

“RUCTIONS AT ST. JIM’S!” RIPPIING LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL YARN INSIDE!

CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS -
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!

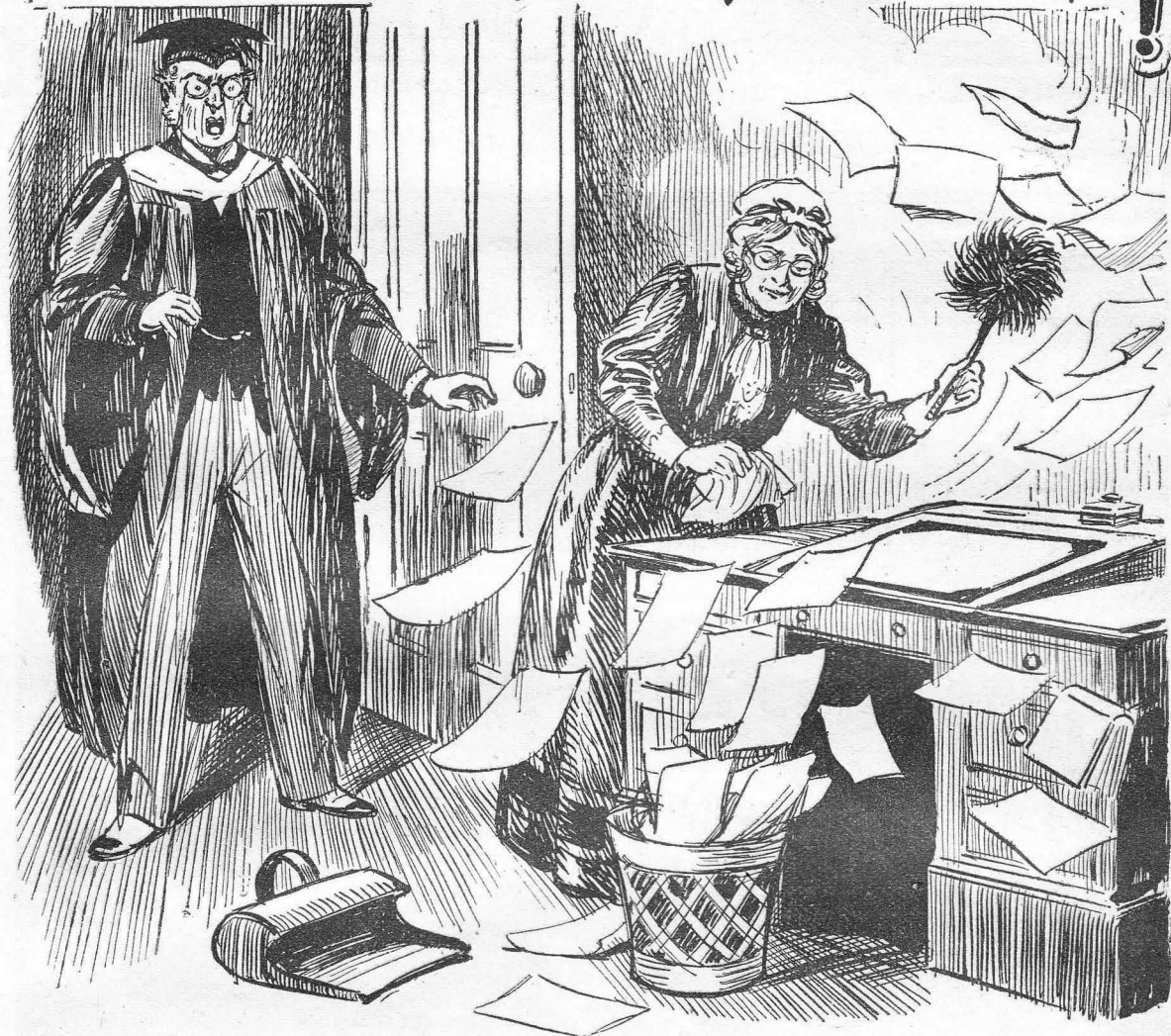
The GEM

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MISS PRISCILLA FAWCETT TAKES A HAND IN RUNNING THINGS AT

RUCTIONS AT ST. JIMS!



Tom Merry is always glad to see [his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, but when she arrives at St. Jim's and starts trying to "domesticate" the juniors, things begin to hum!

CHAPTER 1. An Amazing Letter!

TOM MERRY of the Shell Form at St. Jim's sat on the stone balustrade of the School House steps, with a letter in his hand and an expression of blank wonder on his face.

He was staring at the letter, which he had just read through, and his look was enough to show that he found something very surprising in its contents.

So preoccupied was he, that he did not see Manners and Lowther, his chums in the Shell, come out of the School House and stop just before him.

Manners and Lowther, naturally, expected Tom Merry to look up; but he didn't. He stared at the letter in his hand. He was quite unconscious of the proximity of his chums. The two juniors exchanged glances, and Lowther

coughed. Still Tom Merry did not remove his gaze from the letter.

The chums caught a glimpse of the writing, and they knew it was that of Tom Merry's old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett—the kind old dame who had brought Tom home from India in his early childhood, and had cared for him until he went to school, and after, for that matter.

Miss Priscilla's care for her ward was, as a matter of fact, a standing joke in the School House. The amount of medicine she sent would have stocked a chemist's shop, and the excellent advice she gave him in lengthy letters would have filled many large volumes. Tom Merry always replied dutifully and gratefully, though it must be admitted that he seldom took the advice, and never took the medicine.

"Ahem!" said Manners.

Even that failed to draw Tom Merry. He seemed to be blind and deaf to his surroundings.

ST. JIM'S—WITH STRANGE RESULTS! READ THIS SPLENDID YARN!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Monty Lowther leaned towards him, putting his mouth close to Tom Merry's ear, and gave a sudden bawl.

"Hallo!"

Tom Merry jumped.

"Oh, hallo!"

"Oh! You've woke up at last?"

Tom Merry rubbed his ear.

"You ass! You've made my head sing!"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Lowther.

"Here we've been standing looking at you for about half a minute, and you haven't been aware of our existence. What's the matter?"

"I've had a letter."

"Go hon! As we can see the letter in your hand, we could have guessed that without making any tremendous mental efforts," said Lowther sarcastically.

"It's from my old governess."

"Yes, I know the fist—ahem—the hand."

"It's a curious letter."

"Nothing new in that."

"I don't understand it."

"Hand it over, and I'll interpret it."

But Tom Merry's face was grave. He did not smile, and he cast another perplexed look at the letter.

"I'm afraid there is something wrong," he said.

Lowther and Manners became serious at once. Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and her touching regard for Tom Merry's health and comfort might be regarded in a humorous light in the School House, but all the fellows had a great respect and liking for her, all the same.

"I'm sorry," said Lowther. "But what's the row?"

"I don't know."

"She's not ill?"

"No, she says not. She's thinking of coming to see me, so she can't be ill!"

"Worried about you?"

"No; she doesn't say so!"

"Then what—"

"I'd better read you the letter."

"Well, it would simplify matters," Monty Lowther assented.

"Here goes, then. It's very odd. It seems to me that she must have been very disturbed at the time of writing, and got things mixed up."

"Go ahead!"

"My Dearest Tommy," began Tom Merry, colouring a little. "I am writing to tell you that I shall come and see you soon. I have been very much troubled, but he has not been to see me."

"Who hasn't?"

Tom Merry scratched his curly head.

"That's what I can't make out. Somebody hasn't, but it doesn't appear who and what the chap is."

"Well, get on with the washing!"

"A hundred pounds is a large sum of money, and I could not spare it."

Lowther whistled.

"You haven't asked her for a hundred pounds, have you, Tom?"

"Of course not."

"Has somebody?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. I can't make it out!"

"Finish the letter," said Manners.

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry read on.

"But the worry is very great upon my mind. I do not wish to trouble my dearest boy about it, but I do wish he were with me at this moment. I have told him that it will be impossible for me to take part in the bazaar, owing to the disturbed state of my health."

"Told whom?"

"Blessed if I know."

"What bazaar?"

"Haven't the faintest idea!"

