheat-growing districts in the world. The ground is covered with snow for two or three months of the year, and this, besides forming a protective mantle for certain kinds of vegetation, also supplies the soil with much-needed moisture when it thaws. Here in this part of Canada my chums who wish to become farmers will find ample scope for their energies.

The Great North-West, which includes portions of Saskatchewan and Alberta, is another fine grain-growing district, and the climate is somewhat similar to that of the Middle West. The winter is apt to be very severe, and for spells, which fortunately do not last long, the cold becomes truly Arctic. False statements are published both in English and Canadian papers regarding the winter temperatures in the Dominion. Zero weather in the North-West and other parts is not infrequent, and I have seen the thermometer registering 60 degrees below zero, and many times 20 and 30 degrees below. I mention this fact about the winter weather because it is generally conveniently omitted from the pamphlets issued by the railway and steamship companies and by the Canadian Government.

But for all the attraction the prairie provinces have for some people I prefer to live farther west still. In various parts of British Columbia I have made my home for more or less lengthy periods, and, in my opinion, no other place in the world can compete with it in the opportunities this province offers its settlers. For one thing, the wages of tradesmen and unskilled labourers are higher than anywhere else; but, later on, I shall deal at greater length with this subject, in addition to setting forth particulars about farming and various other callings.

The Okanagan Valley in southern B.C. is a magnificent fruit-growing district, which has a more equable climate than most portions of the Dominion. Through the centre of British Columbia runs what is known as the "Dry Belt." Occasionally for weeks together during the summer season not a drop of rain will fall, and then the cattle-ranges change their hue from green to yellow, and only the sage-brush, cactus, and bunch-grass flourish on them. Fruit-growing and farming can only be carried on by means of irrigation; yet some of the largest fruit and vegetables grown in the world come from this district. But although apples, for instance, grow to a truly enormous size when grown under the irrigation system, they lose much in flavour. Indeed, I consider that some of the apples and peaches grown in the "Dry Belt" taste like potatoes.

Some people do not like a dry climate, or an intensely cold one, and to these the Pacific slope and Vancouver Island should appeal. The weather here is very similar to that of England. A great timber industry is carried on, remarkably fine forests extending for hundreds of miles north of the city of Vancouver, and this furnishes thousands of men with all-the-year-round employment. The salmon-fishing industry of the Western Coast is world-famous; but, unfortunately, Japanese have almost ousted the white man from it. Mining is extensively carried on, for British Columbia, in general, abounds with mineral wealth.

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Two new railroads are almost completed in Western Canada—the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern. To my chums, especially those who have some knowledge of a trade, I would recommend one of the small towns on one of these lines as a likely place in which to make a start in the New Country. To those who wish to save money quickly—and I suppose most people do—the small towns have some great advantages over such cities as Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, or Winnipeg. In the latter places competition is keen, and there are too many inducements to spend money, which especially appeal to the young man away from home. Many men in Canada to-day owe their fortunes to the fact that they identified themselves with some little town, which, as it grew, enlarged their opportunities and incidentally their banking accounts. In one such small city in British Columbia, with a population of about 2,500, I have had strangers come up to me with offers of employment. Particulars of towns can be obtained by writing to the Secretary of the Canadian Government Office, 17, Victoria Street, London, S.W.

Canada can meet a wide variety of tastes. Those who like a metropolitan life will find it in such cities as Winnipeg and Vancouver; whilst solitude and quietness can be obtained on the prairies and in the back-blocks. Fellows who like a hard-working open-air life can get all they want of it in the woods and on the ranches, and strong men who need excitement will find their desires met in the goldfields. Many young Englishmen with adventurous souls join the famous North-West Mounted Police, the Pride of Canada, of which I will have more to say in another article.

There are thousands of young fellows in the Old Country who desire to go to sea, either before the mast or as stewards, but are unable to do so from the English ports, where vacancies are snapped up as soon as they occur. Although there is not much shipping from ports like Vancouver and Victoria, in comparison with some of the English seaboard towns, there seem to be good opportunities of securing positions on what boats there are.

It was at Vancouver that I first shipped as an ordinary seaman. I boarded one of the mail-boats on the Japan-China run, and asked the bo's'n for a job, telling him I was pretty handy with a paint-brush. I was signed on without being asked for discharge papers, and made one trip across the Pacific before the mast. On my return, I asked for my discharge, and went to an hotel with several other members of the crew who had quitted the ship. While we were there the bo's'n came up to the hotel, and tried to induce us to make another trip, as he could not secure enough men. This occurred in the early summer, when men prefer to take shore jobs at higher wages.

A few days after leaving this ship I was strolling down by one of the wharfs, when a sudden desire to make another trip somewhere else came to me. Thereupon I boarded a small steamer, and asked for the chief steward. Although I had never done steward's work before, I was promptly taken on, and half an hour later I had rescued my kit-bag from the hotel, and was in this boat passing out of the Narrows, without even the knowledge as to where the ship was bound. On this trip I visited some United States and Northern British Columbian ports.

In next week's article I shall have something to say about the prices of food, lodgings, and clothes in the Dominion, and will give you some hints in regard to seeking employment.

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INTRODUCTION.