"Is there any more?" asked Lowther.

"Yes; here you are." Tom Merry read the rest of the letter.

"Do not be surprised to see me at any moment, my dear child. I should feel so much safer with you. Your affectionate old nurse—PRISCILLA FAWCETT."

Lowther gave a prolonged whistle.

"What do you make of it?" asked Tom.

"It's a giddy puzzle. If I didn't know Miss Fawcett too well, I should think—ahem—that somebody had been drinking. There's no beginning or end or middle to the letter."

"It's a bit of a problem," said Manners. "Let's have a look at it. Do you think somebody has been trying to get a hundred pounds from her to start a bazaar?"

"Not likely."

"The chap who hasn't called on her might have called about the bazaar—I mean, he might have been going to call about the bazaar," hazarded Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head perplexedly.

"There's only one chap who gives bazaars at Huckleberry Heath," he said. "That's the curate, Mr. Dodds. He's a ripping chap; you know him. It couldn't be he who's bothering Miss Fawcett. Somebody or something's bothering her."

"Looks like it."

"I don't know whether I ought to go to her—"

"She says she's coming here. You might pass her on the road."

"I can't help feeling worried about it. The letter is a mystery. I suppose the Head would give me permission to go if I asked him?"

"I suppose so; but—"

"Blessed if I know what to do," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows. "It's a blessed puzzle."

"It's all wight, deah boy, I can tell you what's the pwopah thing to do," said a cheerful voice, and the chums of the Shell looked round as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form came out of the School House.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy Gives Advice!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY nodded cheerfully to the Terrible Three. The swell of the School House was looking as elegant as usual, from the tips of his shiny boots to the crown of his still more brightly gleaming topper.

He jammed his monocle into his eye, and looked at Tom Merry.

"I twust I am not intvudin'," he said. "I happened to hear your wemark, deah boy, as I came out. You can always wely upon me to tell you the pwopah thing to do. What's the posish?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're a good little ass, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But you wouldn't be able to give me advice."

"Wats!"

"You see—"

"I have no desiah to inquiah into pwivate mattahs," said the swell of St. Jim's with a great deal of dignity, "but if my advice could be of assistance, I should be vewy happy to give it."

Tom Merry handed him the letter.

"Read that, Gussy, and tell me what you think of it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took the letter, and turned his eyeglass carefully upon it, and read it through.

"Bai Jove!"

"What do you think of it, Gussy?"

"It's a wathah wemarkable lettah."

"Yes, I know that."

"Miss Pwiscillah is in a feahfully anxious state of mind."

"She seems worried, but I don't know about being feahfully anxious," said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"You know that I have taken up amateur detective work as a bwain west, Tom Mewwy," he remarked. "I have twained my observation on the system of Sherlock Holmes and Fewwers Locke. My twained intellect can see things that are invisible to common minds—"

"Common or garden minds?" asked Lowther.

"Pway don't be funny, Lowthah. This is a sewious mattah. Miss Pwiscillah is in a feahfully anxious state of mind. Haven't you noticed that she does not inquiah aftah Tom Mewwy's health?"

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry.

"Has the good lady evah written to you before without inquivin' aftah your health, deah boy?"

"Not that I remember!"

"She does not ask you if you have got your feet wet—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Or if you are still wearin' your chest pwotectah—"

"Cheese it!"

"I am not jokin'. These remarkable omissions from the lettah make it perfectly cleah that Miss Pwiscillah is in a feahfully anxious state of mind."

"There's something in it," said Monty Lowther, with a chuckle. "Gussy has really hit the nail on the head, Tom."

"I believe he has. But what do you make of the letter, Gussy?"

The swell of St. Jim's shook his head.

"Weally, I do not know what to make of it," he replied. "It looks to me as if Miss Fawcett was goin' to start a bazaar, and was expectin' somebody to call and lend her a hundred pounds."

"Try again, Sherlock Holmes."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"I don't think that's it," said Tom Merry. "But I'm blessed if I know what it is. I don't know what to do."

"It's wathah a deuced awkward posish," agreed Arthur Augustus, handing the letter back to Tom Merry, and wrinkling his brows in deep thought. "Howevah, I think I can give you some advice, deah boy."

"You think I ought to ask the Head's permission to go to Miss Fawcett at once?"

"Not exactly."

"What then?"

"You see, deah boys, what is wequiahed at a moment like this is a fellow of tact and judgment. I should wegard it as a good ideah for you to ask the Head's permish for me to go to Hucklebewwy Heath—"

"You!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why, you ass—" began Lowther.

"I wefuse to be called an ass—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Thanks awfully, Gussy. But if anybody goes, it ought to be myself—"

"Then pewwaps you could get the Head's permish to take me with you," suggested Arthur Augustus. "I should feel much easiah in my mind if I were there to look aftah you."

"I don't think the Head would part with you, Gussy. You see, there's the whole school requires looking after, too!"

And Tom Merry went into the House before D'Arcy could reply to that remark.

The hero of the Shell made his way straight to Dr. Holmes' study.

The Head was there, and he bade the junior enter.

"Merry, what is it?"

The Head ceased writing, and glanced across his desk at the junior.

"If you please, sir, I—I want to ask leave."

"Indeed! Why?"

"I've had a letter from my old governess, sir—Miss Fawcett—and she seems to be ill, or something," said Tom Merry. "I'm anxious about her. I thought you might allow me to go home and see her."

"Ahem! H'm!"

"This is the letter, sir."

Dr. Holmes glanced at the letter. An expression of bewilderment came over his face.

"This is a very strange letter, Merry."

"Yes, sir. It makes me feel anxious."

"I am not surprised. I should imagine that Miss Fawcett was ill. You may go by the first train in the morning, Merry."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

And Tom Merry left the study, feeling more at ease in his mind.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Dead of Night!

TING-A-LING!

Ting-a-ling-a-ling-ting!

The stroke of one had boomed out from the clock tower.

Taggles, the porter, came shuffling out of his lodge in an overcoat and a pair of old slippers. Taggles did not indulge in the luxury of a dressing-gown, and Taggles was not inclined to dress himself at one in the morning to open the gates to the persistent person who was ringing the bell. The edge of Taggles' nightshirt showed like the fringe of a petticoat under the greatcoat he had hastily thrown on and buttoned to his chin. His bare feet shuffled in the slippers. Taggles carried a lamp in his hand, and a portentous frown upon his face. Taggles was not in a good temper.

The quadrangle was as black as the inside of a hat.

Hardly a star glimmered in the sky, and the great elms looked like blacker shadows against the black sky.

St. Jim's was sleeping the sleep of the just. The last light had long ago been extinguished in the last window.

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Taggles had been sleeping, his slumbers aided and soothed by his last glass of gin-and-water, when the violent ringing of the bell had brought him forth from his lodge in coat and slippers and a bad temper.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

"Yes, you can ring!" grunted the school porter, as he shuffled out. "I'm coming to hopen that there gate just when it suits me, and not a second afore. That's when I'm comin' to hopen that there gate."

Ting-a-ling! Ting-a-ling!

"Drat 'em!" said Taggles. "At this time in the morning, too! Who can it be? Blessed if I go to the gate at all. It ain't my dooty. An honest man is entitled to his rest, ain't he? Blessed if I stay in this place at all!"

Ting-a-ling!

"Oh, ring away! I ain't comin' any faster."

While he was mumbling and grumbling, Taggles was, as a matter of fact, making all haste to the gate, and had now reached it. He held up his lamp and peered through the thick bronze bars into the roadside beyond.

A feminine figure came into view.

A lady in a long cloak, which reached from her head to her feet, stood there in the darkness. The wide hood of the cloak was pulled over her head, leaving only a tiny portion of her face visible, and she bore a curious resemblance to Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother in the pantomime.

Taggles glared at her through the gates.

"Which I says—" he began.

"Oh, thank goodness you have come!"

Taggles snorted.

"You ain't got nothin' to thank goodness for yet, ma'am," he replied. "I hain't hopened this 'ere gate!"

"Please open it at once!"

"Who are yer? Whatcher doin' out at this time of night?" demanded Taggles surlily. "'Ow do I know it ain't a plant? There was a burglar here some time back."

"Oh, please—"

"Better go 'ome!"

"Pray open the gate!"

"I'm goin' to bed."

"But—"

"You'd better do the same, ma'am, and I 'ope your 'usband will tell you what he thinks of you when you get 'ome."

"Sir!"

"Good-night, ma'am!"

"Open the gate!"

"Not half!"

"But I am—"

"I'm horf!" said Taggles.

"Stay! I shall report you to Dr. Holmes! My good man, surely you know me!"

"I don't know you!" grunted Taggles, who was convinced that he had to do either with a mad woman or an intoxicated person. "I don't know persons who takes their little walk at this 'ere time. If you ain't drunk, go 'ome to bed. If you are drunk, there's a dry ditch over there where you can go to sleep, and I am goin' back to bed to do the same!"

"But, please—"

"Oh, git horf!"

"But—but surely you know me, my good man? I am Miss Fawcett."

"Hey?"

"I am Miss Priscilla Fawcett."

"What?"

"My ward is at this school—Tom Merry of the Shell Form. "You surely know me now, Taggles?"

Taggles nearly dropped his lamp in amazement.

He certainly did know Miss Priscilla Fawcett, of Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath. Her visits to St. Jim's were neither few nor far between.

Some anxiety for Tom Merry's health and comfort frequently drew her to the old school, where Dr. Holmes, though the most courteous of old gentlemen, sometimes found his patience sorely tried in consequence.

But Taggles would have expected an earthquake as soon as seeing Miss Priscilla upon the Rylcombe Road at one o'clock in the morning.

Miss Fawcett pushed back her hood as she spoke, and the lamplight streamed upon her face, and Taggles could have no further doubts.

The school porter stared at that kind, old face as if it had been the face of a gorgon. If St. James, the original and reverend patron of St. Jim's, had suddenly appeared on the road there and rung for admission, Taggles could hardly have been more astonished.

"Yes, ma'am!" he gasped.

"Open the gate, please!"

"But—but—"

Miss Fawcett cast a hurried glance along the dark road behind her.

"Open the gate—quick! He may be coming!"



Skimpole came dashing round the corner and Arthur Augustus came round the other way at top speed. There was a terrific bump as the two met. "Ow!" yelled Skimpole. "Gweat Scott!" gasped D'Arcy. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry, from the window.

"He? Who?"
 "Quick—quick!"
 Taggles dazedly unlocked the gate. Miss Fawcett came in, and Taggles stared at her blankly. The old lady caught him by the arm.
 "Lock the gate again—quick!"
 "What's the 'urry, ma'am?"
 "He may be coming!"
 "Who may be?"
 "Lock the gates!"
 "Oh, very well, ma'am!"
 Taggles turned the key again. Miss Fawcett gave a gasp of relief as the heavy gate was secured between her and the road.
 "Oh dear—oh dear! I have been so frightened!" she gasped.
 "What about, ma'am?"
 "I am sure he has followed me!"
 "Who has?"
 "A hundred pounds is so much!"
 "A 'undred pounds!" said Taggles, wondering if he was dreaming. "Who's talkin' about a 'undred pounds?"
 "Besides, that would only be a beginning."

"Eh?"
 "I refused."
 "What?"
 "He has followed me, however."
 "Which?"
 "Oh, I was so frightened!"
 And Miss Priscilla began to cry. To Taggles' great alarm she showed signs of fainting. The porter stood perplexed.
 "Oh, buck up, ma'am!" he said weakly. "Don't—don't faint! Blessed if I know what to do with a fainting female! Oh lor'!"
 For Miss Fawcett had fainted in earnest, and the porter had only just time to catch her as she fell.

CHAPTER 4.
 A Surprise for the School!

"**E**LP!"
 It was Taggles who shouted. The porter stood with the fainting lady supported in his arms, the lamp in his right hand in eminent risk of setting Miss Priscilla on fire. He could not

get rid of either, and his only resource was to summon assistance.

And so he stood where he was and shouted.

"'Elp! 'Elp!"

Taggles' shouts for help, rising crescendo, rang through the shadowy quadrangle,

"'Elp! 'Elp!"

Taggles hoped that Mrs. Taggles would hear him and come to the rescue, Dame Taggles being about the best person to whom a fainting lady could be entrusted.

Dame Taggles did hear, and she came; but not till she had taken five minutes to dress and to see that her hair was tidy.

And by the time Dame Taggles arrived on the scene help was arriving from other quarters.

Taggles' shouts had reached almost every quarter of St. Jims.

In the School House Tom Merry was the first to wake in the Shell dormitory, and he started up in bed and listened.

"'Elp! 'Elp!"

The sound came faintly in at the windows from the distance. Tom Merry knew the voice of Taggles, and he jumped out of bed.

A late burglary at St. Jim's was in his mind, and that wild shouting in the middle of the night could only mean that Taggles was in danger.

Many were the little rubs the juniors had had with the school porter, but that did not make any difference to Tom Merry then.

He jumped into his trousers, and yelled to Manners and Lowther, and dashed out of the dormitory.

In the Lower Hall of the School House he stopped a second to clutch up a walking-stick belonging to Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, and then he unbarred and unchained the door, and tore out into the quadrangle.

Manners and Lowther were only a few moments behind him.

And in the Fourth Form dormitory Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his chums—Blake and Herries and Digby—and a crowd of others, were tumbling out, and they were in the quadrangle almost as soon as Tom Merry.

The latter caught the glimmer of Taggles' lamp at the gate, and dashed towards it at top speed, rolling over once or twice as he stumbled upon unseen obstacles in the darkness.

Meanwhile, Dame Taggles was on the scene, and her astonishment when she saw Miss Priscilla Fawcett in the arms of the porter may be imagined.

Miss Fawcett was coming to a little, and she was moaning.

"It's Miss Fawcett, Jane," said Taggles helplessly. "It's her who was a-ringin' the blessed bell."

"Dear me!"

"She's fainted," said Taggles. "Take the lamp, and I'll carry 'er in. You can do somethin' for her, Jane."

"Oh, oh, oh!" moaned Miss Fawcett.

"She's comin' to, poor soul!" said kind-hearted Mrs. Taggles. "Bring her in!"

And Miss Fawcett, between the two, was carried into the porter's lodge, and laid upon a sofa in the little sitting-room.

A minute later Tom Merry was looking in at the door.

"What's the row, Taggles? Anybody hurt?"

"No, sir!" gasped Taggles, wiping his perspiring brow.

"I ain't hurt!"

"Then what the dickens were you making that fearful row about?" demanded Tom Merry indignantly.

"You see——"

"Here, I've bundled out of bed and buzzed off with nothing on but pyjamas and trousers, and——"

"She's fainted, sir!"

"What, Mrs. Taggles?"

"No, Miss——"

"Bai Jove!" broke in a voice over Tom Merry's shoulder.

"What's all the wow about, Tom Mewwy?"

And Arthur Augustus looked in through his eyeglass. The swell of St. Jim's had dressed in haste. He had put a slipper on one bare foot, and a boot on the other. He had Blake's trousers on and Digby's jacket, and no shirt or collar at all; but he had not forgotten his eyeglass.

"There's no row," said Tom Merry. "It's Taggles has a giddy nightmare, that's all."

"Which it ain't," said the porter.

"What is it, then?"

"It's Miss Fawcett——"

"Whom?"

"Miss Fawcett."

"My old governess?"

"Yes."

Tom Merry stared blankly at Taggles.

"What about her?" he said. "What are you talking about, Taggy?"

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"She's come."

"Come—where?"

"'Ere," said Taggles.

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"Miss Fawcett—here!"

"She's in my sitting-room," said Taggles. "Which she has fainted, but she's a-comin' round. She's just rung me up, at one o'clock in the mornin'. Which she thinks that someone was a-follering her, but I didn't see nobody."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry's face was a study.

He remembered Miss Fawcett's strange letter. On account of that he had intended to go home the first thing in the morning. She had anticipated him by coming to St. Jim's.

But what did it mean? Who could possibly have induced the usually correct and almost painfully precise old lady to arrive at the school at this unearthly hour? And whom could she have imagined was following her?