After an exciting election at Grovehouse College, Geoffrey Foster is chosen to fill the vacant position in the college cricket eleven when they play Healdingham—one of the most important matches of the year. The fact that Geoffrey is elected earns him the enmity of Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his friend and crony, Sidney Weames. Later, Geoffrey makes his way to the nets, where Jeffcock, William Hewitt—captain of the school and Foster's firm friend—and a lad named Adams are practising.

Geoffrey succeeds in bowling Jeffcock three times in four balls, and the latter loses his temper, and, with a cowardly blow, knocks Geoffrey down. This results in a fight, which takes place in an old gravel-pit—the scene of many a fight. Jeffcock informs his toadies that he is going to give Foster such a hiding that he will be unable to play in the Healdingham match. But Geoffrey proves the better man, and it is Jeffcock who has to stand down from the match.

Geoffrey distinguishes himself both at the wicket and bowling, but, mainly owing to bad play on the part of Weames and Talbot, Grovehouse loses the match.

Two or three days later, Geoffrey learns that the company of which his father is the principal is about to go smash, and that Jeffcock's father, who was also in the company, has retired. Of course, Jeffcock makes the most of it, and publicly brands Foster as the son of an embezzler. The next Geoffrey hears of his father is that the police hold a warrant for his arrest. That day Geoffrey meets a man who tells him to meet his father at the stile in the lane at ten o'clock. (Now go on with the story.)

Faces at the Window—Father and Son—Geoffrey Begs Simon Blake to Help Him—Caught Breaking the Rules.

At half-past nine, when most of the schoolboys at Grovehouse were fast asleep, and only one or two of the Upper Sixth and the preceptors kept the lights going in their own rooms, Geoffrey Foster cautiously opened his door, glancing quickly at the bed in which Adams slept to see if he were asleep or not, and then, closing it carefully, he crept along the corridor to a window on the landing below, and, opening this, he slipped quietly out, and by means of the closely-clinging ivy rapidly made his way to the ground.

He had scarcely reached it when he was startled by the noise of the window closing, and glancing above, with fast-beating heart, he could almost have sworn that he saw two faces pressed against the glass, and that these were the faces of Jeffcock and Sidney Weames.

He stood a moment irresolute. Had they been on the watch, he wondered, or had Jeffcock been coming up the

stairs from below and seen him open the window and get out?

Jeffcock's room was not near his own, but he would have to reach the landing before taking the corridor bearing to the right in order to gain the room in which he slept.

But Geoffrey had other things to think about than the probable movements of his enemy, and, throwing aside his indecision, he ran swiftly down towards the playing-fields and across these to the big gates. These were easy to scale for a youngster as healthy and as active as he, and, swarming up the ironwork, he clambered over the top and made his way easily down into the road.

Before him, broad and white, lay the level road leading to Elsworth, and along this he swung at a quick pace, his heart beating wildly at the thought that he was about to meet his father.

In his excitement he reached the stile leading into the private footpath that crosses Farmer Bates's fields, the appointed meeting-place, a full quarter of an hour before the time that Patrick Mulready had mentioned. But he had not long to wait. Pacing up and down in the shadows he saw a tall, familiar figure. There was no mistaking that erect carriage, that well-set poise of the head, that firm step, full of courage and confidence. Geoffrey had approached noiselessly, and it was not until he was within a yard or two that Major Foster, hearing his approach, turned round with a start, as if afraid of who it might be.

His fears vanished in a moment, however, and Geoffrey found himself folded in a pair of strong arms.

"Geoffrey!" cried Major Foster, in a voice of deep emotion.

"Father!" said the lad, a lump rising in his throat and choking him.

Then neither spoke for some time.

But the precious moments were fleeting, and none knew better than Geoffrey that if his father had good reason to fear the police it would not be wise for him to be seen anywhere within the neighbourhood of so small a village as Elsworth, where the coming and going of every stranger was carefully noted, and his description mentally photographed by all who saw him.

This the major understood, too, and, lightly vaulting over the stile into the footpath beyond, he walked onward at a slow pace when his son joined him.

The boy could not speak for the great fear that gripped his heart. Was his father guilty? He knew, of course, that the expenses of their establishment at home, and of his own schooling, were very large indeed, and that the major's half-pay would go little towards meeting them.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A DANGEROUS DOUBLE!"

Had his father, then, been living above his means, and so been forced to cheat the companies in which he was interested out of the money for the taking of which he had now to flee from justice? Geoffrey, unlearned in the ways of the world as he was, knew that sometimes strictly honourable men had been led into dubious paths by such temptations as these.

"Geoffrey!"

"Yes, father?"

"You know what has happened? Your mother wrote and told you?"

"Yes, father."

The major stopped. He stood in front of Geoffrey, his keen grey eyes fixed upon his son's face.

"You see me, my son," he said, "a ruined man. All London is ringing with the story of my dishonour. The police are searching for me. An angry mob is besieging the offices of the London and County Building Society, clamouring for the return of the money they have invested in it, beating their fists upon the closed doors of the office, and at times defying the police that have been told off to keep order. I have read it all in the day's paper, and it is breaking my heart."