Tom Merry stepped into the lodge quickly.

"Can I see her, Mrs. Taggles?"

"Yes, Master Merry. She's asking for you."

Tom Merry entered the little room.

Miss Fawcett, looking very pale and worn, was propped up on cushions and pillows on the sofa, but she was quite conscious now. Her face lighted up as Tom Merry came in.

"Tom! My darling Tommy!"

Tom ran towards her.

"What is the matter, dear?"

He put his arm round her neck, and Miss Fawcett clung to him and burst into tears.

"My darling! I feel safe with you! Don't leave me!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Mystery of Miss Priscilla!

TOM MERRY did not go to bed again that night. From Miss Fawcett he had received no explanation of her strange visit; nor did he care to question her in her troubled and hysterical state.

The old lady was content to have him sitting with her, and to hold her hand, as if to assure herself that he was not leaving her.

Miss Fawcett slept by fits and starts, propped on pillows on the sofa, and Tom Merry was content to forgo the rest of his night's sleep for the sake of remaining with her, for the comfort his presence gave her.

The other fellows went back to bed, discussing the strange occurrence, and unable to make either head or tail of it.

Miss Priscilla was so precise in her habits that it was impossible to explain this sudden freak, unless she had taken leave of her senses.

Tom Merry did not know what to make of it, but he understood that the same worry which had caused Miss Fawcett to write that strange letter the previous day, had caused her to fly from her home at Huckleberry Heath.

What could it all mean?

She had imagined that she was followed, but no pursuer had turned up near St. Jim's, so far as could be discovered. Was it merely a fancy, or had someone been threatening the old lady? At the latter thought, Tom Merry's eyes blazed and his fist clenched. But who could it be? And why? Surely it was all fancy!

Dr. Holmes had come out to inquire into the disturbance, and he had tried to persuade Miss Priscilla to come to his house and take the room she usually occupied on her visits to the school. But the good old lady was not in a state to move. She remained in the porter's lodge, and Tom Merry remained with her, the Head giving him permission to sit up with his old friend.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton saw the boys back to their beds, and then, before they parted for the night, they exchanged a curious look.

"Miss Fawcett has been alarmed about something," the Head remarked.

"Apparently so."

"Merry showed me a very strange letter from her yesterday, which seemed to indicate a disturbed state of mind. I had given him permission to visit her in the morning."

"Ah!"

"She has come here instead."

"She seems to be greatly alarmed about something."

"I have a great respect for Miss Fawcett," said the Head. "She has subscribed liberally to the chapel restoration fund, and in other ways she has always shown a kind heart and a most estimable character."

"She has, indeed!" said Mr. Railton heartily.

"I am always glad to see her," said the Head, as if trying to convince himself on the subject.

"Naturally so."

"But I cannot disguise from myself the fact that when

she is here, there is a certain—a certain amount of restiveness below stairs," said the Head uneasily.

"I have observed it."

"Miss Fawcett has the kindest heart in the world. If she can help by advice or assistance, she will always do so." The Housemaster smiled slightly.

"I have noticed that, too, sir."

"Unfortunately this advice and assistance is not always received in the spirit in which it is given."

"It is very unfortunate."

"Mrs. Mimms has sometimes complained."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"The maids have complained to Mrs. Mimms."

"I have heard so."

"A prolonged stay here by Miss Fawcett is, curiously enough, always the cause of some trouble in the household, although her intentions are of the very best."

The Housemaster nodded again. He knew it well enough, and he knew what Dr. Holmes felt about it.

"In short, Mr. Railton, do you—do you think that Miss Fawcett's intention is to pay us a prolonged visit?" said the Head, colouring a little.

Mr. Railton looked grave.

"It looks like it, sir."

"Ahem! I should be far from wishing to appear inhospitable," said Dr. Holmes, with a sigh. "But, however, I suppose it will be all right. Good-night, Mr. Railton!"

"Good-night, sir!"

And they went to bed.

And the next morning there was only one topic being discussed in the School House—and the New House as well, for that matter.

It was the mysterious midnight visit of Miss Fawcett.

The fellows were everywhere on the look-out for her, to catch a glimpse of the old lady who had caused so great a furore.

When Miss Fawcett appeared in the quadrangle, leaning on Tom Merry's arm and making her way towards the Head's house, there was a general turning of glances in her direction.

The old lady looked very pale and worn; and Tom Merry looked pale, too, from want of sleep.

Miss Fawcett hardly noticed that she was being looked at.

Some of the fellows were grinning, but most of them were quiet enough, and many of them sympathetic.

Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, was highly amused. He grinned at Gore of the Shell, the fellow he usually chummed with.

"Rum go!" he remarked. "The old lady must have dreamed that Tom Merry got his feet wet, and bolted off in the middle of the night to see whether it was true."

Gore snorted.

"Nice-looking, historic figure, ain't she?" went on Mellish. "What I particularly like about her is her face. It reminds one of a visit to the British Museum— Oh!"

He broke off as Gore took hold of his ear between finger and thumb.

"Ow! Leggo! Yow!"

"Shut up, then!"

Mellish stared at Gore in blank amazement. Gore was generally quite ready to enter into any caddish joke.

"Wh-what's the matter with you, Gore?"

"Nothing, you cad!"

"Wh-what! Why—?"

"Shut up, that's all!"

Mellish jerked himself away, and gave Gore a venomous look.

"You—you rotter!" he said. "This is what comes of being sacked. I've noticed that you've been putting on self-righteous airs ever since you were expelled and the Head allowed you to come back!"

"Oh, get away!" growled Gore.

And he walked away, leaving Mellish staring after him with mingled surprise and spite.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry and his old governess had reached the Head's house.

There the old lady went in, kissing Tom Merry at the door—much to the delight of a group of fags—and the door closed behind her.

Tom Merry came towards the School House with a grave and thoughtful expression upon his face.

Manners and Lowther joined him at once, and the chums of Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth Form—strolled over towards him. It was nearly time for breakfast in the School House.

"Well?" said Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I can't make it out," he said.

"Why has she come?"

"I don't know."

"What has happened at Laurel Villa?"

"Nothing, that I know of."

"Then what does it mean?"

"It's a giddy mystery!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "As an amateur detective, you know, I wathah think I ought to take up the mystewy, you know, and wun it to earth—I mean, unwiddle the secwet, you know. That ass Skimpole thinks he can do the detective business; but he can't, you know!"

"Miss Fawcett was frightened about something," said Tom Merry. "She seemed to think that somebody was following her."

"Bai Jove!"

"But—"

"I've thought of somethin', deah boys!"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"With my twained intellect—"

"Oh, blow your twained intellect!" said Monty Lowther. "If you've thought of anything sensible, let's have it!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, ring off, then!"

"I wefuse to wing off. With my twained intellect as an amateur detective I can see deeah into the mattah than you chaps, and I have thought of a theowwy."

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry, smiling a little.

"I am makin' my deductions fwom the circes of the case, and fwom the lettah Miss Pwisecillah wote to Tom Mewwy."

"Fire away!"

"Miss Pwisecillah is fwightedened about somethin'. She has suddenly wun away fwom home. She thinks she was followed. She's been talkin' about a hundwed pounds, and sayin' she could not give so much away."

"To a bazaar," said Lowther.

"It is not quite cleah about the bazaar, deah boy. Now, my ideah is that some wascal has been twyin' to get money fwom Miss Fawcett, and thweatenin' her if she doesn't shell out, you know."

Tom Merry started.

He had very little faith in D'Arcy's abilities as an amateur detective—and, indeed, Gussy's essays in that line had been extremely comical so far—but out of the mouths of babes and sucklings— The theory Arthur Augustus was propounding seemed certainly to account for what had happened.

Miss Fawcett was just the kind of timid old lady whom some unscrupulous rascal might attempt to extort money from.

"By Jove!" said Jack Blake. "I really think that Gussy has hit a bullseye!"

"In a case like that what you wequiah is a fellow of tact and judgment!" said Arthur Augustus modestly.

"With my twained intellect—"

"I shouldn't wonder if there was something in it," said Tom Merry abruptly. "I'll ask Miss Fawcett as soon as I can, and if it turns out so—"

"In that case, deah boy, I will take up the case professionally, and sift it to the bottom!" said Arthur Augustus, in his best Sherlock-Holmes-Sexton-Blake manner.

"Good wheeze!" said Blake. "The rascal will have plenty of time to escape if Gussy gets after him, so nobody will benefit."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo, there's the breakfast bell!"

"Undah the circes—"

"Come in to brekker, fathead!"

"I decline to be called a fathead! Undah the circes, I think I had bettah go and ask Miss Fawcett for a few details."

"No, you won't," said Blake, dragging his elegant chum away. "You'll come in to brekker!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Take his other arm, Herries."

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Come on!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was run into the School House dining-room, and planted at the Fourth Form table before he could recover his breath.

CHAPTER 6.

Miss Priscilla Explains!

"YOU must have been surprised, Dr. Holmes!"

Miss Priscilla Fawcett made that undeniable statement as she sat in the Head's study after breakfast.

The Head smiled.

"Perhaps a little, Miss Fawcett."

Miss Fawcett was looking much better now. Tom Merry had been told to go and lie down instead of attending morning lessons, which he was glad enough to do. He had

stretched himself on his bed in the Shell dormitory in the School House, and dropped off to sleep.

Miss Fawcett had called in at the Head's study to explain. Dr. Holmes was very busy in the mornings, and he had to take the Sixth Form in Greek shortly, but the good old Head resigned himself to his fate, and worked up the most courteous of smiles to greet his visitor from Huckleberry Heath.

"In fact, you must have been astonished," said Miss Priscilla.

"Well, yes, somewhat."

"It was so—so extraordinary a step to take."

"Perhaps so."

"I hope you were not too much shocked!"

"Oh, Miss Fawcett!"

"But I had a very powerful motive," said Miss Priscilla. "In the circumstances, I felt that I could do nothing but rush off at once to my darling boy!"

"Ahem!"

"I feel so much safer when my sweet Tommy is with me!"

"No doubt!"

"I left Laurel Villa in great haste—without even allowing myself time to bring my darling parrot with me!" said Miss Fawcett, showing signs of tears.

The Head looked sympathetic, but in his heart he was devoutly glad that Miss Fawcett had not allowed herself sufficient time to bring her darling parrot.

"I was so frightened!" said Miss Fawcett; and, to the Head's great alarm, she showed signs of a return of hysterics.

Dr. Holmes started to his feet.

"My dear Miss Fawcett! My dear lady! Can I get your smelling salts? Can I—"

"I have them, thank you!" said Miss Fawcett, sniffing at them. "There, I feel better now! I have been through terrible experiences, sir!"

"I am sorry to hear it."

"I would not worry my darling boy with them, but I can confide in you, sir!"

"Oh, pray do!"

"I trust you are not in a hurry this morning?"

The Head thought of the Sixth Form now going into the class-room for the Greek lesson, and groaned inwardly. But courtesy came first, especially to such an estimable lady as Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

"Pray take your own time, Miss Fawcett."

"Thank you very much! I have received a letter," said Miss Priscilla. "You can imagine into what a state of terror I was thrown!"

The Head coughed.

"Ahem! Is there anything so—so very unusual in receiving a—letter, Miss Fawcett?"

"Such a letter, sir—such a letter!"

"Indeed!"

"A demand for money," said Miss Fawcett—"for a hundred pounds."

"Oh!"

"From a man I do not even know."

"Dear me!"

"And he uttered the most terrible threats of what he would do if I did not send the money."

"Shocking!"

"I was so frightened!"

"I am not surprised, Miss Fawcett! What did this scoundrel threaten you with? It is evidently a base attempt at blackmail!"

"He—he threatened to call on me—"

"Oh! Is that all?"

"And to set fire to my house."

The Head restrained a smile. Miss Fawcett had evidently been selected as a victim by an unscrupulous blackmailer, but his threats were too absurd to frighten any but a timid old lady.

"You have the letter now, Miss Fawcett?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Have you been to the police?"

"There is only one policeman at Huckleberry Heath," said poor Miss Fawcett. "He is also a gardener. He is a very good gardener, but he is not very clever as a policeman."

"Ah! It is a—a secluded place, I think?"

"Yes, Dr. Holmes—a very quiet place. I showed him the letter, however. But it was useless—it was written in invisible writing."

"In what? Then how did you read it?"

"The writing was visible when I read it, you understand, but shortly afterwards it faded from the paper."

"Oh!"

"I have the letter here," said Miss Fawcett, opening the little bag she carried, and selecting an envelope from among a collection of smelling-salts, letters, hairpins, handkerchiefs, perfume, and so forth. "Pray look at it."

She extended the envelope to Dr. Holmes, who took it

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somewhat absent-mindedly. He was thinking of the Sixth, who were now waiting for him.

Dr. Holmes extracted the letter from the envelope, and looked at it. It was a sheet of common, cream-coloured note-paper, and quite blank.

"My dear madam!"

"Yes, dear Dr. Holmes?"

"This letter was sent to you?"

"Yes."

"And the writing faded since?"

"Yes."

"But the postmark could not have faded," said the Head. "Are you sure that you have made no mistake in the matter?"

"Quite certain, sir!"

"Then how—"

"The letter did not come through the post."

"Oh!" said Dr. Holmes.

"It was addressed to me in the same writing as the letter, and put into the letter-box at Laurel Villa," explained Miss Fawcett. "Hannah brought it to me. I imagined it to be some tradesman's advertisement at first—till I opened it. Then I was very much frightened."

"Dear me!"

"By the time I had taken it to the policeman, the ink had faded. The man seemed to think that I was suffering from some delusion."

"Dear me!"

"Then I went to Mr. Dodds for advice. You remember Mr. Dodds, the dear curate of Huckleberry Heath?"

"Quite well; a very estimable young man."

"He was very courteous," said Miss Fawcett; "but he seemed to share the policeman's opinion that I was under a delusion. He did not say so, but I could see very well that it was his opinion."

"Very remarkable," murmured the Head, who was perfectly convinced himself that Miss Fawcett was under a delusion.

"Is it not? I returned to Laurel Villa. I had written to my darling Tommy—"

"Yes, he showed me your letter, madam."

"The dear boy! He must have been anxious."

"He certainly was anxious."

"My sweet darling! But when night came on, and I remembered that fearful man's threat of setting my house on fire—I—I lost my courage. I felt that I must be with my dear boy for protection."

"I—I quite understand."

"And so I left suddenly, without even bringing my parrot. I caught the last train. I arrived in Rylcombe by the last local from Wayland."

"Terrible!"

"The cabman was gone to bed, and I had to walk from the station."

"My dear Miss Fawcett!"

"I lost my way in the lanes, in seeking to escape the wretch who was following me."

The Head started. Was there something tangible in the story, after all?

"You were followed, Miss Fawcett?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw the man?"

"Well, no, I did not see him, but I felt his presence," exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "You can understand, can you not, Dr. Holmes?"

The Head of St. Jim's could easily understand how every dark shadow in the lane had been full of terror for the dismayed old lady.

"Yes, I—I think so, Miss Fawcett."

"I was so frightened when Taggles delayed opening the gates. At every moment I expected to feel that dreadful man's clutch on my shoulder."

"It must have been terrible!"

"It was, indeed. But I feel so safe now that I am under the same roof as my darling Tommy."

"I—I suppose so."

"Now, what would you advise me to do, sir?"

"I—I really do not know, madam."

"I cannot return to Laurel Villa in such a state of terror," said Miss Fawcett, applying her smelling-salts again.

"I—I suppose not, Miss Fawcett," said the Head, in dismay.

"What would you advise me, sir?"

"I—I should send this letter to Scotland Yard for the police to investigate the matter," said Dr. Holmes slowly.

"They can test the paper, and discover whether it ever bore any writing in invisible ink."

"That does not need discovering, Dr. Holmes. I could repeat the letter almost word for word."

"Er—yes; but—but the police, like Mr. Dodds, might imagine that it was all a delusion on your part," stammered the Head.

"Ah, yes, I did not think of that!"