His voice trembled as he spoke.

"My name is a byword!" he cried, continuing rapidly. "Major Foster, who all his life has prided himself upon his integrity and his honour, has fled like a thief in the night, staining the family name beyond redemption; and among those who used to know and respect him there is not one who would say a word on his behalf."

"Yes, father, there is," answered Geoffrey—"my mother."

The major's voice softened.

"So there is, my boy," he said; "you are right. Your mother will know, whatever the world may say of me, that I am guiltless of the crime with which I shall be charged."

A thrill of joy ran through the boy's veins. He could not listen to his father's words, hear the honest ring in his voice, and doubt. His fears vanished in a moment. What cared he now what the world might say?

"You didn't do it, father?" he cried. "You didn't do it?"

"No, my boy," answered Major Gilbert Foster earnestly. "I did not do it. I am as guiltless of misappropriating the company's funds to my own use as you yourself. I wanted to see you, to assure you of that before I left England, perhaps for ever, because I know your character so well, and I know you would never hold up your head again if you thought your father was a common thief."

"Then why not face it out, dad?" asked the boy. "Why not let them take you? The investigations, and your own evidence, will place the guilt where it should be? Why not brave it out?"

"My boy," answered the soldier earnestly, "do you think I should have allowed matters to go as far as this if I had intended to brave it out? There is more at stake than even my honour. If I were to reveal the truth, I should be guilty of the basest ingratitude to one to whom I owe not only my past fortune, but my very life itself. I have been weighed down for years by my obligations, seeking in vain for a means of returning them; but now the chance has come. I must sacrifice myself in order that my dearest friend may not suffer. It is a long story, and one which it would be unfair for me to tell. But time is pressing, Geoffrey. The old home will go, of course. I can hope that nothing will be saved from the wreck to benefit you or my dear wife. But for her I have no fear. My brother-in-law or her own mother will see that she does not want. For you, my dear son, I am more concerned. You will have to earn your own living. Are you afraid?"

"I am a Hedley Foster," said Geoffrey proudly, raising his head; "I am afraid of nothing."

"You have received a good education, you are a lad of spirit"—the major jerked the words out in his agony—"you are young. The whole world is before you. You will do well, I am sure. Go to your mother when you leave the school, Geoffrey, and then see what you can do for yourself. One last word. Whatever may happen to you, in whatever walk of life you may descend, and to descend is easy when you start in life, always remember that you are a gentleman, and act as such. Honour your friends, respect even your enemies, and obey your master. Good-bye, Geoffrey, and Heaven bless you! If we never meet again, believe in me always to the end. It is late. You must get back to the school. Besides, I must get as far as I can to-night. I must leave the country as soon as possible. Good-bye, my boy, good-bye!"

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The enforced calm with which the major spoke only served to betray his agitation the more. Geoffrey found himself caught in those strong arms he loved in just the way he used to be when he was a child. He felt his father kiss him passionately once on the forehead, and then something was pressed into his hand.

Scarcely could he command himself to say good-bye, when, with a bound, the soldier left him and disappeared into the darkness.

Geoffrey's head whirled round. Hardly knowing what he was doing, he wandered into the village, and as he turned in the direction of the school a man barred his way.

"Hallo!" he cried, in a tone of astonishment. "A Grovehouse boy out at this time of night! Here's a tale for Dr. Morgan."

Looking up, Geoffrey recognised in the man Simon Blake a sporting no'er-do-well and bookmaker of Elsworth. The man, hands in pockets, stood grinning at him, and like a flash an idea occurred to the schoolboy. He remembered the closing of the window. If someone had seen him go out, and if they were waiting for him on his return, he must hide the real reason he had for leaving the school at night, at all costs.

Simon Blake was a man who made a good deal of money during the term by accepting bets from the schoolboys. Betting was a sad evil at Grovehouse, and men of Bangley Jeffcock's type had done much to foster it. It had become such a scandal that Dr. Morgan had threatened to expel the next schoolboy, be he in whatever class he might, who should be found in open communication with the bookmaker.

Well, better take that risk than betray the fact that Major Foster had come to see him at Elsworth.

"Blake," he said quickly, "I want you to do me a favour."

The bookmaker regarded young Foster critically.

"I'd always do a favour for you, Mr. Foster," he said. "You've never done any business with me, but I like you all the better for that. You are one of the few gentlemen there are up at Grovehouse, and you've only got to say the word for me to stick to it."

"Well, then," the schoolboy went on, "I have broken out of bounds to-night because a question of honour was involved. I give you my word as to that. If anyone should ask you whether I have been to see you to-night, I want you to say 'Yes.'"

"But that would mean your being expelled from the school, sir," said Blake, amazed.

"I know that; but I want you to do it. Will you promise me?" And the boy felt in his pockets for some money. The bookmaker flushed.

"If you really wish it, Mr. Foster," he said, "I'll do it, come what may. But I won't accept a bribe. I'm not that sort."

"Can I trust you?" asked Geoffrey.

"You can, sir."

"Then the reason for my coming out intimately concerns my father. You understand. Now, will you give me your promise?"

The ruin of Major Foster was common talk in the village, and Blake understood in a moment.