"Then, if they discover signs of invisible writing, they will take the proper steps to discover the blackmailer."
 "You relieve me very much, Dr. Holmes. Perhaps you would be kind enough to communicate with the detective department, and send them the letter?"
 "With pleasure, Miss Fawcett."
 "I suppose the matter will take some time?"
 "Probably a few days."
 "And, in the meantime—"
 "Ah, yes—er—in the meantime—"
 "With your permission—"

"Oh, no, not at all!"
 "Ah, but I shall insist, my dear sir. I have always believed that it is every woman's duty to set the maids an example of industry."
 "Ye-e-es; but—"
 "Besides, I could give some advice and assistance to the House dame."
 "But—"
 "And perhaps improve some of the arrangements for the comfort of the boys."
 "Oh!"



"Sock it to 'em!" roared Bernard Glyn. The New Firm rushed at the three juniors, and in a moment the half-dozen of them were rolling over in the passage fighting like wild cats!

"Oh, certainly!"
 "I should be glad to remain at the school for a few days."
 "Oh, yes, delighted!" murmured the Head.
 "I should feel so much safer with my darling Tommy."
 "Er—naturally."
 "And the wretch could hardly come here and set the school on fire."
 "Er—hardly."
 "So, if I should not incommode anyone—"
 "My dear Miss Fawcett—"
 "I will stay a few days, until this matter is cleared up."
 "I will send the letter to Scotland Yard by the very next post," said Dr. Holmes, with great fervour.
 "Thank you so much. Of course," said Miss Priscilla Fawcett, with a winning smile, "I shall not eat the bread of idleness while I am here. I never was an idle woman. I shall try to make myself useful."

"I assure you that I shall not be idle. But perhaps I am detaining you?"
 "Well, as a matter of fact, my class has been waiting a quarter of an hour," said the unfortunate Head of St. Jim's.
 "Dear me! Pray go at once. I feel ever so much relieved after this talk with you, Dr. Holmes. I'm going to be very useful."
 "But—"
 "You think I cannot work," said Miss Fawcett, with a smile. "You think I am too old."
 "Oh dear, no! But—"
 "I shall prove it to you. I shall dust your study while you are gone to your class."
 The Head nearly fell on the floor.
 "But—but—"
 "Not a word, sir. I shall do it. It will be no trouble at all."

The Head looked at Miss Fawcett. He thought of his waiting and wondering class. He thought of the papers in his study. But he felt powerless to deal with the dear old lady from Huckleberry Heath.

He murmured something and rushed from the study. He came into the class-room where the Sixth were kicking their heels with a red face and a rustling gown. But the Head's mind was wandering that morning, and the Sixth had the most surprising lesson in Greek that they had ever received. When the Head told them that Achilles had sulked in his tent because he had received a letter written in invisible ink, they gasped.

But the Head hardly knew what he was saying. He was thinking of the kind old lady at work in his study with a duster, and the best intentions in the world.

CHAPTER 7.

Miss Fawcett is Useful!

IT was a quarter of an hour before Dr. Holmes left the Sixth Form class-room, and made his way towards his study again.

He met Mr. Railton in the passage, and the School House master looked in amazement at the Head's disturbed face.

"Has anything happened, sir? Miss Fawcett——"

"I—I left her in my study, Mr. Railton."

"Yes?" said the Housemaster, wondering why that should make the Head look so disturbed.

"And she is going to make herself useful while she stays at St. Jim's."

"She is staying, then?"

"For a few days."

"Oh!"

"She is going to set an example to the maids."

"Oh!"

"And advise the House dame——"

"H'm!"

"And look after the comfort of the boys——"

"H'm!"

"And now she is dusting my study!"

"Great Sco—— Ahem! I—I mean, dear me!"

"And my examination papers are there, and—and my notes for my book on 'Æschylus,'" said the Head.

"Pray do not let me detain you, then," said Mr. Railton hastily.

The Head almost ran back to his study.

He opened the door quickly, and looked in, his heart in his mouth. Any woman with a duster is a terror to a literary man; but Miss Fawcett, with her tidy ways, her desire to have everything neat and in its place, her deadly determination to have no dust and no scraps of paper about—no wonder the Head trembled.

Miss Fawcett was busy.

She looked towards the Head as he came in, with a charming smile.

"I am very busy already, as you see, Dr. Holmes," she said.

"Ye-e-es."

The Head glanced at the waste-paper basket beside his desk. It had been emptied that morning by the maids, but it was full to the top now.

"You—you have been—er——"

"I have put the papers tidy on your desk," said Miss Fawcett. "I have cleared away all the paper that was scrawled on, and put the blank paper tidy, as you see."

Dr. Holmes sat down.

The paper that was scrawled on contained his notes for his book on "Æschylus and his tragedies"—a book that the Head firmly believed was destined to create quite a sensation in a score of dusty old studies in the quiet closes of Oxford.

Miss Fawcett had cheerfully deposited the work of three years' leisure in the waste-paper basket. It was a mercy there was no fire in the room, or the devastation might have been irreparable.

"I have taken a nice new pen from the box for you," went on Miss Fawcett. "I have thrown the old one away. It was almost worn out."

That pen was, indeed, almost worn out, but it had been the Head's familiar companion for years, and he would not have exchanged it for a new one of solid gold.

"And how dreadfully careless you men are with books," said Miss Fawcett, smiling. "Do you know, I found no fewer than eleven volumes lying on the table or desk, instead of being in their places in the bookcase."

"Oh!"

"And all of them had the leaves turned down in various places at the corners," said Miss Priscilla. "I never could understand why men did not use bookmarkers, and why they ever wanted to mark so many places in a book at once."

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However, I have turned back all the corners now, and smoothed them out as much as possible."

The Head almost groaned.

All the marked places in his books of reference were lost now, and he would have many an hour of hard work before he found them all again.

"A woman's hand makes so much difference in a man's room," said Miss Fawcett.

"It does!" gasped the Head. "It does, indeed!"

"I have now finished here."

"Thank goodness! I mean—thank you very much."

"I will now go and see if I can make myself useful elsewhere."

"But——"

"I am determined to be useful. No, do not trouble to come. I know my way to Mrs. Mimms' room."

"Yes, but——"

"She will be so pleased to see me again."

And Miss Fawcett left the study.

Slowly and solemnly the Head extracted his valuable lucubrations upon the subject of "Æschylus and his tragedies" from the recesses of the waste-paper basket.

He smoothed them out on his desk, almost with tears in his eyes.

It was not surprising that Miss Fawcett's untrained eye had taken the jottings of mingled English and Greek for something of no importance; but to the Head they were as the treasures of Golconda.

"Dear me!" murmured the Head. "Miss Fawcett is an estimable lady—a most estimable lady, but—— Dear me!"

CHAPTER 8.

Rival Detectives!

TOM MERRY joined the Shell in time for third lesson. The sleep had refreshed him, and he felt no worse for having sat up the second half of the night with Miss Fawcett.

But he was still feeling somewhat worried about his old governess, and that worry brought a thoughtful shade to his brow.

He found the Shell still greatly interested in the sudden appearance of Miss Fawcett at St. Jim's, and talking about it in whispers, while Mr. Linton, the Form master, vainly strove to fix their attentions upon the configuration of the coast of South America.

Tom Merry sat down, at his place between Monty Lowther and Skimpole. Skimpole blinked at him through his spectacles.

There was a great deal of thought in the countenance of Herbert Skimpole of the Shell, but that thought was not being expended upon geography.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth was not the only junior at St. Jim's who imagined himself to be a born detective.

For Skimpole was, in his own opinion, a genius. Anybody who had listened patiently to his conversation must infallibly have discovered that he was a genius; and if that discovery had not been made, it was probably because he could induce nobody to listen patiently to his conversation.

For his conversation ran upon 'ographies, 'ologies, and 'isms; and 'isms, 'ologies, and 'ographies were not beloved of the Lower Forms at St. Jim's.

Skimpole was very short-sighted, and he never knew when the Form master's eye was upon him. Hence when he talked in class he was generally detected; and he often talked in class. Skimpole believed in the full liberty of anybody to make an ass of himself if he liked—at least, that was how Monty Lowther described it. And Lowther was his Form fellow, and ought to have known. Skimpole put it differently; but nobody ever listened to Skimpole.