"I'll do it, sir," he said heartily; "and I admire your pluck."

"Thank you," returned Geoffrey quickly, and off he set at a run along the road towards the school.

The meeting with Blake had for the moment turned his thoughts away from his father; but he now remembered the packet the major had pressed into his hand, and opening it as he paused for a moment, he found it full of gold. There were about ten pounds in coin of the realm in all, and Geoffrey flushed as he thought to what sacrifice his father might have gone in order to give it him. But it was too late to return it now, and, thrusting it into his pockets with a sigh, Geoffrey ran on to the school gates, scaled them as before, and a minute or so later reached the School House.

To clamber up the ivy, risky feat though it was, was no difficult task; but when he had gained the window, to his dismay, he found it shut, and the catch set, and the shutters closed beyond. He could not get in. There was only one thing for it—he must wander about the grounds all night, and hope to sneak in in the morning. He made his way down to the ground again, but scarcely had his feet touched the earth than three figures appeared, and Geoffrey found himself confronted by his enemy Jeffcock, Kelly, one of the undermasters, and Dr. Morgan, the Head, himself.

The Interview with the Head of Grovehouse—Geoffrey Accused of Theft—A Cowardly Plot—What will be the End?

"Foster," said the Head, "come to my study at once!" He led the way, and Kelly, walking by Geoffrey's side, saw that the boy made no attempt to escape. But Geoffrey's heart was too full. His misery had reached its height. Higher he thought it could not go.

A minute or so later they were all within Dr. Morgan's luxurious study, the walls of which were surrounded by precious books, the furniture of which was on a lavish scale and in good taste; and stern and inflexible, with a brow as fierce as that of an inquisitor of old, the Head sat at his desk motioning to Geoffrey to stand before him.

"Why have you been out of bounds to-night, Foster?" he asked.

Geoffrey flushed.

"I cannot answer, sir," he said.

"Will you have the goodness to turn out your pockets?" asked the Head next.

"Is it necessary, sir?" asked Geoffrey quickly, thinking of the money that his father had given him.

"I wish it."

Geoffrey obeyed. From his inner breast-pocket he produced the last two letters his mother had written from home—sacred letters both. From his waistcoat he drew a pearl-handled penknife, a gold watch and chain, a stamp case, and some other odds and ends, including a fountain-pen and a piece of lead pencil. From his trousers-pocket came his bunch of keys and chain, and the ten pounds worth of gold.

The doctor's eyes shot fire at the sight of this. The under-master's face grew stern, and Jeffcock could not conceal the triumphant expression that filled his heart.

"Where did you get that gold?" asked Dr. Morgan sternly.

Geoffrey hesitated. What could he say?

"It is the proceeds of a betting transaction with the man Blake, I suppose?" suggested the Head of Grovehouse; and Geoffrey smiled as he saw smooth water ahead.

If the doctor thought that, he would never guess that Major Foster had visited Elsworth, and Blake would confirm the story if applied to.

The smile made Dr. Morgan believe that his suspicion was correct, and with flashing eyes he brought his fist heavily down upon the leather-covered top of his writing-desk.

"Foster," he said, in a terrible voice, "like father, like son! All the world knows now what your father is—a common thief, a robber of the poor, a ruiner of homes, a felon flying from justice!"

"No, no!" cried Geoffrey in agony, writhing to hear his father spoken of in this way before Jeffcock and Mr. Kelly.

"It isn't true; it isn't true!"

"His conduct is infamous!" cried the Head. "The papers have given us the details, and already one poor victim of his fraud has committed suicide!"

Geoffrey uttered a hoarse cry, and hid his face in his hands. He stood the very picture of shamed misery, and not one in that room had compassion on him. Jeffcock's triumph was complete.

"Foster, look at and attend to me!"

Geoffrey lowered his hands.

"The treasury of the school cricket club, the box of which Secretary Adams has always kept carefully locked away in the room which you share with him, has been broken open and the money abstracted."

Geoffrey's eyes opened wide, and as the horror of the realisation of what must follow this pronouncement dawned on him, he uttered a cry of anguish.

"When Mr. Kelly came to me, informed by Jeffcock here that you had left the school in defiance of all its rules at half-past nine, I went with him, first to your bed-room, where we found Adams asleep, and then to your study, in the hope of finding you there. But instead we found the desk in which the money-box was kept broken open, and the money-box upon the table with the lid open, and the key, which had been taken from Adams's chain, still in the lock. Who could have taken it but you? Secretary Adams declares that he had no idea you had left the bed-room. He did not hear you go; neither would he hear you abstract the key from his chain. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Do you mean to say, sir," asked the boy, in horror, "that you suspect me of stealing the club money?"

"I do."

"It's not true, sir," answered the boy, raising his head and looking defiantly round; "it's not true. If Jeffcock kept watch on me to-night, perhaps he knows more of it than I do. He saw me leave the school, he could easily have gone to my bed-room and have taken the key and have robbed the treasury. I am utterly innocent, sir. I know nothing about it."

"Then where did you get this gold?"

Geoffrey's face flushed, then turned the hue of death.

"I cannot tell you, sir," he said, in trembling accents. "You could not get such a sum from Blake, the book-maker!" said the doctor harshly. "Part of the money might have come from him; the rest is from the treasury. How much did Adams say there was there, Mr. Kelly?"

"A matter of four pounds in gold, sir—three sovereigns and two half-sovereigns. The petty cash, in silver and copper, was left in its separate compartment. That money was marked, sir."

"A very good reason why it should be left," said Dr. Morgan, with a grim smile. "And who would know it to be marked but Foster, who shared the confidence of Adams? Foster, you had better by far tell the truth. After breaking from the school to-night, of course, I should have no alternative but to expel you, but before you go you might make at least what amends lie within your power. Will you confess to taking this money? I know the need you must shortly be in might have tempted you, and I might be disposed to view the case more leniently for that reason. Come, now, did you take the money?"

"No, sir," answered the boy, whose heart was throbbing violently, whose head was numbed with this latest sorrow coming so soon upon the last; "I cannot confess to what I did not do. I know nothing about it. When I left my study and went to bed the desk was all right then. The robbery must have been committed while I was out."

"While you were gone to Elsworth to see a rascally book-maker!" cried the Head sarcastically, "with whom you have had dishonest dealings despite the law of the school forbidding you to do so. You are being judged by men of the world, and I think Mr. Kelly and myself will know how to appreciate your denial. The money I have here shall be impounded until I have made inquiries of the bookmaker. Foster, you can go to bed to seek the rest you can. Your own conscience will be your accuser. It goes to my heart to see a lad whom I thought promised so well, turn out a thief, a liar, and a rogue ere he has left his school."

With that Dr. Morgan rose.

"See Foster to his room, Kelly," he said, and Geoffrey, with his head proudly held erect, darting one scornful glance at Jeffcock which made the Upper Sixth Form boy wince, marched out of the study with his preceptor, and along the corridors, and up the stairs to his room.

Here he found Adams awake, and waiting for him. Mr. Kelly locked the door upon him, and took away the key. He meant keeping his prisoner safe.

"Geoffrey," cried the club secretary, going to him, and looking him earnestly in the eyes, "did you take that money?"

"No," was the quiet reply. "On my word of honour as a Grovehouse boy, I did not."

"I knew it," answered the secretary, with a sigh of relief, pressing his chum's hand. "And I believe you."

This display of friendship broke down Geoffrey's reserve. Reproaches, accusations, hard words he could have fought against; kindness found him as incapable of resistance as a child, and, unnerved by the terrible ordeal of that night, he threw himself face downward upon his pillow and sobbed as if his heart would break.

The fiat had gone forth. In the morning he would be sent down. It was not likely that Dr. Morgan, anxious as he doubtless was to get rid of the son of the absconding Major Foster, would keep him longer at Grovehouse than he could help; and after he had made inquiries of the bookmaker Blake, inquiries which would confirm his suspicions in every respect, Geoffrey would be turned out of the school which he had loved, disgraced, and discredited in the eyes of all his fellow schoolmates.

Well, it was the end. He did not care now that his father had gone and his mother was suffering so, what happened to him, and all he prayed for was strength to face his ordeal like a man.

(This Grand New Serial will be continued next Wednesday.)



DON'T MISS READING

ARTHUR S. HARDY'S

Grand Sporting Serial now running in

CHUCKLES, ½d.



THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 322.

TROUBLE FOR TOM!

(Continued from Page 21.)

to please you—ahem! I'll play cricket every chance I get through the summer."

"That is my own dear devoted boy! You must not complain, my dearest Tommy, if it takes up your time on a half-holiday, when you might be improving your mind by reading some instructive book about entomology or—*or* geography," said Miss Fawcett. "You must remember that it is for the sake of your health and safety."

"I won't complain!" Tom Merry promised. "Not a bit of it. I—I dare say I shall get to like it in—in time."

"It is for the sake of his health," said Miss Priscilla gently. "I hope you will become a very keen cricketer, Tommy, and get large numbers of goals and things. I think you call them goals? Can you tell us anything more, my good dame?"

"I have done!" said the gipsy. "Thank you so much! You have relieved my mind." Miss Priscilla selected a sovereign from her purse. "Pray take this—"

But the gipsy drew back.

"Madam, I cannot accept it. The young gentleman has crossed my palm with silver, and that is enough. Farewell!"

And the gipsy hobbled away, stumping along with the stick. "The dear, good soul!" said Miss Priscilla, quite touched. "How very honest! Tommy darling, my mind is very much relieved."

And Tom Merry, who had been feeling some inward compunction, was relieved at the happiness that was unmistakable in the old lady's kind face. The little device was surely justifiable to relieve the terrors and anxieties caused by the real gipsy's lying predictions.

"Let us go in," said Miss Fawcett. "I will speak to the Head at once. I will also settle matters with Mr. Blum, and send him away! Come, my darling Tommy!"

Darling Tommy came most willingly.

Miss Priscilla Fawcett visited the Head's study, and the Head groaned inwardly when she was announced. But he looked very much relieved when he heard what she had to tell him. And he was decidedly glad to hear that Mr. Blum was to depart from St. Jim's, and take the next train from Rylecombe to London.