Skimpole poked Tom Merry in the ribs with a long, bony forefinger as he sat down, and Tom Merry gave a gasp. Mr. Linton stared straight at them, a fact of which Herbert Skimpole was blissfully unconscious.

"I say, Merry——"

"Ow! You ass!"

"I hear that Miss Fawcett has arrived at St. Jim's."

"Yes. Shut up!"

"I hear that there is a mystery——"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"And so I——"

"Can't you see Linton looking, you duffer?" whispered Tom Merry.

"No; I do not see very well, and——"

"Shut up!"

"But——"

"Skimpole!" thundered Mr. Linton.

The Form Master could hardly believe his eyes at seeing Skimpole talking away under his very nose, as it were. Mr. Linton's face grew red, and he picked up his pointer in a businesslike way.

Skimpole blinked at him.
 "Yes, sir?"
 "You were talking."
 "I was only saying to Merry—"
 "You were talking!" thundered the master of the Shell.
 "That I was quite willing to solve—"
 "Skimpole!"
 "The mystery of Miss Fawcett, and—"
 "Take a hundred lines, Skimpole."
 "Certainly, sir. But—"
 "Another word and I shall cane you, Skimpole."
 And even Skimpole left off at that.
 Mr. Linton looked very angry for some time, and kept an eye on Skimpole; but Tom Merry was careful not to allow the amateur detective to start another talk. The class was dismissed at last, and Skimpole blinked round for Tom Merry as the Shell poured out into the broad, flagged passage.
 The Fourth Form had already been released, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was also looking for Tom Merry.
 The two amateur detectives found Tom Merry at the same moment. Tom had tried to escape into the quadrangle, but they cornered him on the steps. Skimpole took him by a button in the objectionable way he had, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped him on the shoulder.
 "I want to speak to you, Tom Mewwy."
 "Excuse me, D'Arcy, I want to speak to Merry."
 "Oh, that's all wight; you can speak anotheah time!"
 "It is important—"
 "It can hardly be so important as my wemarks. Hold on, Tom Mewwy!"
 "Pray do not go, Merry!"
 Tom Merry had scuttled down the steps. The two detectives scuttled after him, and cornered him again under the big elm in front of the School House.
 "Pway wemain, deah boy!"
 "Just a minute, Merry!"
 "Look here, Skimmay, you ass—"
 "Look here, D'Arcy, you fathead—"
 "Pway buzz off, Skimmay! I want to speak to Mewwy most particularly, as I am goin' to solve the mystewy of Miss Priscillah."
 "Dear me! That is the case I am engaged upon."
 "Bai Jove!"
 Skimpole produced a huge notebook and a blunt pencil, of which he proceeded to lick the point. He blinked at Tom Merry, who was laughing, apparently not much impressed with the importance of either D'Arcy's or Skimpole's investigations.
 "Pray let me have the details, Tom Merry!"
 "Tom Mewwy is goin' to give me the details, Skimmay."
 "Nothing of the sort."
 "Weally, Skimmay—"
 "You asses!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "There aren't any details. You know as much about the matter as I do."
 D'Arcy took a little Russian leather-bound, gilt-edged pocket-book from his waistcoat, and opened a silver pencil.
 "I am weady to take down all you say, Tom Mewwy."
 "I also am ready, Merry."
 "Rats!"
 Skimpole began to write "Ra—" and then checked himself.
 "Really, Merry, that is not a detail."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I wegard you as an ass, Skimmay."
 "I regard you as a feeble, forlorn specimen of the worn-out relic of a degenerate and bloated aristocracy," said Skimpole.
 "Bai Jove! Pway hold my notebook, Tom Mewwy, while I give Skimpole a feahful thwashin'."
 "You called me an ass."
 "Yaas; but my wemark was in switck accordance with the facts."
 "Really, D'Arcy—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Pray do not proceed to violence, D'Arcy!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "As a Determinist I should strike you with violence, the blame of my action, if any, falling on my heredity or my environment."
 "I wegard you as an ass, Skimmay. I will not thwash you, on second thoughts, as you are a harmless lunatic."
 "It is a common circumstance for persons whose brains are rocky to imagine that they discern the traces of insanity in others."
 "Bai Jove!"
 "However, to leave personalities and come to business, I am quite ready to take down— Dear me! Where is Tom Merry?"
 And Skimpole blinked round at the empty air in search of the hero of the Shell.

(Continued on next page.)



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 5, Carmelite Street,
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Half-a-crown will be paid for every joke that appears in this column.

SO TRYING!

Proud Mother: "My small boy is doing so well at school."
 Friend: "Is he, indeed?"
 Proud Mother: "Yes. The master says that he is the most trying boy in the school and he simply can't teach him anything!"
 J. FRASER, 13, Hafer Road, London, S.W.11.

NATURALLY.

Doctor: "Your pulse is as regular as a clock."
 Patient: "It ought to be; that's my watch you've got your fingers on!"
 ERNEST ROSE, Hopton Cottage, Youlgrave, Derbyshire.

GOOD REASON.

Boss (to office boy asking for a rise): "Why should you have one?"
 O. B.: "Well, sir, you said yourself that I was a model office boy."
 Boss: "Yes; but not a working model!"
 LESLIE HALLETT, 56, Miller Road, Croydon, Surrey.

HOW DENSE!

Political Speaker: "I am very glad to see such a dense crowd here to-night!"
 Voice from the back: "Don't be too pleased. We're not all dense!"
 GEORGE TRANTER, 36, Manor Grove, Glasshoughton, near Castleford.

CLEVER ANIMALS.

He (reading from paper): "Three thousand four hundred and twenty-six elephants were needed last year to make billiard balls."
 Dear Old Lady: "Fancy now, how wonderful that such great beasts can be trained to do such delicate work!"
 R. A. FARBRIDGE, 59, Princes Park Avenue, Golders Green, N.W.11.

QUITE SAFE!

Explorer (about to bathe): "You are sure this bay is safe? There are no sharks here?"
 Native: "No, sah, dey am all driven away by de crocodiles!"
 S. A. MORRELL, 11, Cardiff Street, Carlton Road, Nottingham.

A GRAND IDEA.

Jack: "Let's play zoo. I'll be the elephant."
 Betty: "What shall I be?"
 Jack: "You be the keeper and feed me with buns!"
 JACK FLETCHER, 37, Fielding Street, Rishton, near Blackburn, Lancs.

HE KNEW.

Magistrate: "How do you know that the defendant threw bottled fruit at you?"
 Plaintiff: "If you please, your honour, I felt the jar!"
 LILLIAN ELKINGTON, 119, Aldborough Road, Seven Kings, Ilford, Essex.

Tom Merry had walked away, and Arthur Augustus was running after him.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "I should have thought that Merry would be glad to have his mystery cleared up, if only for the sake of his respected governess. I wonder what has happened? Perhaps Miss Fawcett has committed a murder, and come to St. Jim's to hide from the police. She certainly does not look like a homicidal person, but a detective cannot afford to trust to appearances. In a moment of rage she may have smitten Hannah to the ground. I must investigate."

Tom Merry was running now, with the idea of giving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a little exercise.

Holding his notebook in his hand, and his silk-hat on with the other, D'Arcy dashed in pursuit of the hero of the Shell. Tom was skirting round the gym, and Skimpole, blinking after him, guessed that it was his intention to get round that building and dodge into the School House.

And so Skimpole, with a chuckle at his own cunning, started running round the gym on the opposite side.

He was thus certain to meet Tom Merry face to face if the hero of the Shell kept on.

But Tom Merry had no intention of doing so.

At the rear of the gym were several windows, in and out of which the juniors not infrequently chased one another when elder eyes were not upon them.

Tom Merry reached the back of the building well ahead of Arthur Augustus, and popped into one of the windows in a twinkling.

Skimpole came dashing round the corner, and Arthur Augustus came dashing round the other at top speed.

There was a terrific bump as the two met.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry from the window.

"Ow!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down with a bump, and Skimpole rolled over on the ground. They both sat up, gasping, and looking at one another.