After the departure of Mr. Blum, who went away quite satisfied with a handsome fee in his pocket, Miss Priscilla came to Tom Merry's study.

Great preparations were going on there.

Tom Merry had promised to stand a tremendous feed if he succeeded in getting out of the trouble the gipsy's prophecies had brought upon him, and he was keeping his word.

The study table gleamed with a new table-cloth, and crockery that had been borrowed up and down the passage, and the festive board groaned under the weight of good things, as a novelist would say.

The chums of Study No. 6 were there, and Kangaroo and several more fellows, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn. Kerr came in later, his face presenting a newly-washed appearance, and a cheery grin. The chums of St. Jim's sat down to tea in great spirits, and the merriest of all was Tom Merry, perhaps with the exception of Miss Priscilla. That good lady was very happy indeed. Fatty Wynn was in the seventh heaven. There was a cheery buzz of talk over the well-spread tea-table, but Fatty Wynn did not take part in it. His jaws were otherwise—and very busily—engaged, and he had no time to spare for talk.

It was a very merry celebration.

And when it was over, and Miss Priscilla rose to leave, she beamed sweetly upon the juniors, and once more impressed upon Tom Merry the stern necessity of devoting himself to the rough game of cricket that season.

And Tom Merry promised faithfully that he would devote himself to the summer game, and never neglect an opportunity of playing it, a promise which he carried out in the most faithful manner.

The juniors saw Miss Fawcett off to the station in great spirits. When they came back to St. Jim's cricket practice was going on on Little Side, and Tom Merry simply jumped into his flannels, and joined his chums there. The worry caused by the gipsy's prediction was over now, and it was the end of the Trouble for Tom!

(Another splendid long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Wednesday, entitled "A Dangerous Double!" by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy in advance.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 322.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1st.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY 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."

Thos. D. Stokes, Rata Street, Tokomaru, via Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 16—17.

Thomas Glenn, Sea View, Torea Street, Granity Post Office, Granity, Westport, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or Scotland.

M. Campbell, 83, Russell Street, Westport, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers living in Wales, age 15.

Miss I. Hasley, 2092, Hutchison Street, Outremont, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in Australia, age 10—12.

R. Mouroux, 139, St. Phillippe Street, Henri, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles or Canada, age 16—17.

Leonard I. Moore, care of C. Doveton, 29, Aberdeen Street, Woodstock, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in Ireland (Dublin or Cork preferred), age 16.

K. C. Lenaghan, Durban Street, Urtenhage, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

E. H. Lee, 49, Arab Street, Singapore, India, wishes to correspond with readers.

T. Heyden, 221, Parramatta Road, Leichhardt, Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with boy readers living in the British Isles, age 16—18.

Miss Marion Porter, 65, Central Road, Fordsbury, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in America, age 20—22.

Misses F. Dowds and F. Kettle, Box 20, Cleveland, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with boy readers living in the British Isles, age 16—18.

A. Rhoodie, care of Matroosberg Hotel, De Doorns, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Australia, age 18—19.

Miss Phyllis An Plessis, 83, Holz Street, West Krugersdorp, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in America, age 20—22.

D. Greenwood, care of General Post Office, Fremantle, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Ireland (Newmarket preferred), age 19—20.

A. E. F. Johnston, 132, Ocean Street, Paddington, Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living outside Australia, interested in stamps, age 17.

H. A. Levinsohn, Roslevon, New South Road, Edgecliff, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living outside Australia interested in stamps, age 16—17.

Harry C. Trewenke, Windaroo, Powel Street, Neutral Bay, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in West Indies, Canada, or Ireland, age 14—18.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

DIPLOMACY.

Bachelor (who has forgotten whether the baby is a boy or girl): "Well, well, but he's a fine little fellow, isn't she? How old is it now? Do her teeth bother him much? She looks like you, doesn't he? Everybody says it does!"—Sent in by G. Pygas, Yorks.

THE WORST TO COME!

First M.D. (at the bedside of a wealthy bachelor): "He is sleeping naturally—he will recover."

Second M.D.: "Yes, the worst is no doubt over."

First M.D.: "No, the worst is to come!"

Second M.D.: "How is that?"

First M.D.: "We have to break the news to his relatives!"—Sent in by Thomas L. Bell, Glasgow.

UPSET HIM.

A man rushed excitedly into the smoking-compartment of the train.

"A lady has fainted in the next car," he said. "Has anybody got a drop of whisky handy?"

Instantly half a dozen bottles were thrust out to him. Taking the nearest one, he turned the bottle up and partook of a good drink.

"Thanks!" he said, handing the flask back. "It always did make me feel bad to see a lady faint!"—Sent in by Ivor Jones, Montreal.

VERY NERVOUS.

"George!" she screamed. "My neck!"

"What's the matter?"

"There's a pillercatter!"

"A what?"

"A tapperkiller!"

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Oh dear!" she groaned, as she clutched at him frantically.

"A kitterpaller! You know, George, a patterkiller!"

"Oh!" said George, with relief. "You mean a catterpillar!" And he proceeded to brush the future butterfly away.—Sent in by M. Lovell, Southampton.

IT'S ONLY NATURAL.

"Ah, yes!" murmured Miss Screecher, after the first selection at the concert. "I have had some very exciting experiences. Coming over here from Paris, a terrible storm arose, and I had to sing to quieten the passengers. You should have seen the heavy seas running."

A big, rude man, sitting in the corner of the room, wearing a gaudy necktie, gazed out of the window.

"I don't really blame the sea!" he muttered to himself.—Sent in by W. Angel, Clapton Common, N.E.

THE TEACHER'S THEORY SHATTERED.

"Children," said the teacher to the pupils, "you should be able to do anything equally well with either hand. With a little practice, you will find it as easy to do anything with one hand as it is with the other."

"Go it!" cried the urchin at the foot of the class. "Let's see you put your left hand in the right hand pocket of your trousers!"—Sent in by Joseph Oakes, Bethnal Green, E.

WOULD HE BITE?

Quite recently an old friend of the Browns went to see them at their new country residence. As he approached the house a large dog came running to the gate, and began barking at him through the fence.

"How do you do?" said Brown's wife, coming to the door. "Come right in! Don't mind the dog."

"But won't he bite?" exclaimed the friend, not anxious to meet the canine without some assurance of his personal safety.

"That's just what I want to find out!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "I only bought him this morning."—Sent in by James Gool, Kirm, N.B.

HE WAS WIDE.

She: "Would you start off for your vacation on a Friday?"

He: "You bet your life I wouldn't!"

She: "What a superstitious ass you must be, then!"

He: "Superstitious, be hanged! I wouldn't start off on a Friday because Saturday is pay-day!"—Sent in by J. Van der Schyff, South Africa.

THE SERVANT PROBLEM.

He (reading paper): "Here's a note about the accident at Jones's. The servant put some gunpowder in the fire, and she was blown through the roof."

She (sympathetically): "Poor Mrs. Jones has so much trouble with her girls. That makes the fourth girl that's left her without giving notice!"—Sent in by R. A. Wilson, Birmingham.

A TALE OF LETTERS.

Which letters are the hardest workers?—The bees (B's).
Which are the most extensive letters?—The seas (C's).
Which letters are the most fond of comfort?—The eas (E's).
Which are the noisiest letters?—The jays (J's).
Which are the longest letters?—The eels (L's).
Which are the poorest letters?—The owes (O's).
Which are the most sensible letters?—The wise (Y's).—Sent in by John A. Urquhart, Inverness.

WHY TOMMY WAS WHACKED.

Schoolmaster (pointing to first letter of the alphabet): "What's that letter, Tommy?"

Tommy: "Dunno, sir."

Schoolmaster: "Yes—yes, you must do. What does Farmer Giles feed his horses on?"

Tommy: "Straw, sir."

Schoolmaster (trying letter B): "No, Tommy. Well, what is this letter?"

Tommy: "Dunno, sir."

Schoolmaster: "But surely you must, boy. What's that dear little insect that buzzes about the flowers?"

Tommy: "Wasp."

Schoolmaster (tries letter C): "Now, Tommy, brighten yourself up, and try this letter."

Tommy: "Don't know it, sir."

Schoolmaster: "Well, now, what do I do with my eyes?"

Tommy: "Oh, you mean squint!"—Sent in by John Currie, Glasgow.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

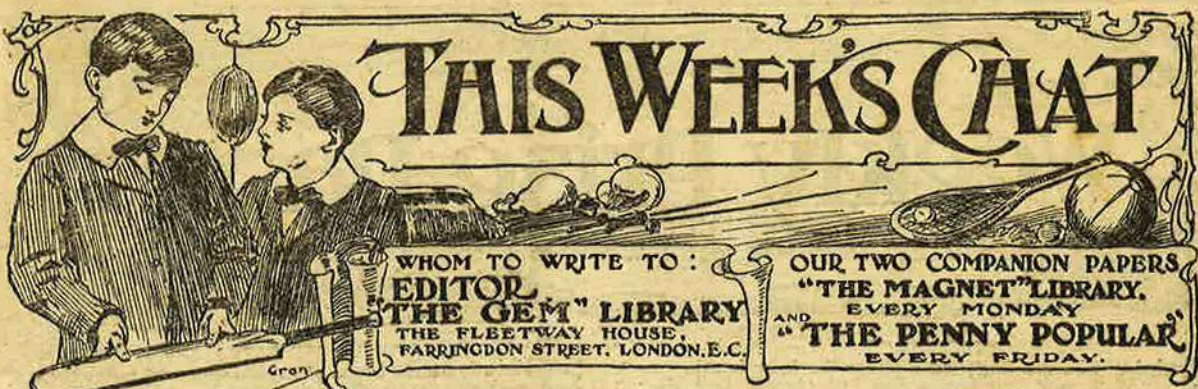
Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in other-wise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE —



WHOM TO WRITE TO :
EDITOR,
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OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS
"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
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 AND
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
 EVERY FRIDAY.

For Next Wednesday,

"A DANGEROUS DOUBLE!"
 By Martin Clifford.

In this splendid long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, Clavering, the boy who so closely resembles Tom Merry, reappears in the neighbourhood of the school.

Gordon Gay & Co. of the Grammar School are the first to be deceived by the amazing likeness, which, as the result of their treatment of him, Clavering himself has reason to be sorry for.

An edict goes forth from St. Jim's that the neighbourhood is to be made too warm for Clavering. Tom Merry realises that he has

"A DANGEROUS DOUBLE!"

And so it proves. But for the result of a little mistake on the part of Jack Blake & Co., the hero of the Shell would have had to suffer severely for the dastardly action of his double.

PASS IT ON!

I am constantly hearing from loyal chums of mine in confirmation of my theory that the simplest of all ways—and one of the most effective—of getting new friends for the famous Companion Papers is just to pass them on after reading them. "I gave one of my friends a copy of 'The Gem' the other day," they write. "He was so pleased with it that he is going to get it for himself every week in future." That is what happens in nine cases out of ten; boys and girls have only to get to know of the famous Companion Papers to become staunch readers. And so once again I ask all my reader-chums to do this to help me and their favourite paper—

PASS IT ON!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"A Bournemouth Reader."—The 3d. Library entitled "The Silent Three" is out of print, therefore unobtainable from this office. There is a long, complete story of Tom Merry & Co. in "The Penny Popular" every Friday.

"Constant" (Glasgow), and others.—A Cure for Knock-knees: Rise on your toes, hands on hips, and slowly sink to the ground, allowing the knees to bend outwards. Do this regularly night and morning.

"Youth" (Battersea).—Most boys do not have to start shaving until they are at least 19, but in a few cases it is necessary before that age. I should advise you to postpone the operation until you are a bit older, if possible.

L. G. Bastin (Exeter).—I have never heard of the game you mention.

F. S. C. (Liverpool).—Messrs. Cassell & Co., of La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C., publish a book called "Sports and Pastimes," which would suit your requirements. The "Daisy" air-rifle is one of the most popular rifles.

"One of my Chums."—Please send me your address. Your questions would occupy too much space to answer here.

A. Peet (Notts.).—The author of "Sherlock Holmes" is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The adventures of that detective are still obtainable in book form.

C. Laurens (South Africa).—Snakes hold birds and mice by the power of fascination or hypnotism which their gaze possesses over the intellects of weaker animals.

THE NAVY AS A PROFESSION FOR BOYS.

By Admiral the Hon. Sir E. Fremantle.

Promotion is Rapid.

A "boy" after a year's training, and a "youth" after six months at sea, joins a ship in a sea-going squadron, and it is well to mention that a commission now lasts for two years, so that his time away from home will not much exceed that period. In former times very long commissions were not unusual, and I was myself 5 years and 4 months away from England in a distant station in one ship.

On his return home he is entitled to a fortnight's leave for every year abroad. At the expiration of which time he joins the naval barracks at his port, soon after which he probably forms one of a nucleus crew at one of the home ports for a year or two, when he is again on turn for a seagoing ship.

At eighteen he is rated ordinary seaman, and if a smart young fellow his subsequent promotion is rapid. At twenty he is A.B. (able seaman), and goes through a course of gunnery and torpedo, becoming a "seaman gunner" and "trained torpedo man." The next steps are leading seaman, second and first-class petty-officer, chief petty-officer, warrant officer, chief warrant officer, and possibly lieutenant. I have known men to reach the rank of first-class petty-officer at 24; and, if ability, conduct and education are good, it is not difficult for a man to reach warrant-officer's rank comparatively young, with a pay from £100 to £250 a year with rations. But I will suppose that a man only reaches the rank of chief petty-officer, and then takes his pension. To mention a typical case which I know of. J. D. was during the last period of his service as chief petty-officer, gunnery instructor, etc., receiving 5s. a day, or £90 a year. He then retired on a pension for life of £51 14s., and he has since been employed under the Admiralty. It must be remembered that a pension is earned at the early age of 40, though in the case I have referred to the man had his pension increased on account of extending his service. The following is a rough scale of pay:

Boys, 2nd class, 3s. 6d. a week; Boys 1st class, 4s. 1d. a week; ordinary seaman, 8s. 9d. a week; able seaman, 11s. 8d. a week; able seaman, after 6 years' man's service, 13s. 5d. a week; leading seaman, 15s. 2d. to 16s. 4d. a week; petty-officer, 21s. to 23s. 4d. a week; chief petty-officer, 25s. 8d. to 30s. 4d. a week.

On promotion to warrant officer: Gunner or Boatswain, £109 to £164 per annum.

On promotion to commissioned warrant officer: Chief gunner or chief boatswain, £182 to £219 per annum.

On promotion to commissioned officer: Lieutenant, £237 to £273 per annum.

On advancement to the rating of chief petty-officer, £5 is allowed towards outfit.

Considerable additions to pay can be earned by capable men for gunnery, torpedo, and physical training qualifications; and substantial money prizes are given for good shooting.

Extra pay is also given when serving in torpedo-boats, destroyers, and submarine-boats.

(Another Special Article
 on this interesting sub-
 ject next Wednesday.)

The Editor

THIS IS THE LATEST NUMBER OF OUR GRAND COMPANION STORY-PAPER.
GET A COPY TO-DAY. YOU WILL ENJOY IT!

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