"Bai Jove! You ass!"

"You fathead!"

"I wegard you as a dangewous lunatic!"

"I look upon you as an unspeakable idiot!"

"You uttah duffah!"

"You fearful dummy!"

"Why did you wun into me?"

"Why did you run into me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked towards the window, in which was framed the convulsed face of Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell was roaring with laughter. The meeting of the two amateur detectives had been comical enough to a third party.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for this wibald laughtah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I also have no perception of any adequate foundation for this unseemly merriment," said Skimpole. "Under the circumstances—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a final yell, Tom Merry disappeared from the window.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy staggered to his feet.

"Bai Jove, he's gone!"

"It's your fault, D'Arcy. I have a feeling that he will avoid us now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He does not wish the mystery to be solved."

"Appawently not?"

"That would seem to imply that Tom Merry has a guilty knowledge of the secret," said Skimpole seriously. "He may have been an accessory to the robbery."

"What wobbewy?"

"Suppose Miss Fawcett has committed a burglary, for instance—"

"You uttah ass!"

"A detective cannot afford to be a respecter of persons," said Skimpole sagely. "A detective is bound to suspect anybody until the culprit is discovered. Suppose Miss Fawcett has raided a jeweller's shop, for instance—"

"You feahful ass!"

"She may have brought the plunder here for Tom Merry to hide in his study. He was minding something for somebody once in his study, you know."

"I wegard you as a fwabjous ass!"

"Time will show," said Skimpole, as he rose to his feet.

"I have had a painful shock; but I do not mind that, in the cause of truth. I shall shortly have the whole case at my finger-tips, and let the guilty beware!"

And Skimpole put his big notebook into his pocket, and walked away with a frown on his bony forehead, which indicated that great thoughts were going on within.

CHAPTER 9.

Many Remedies!

"TOMMY!"

Tom Merry halted.

He had just reached the steps of the School House, and was about to go in, when Miss Priscilla Fawcett appeared in the doorway.

The appearance of Miss Priscilla drew glances from all quarters.

The good old lady was looking more herself now, and her face was less pale and worried. At St. Jim's, with her dear Tommy so near at hand, she felt safe from the blackmailer, whether he was a real or imaginary person.

Tom Merry did not particularly enjoy being called "Tommy" before the fellows. But Miss Priscilla never could understand his feelings on that subject; and, as a matter of fact, Tom Merry never explained them to her.

Miss Fawcett had always been goodness itself to him, and he was not the kind of fellow to return even overflowing affection with ingratitude.

If Miss Fawcett did not realise that he was not a little boy still, and did not understand that a sturdy fellow getting on for fifteen did not exactly like being kissed and fondled in public—well, it couldn't be helped. But Tom Merry would have been the last fellow in the world to say or do anything to wound the old lady's feelings on the subject.

"Tommy!"

"Yes, dear?"

"My darling Tommy, how well you look this morning!"

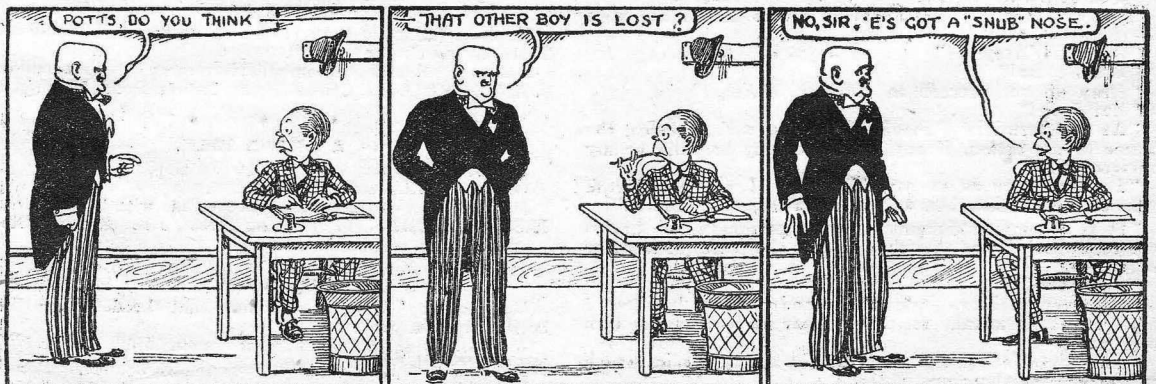
Mellish of the Fourth grinned round at the other fellows.

"This is worth watching!" he murmured. "There's no charge for admission, but it's better than the monkeys at the Zoo."

And some of the fags sniggered.

"You were disturbed in your rest last night," went on Miss Priscilla, drawing Tom towards her, and kissing him on both cheeks, apparently unconscious of the fact that she had

Potts, the Office Boy!



a highly interested and amused audience. "I hope you are not feeling any ill-effects, my love?"

Tom Merry turned pink.
 "Not at all, dear."
 "You have a lovely colour."
 "Oh, I've just been running, you know!"
 "I hope you have not been over-exerting yourself, my darling? You know how delicate you are!"
 Tom Merry grinned.
 "I'm as tough as a hazel nut, dear."
 "Oh, my darling, you know we can never agree on that point. You must remember that you are not strong. I hope that this colour in your cheeks is not merely hectic."
 "Oh, I'm all right, dear!"
 "I hope you are! Did you get your feet wet in the rain yesterday?"

Tom Merry's pink cheeks became quite red.
 "No," he stammered. "I say, would you like to see the study while you're here?"
 "Yes, presently, dearest Tommy. Have you used up all the Purple Pills for Pining Patients I sent you in my last letter?"

"Oh, no; not yet!"
 "Let me know immediately you want some more."
 "I will; I'll write at once."
 "Have you tried the Little Lozenges?"
 "Oh, no; not yet!"

"They are really very good. They may be taken in any numbers at any time, but preferably a dozen of them before and after meals."
 "I'll remember."
 "About your chest—"

"I wish you'd come and look at the study," said Tom Merry, whose cheeks were on fire as he heard suppressed sniggers in all directions.

"So I will, my dear, but your delicate chest—"
 "This way!"
 "I have been anxious—"
 "Up the stairs, dear."
 "I was thinking—"
 "It's the next passage."

And the kind old lady from Huckleberry Heath was ushered into Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage. Outside the School House the fellows were in a roar. Mellish wiped his eyes.

"Touching, ain't it?" he remarked.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Did anybody notice whether Tom Merry was wearing flannel next to his skin?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Gore, let's get up to the Shell passage and—"
 "And what?" said Gore, turning upon Mellish and fixing his eyes on his face.

Mellish retreated a step. He had forgotten for the moment the new line that the cad of the Shell seemed to be taking.

"I've got a wheeze for taking a rise out of the old lady."

"You can keep your rotten wheezes to yourself!"
 "Look here—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"
 And Gore stalked off.
 "My hat!" murmured Mellish, staring at him. "What little game is he playing? Is he hard up, and wanting to borrow tin off Tom Merry? Of course, it's all humbug! But what's his little game?"

And the worthy Mellish pondered over that for a long time without being able to find any solution to the mystery.

CHAPTER 10.

Nobody Wants to be Selfish!

TOM MERRY had taken Miss Fawcett to his study to get her out of the crowd, who were so amused by her affectionate inquiries after his health.

He had not time to think upon the matter; if he had done so he might have remembered that Miss Priscilla was a somewhat dangerous visitor in a junior's study. For the juniors were not the tidiest of mortals, and Miss Priscilla waged a deadly and unending war upon untidiness.

The old lady looked round the study as she entered, and uttered an exclamation:

"Goodness gracious!"
 "What's the matter, dear?"

Tom Merry could not see anything to call forth that exclamation of Miss Fawcett's. The study looked all right to him.

It was true that the boys' maid who looked after the Shell passage had not emptied the ashpan under the grate for a couple of days. Boys' maids will do these things—or will not do them, to be more exact. The table was standing corner-wise, instead of straight, as it had been pulled up towards the armchair, in which Manners had lately been sitting, looking to Lowther's camera, with which something had gone wrong.

Lowther had taken up photography, and Manners had sold him his camera some time back. But Manners still had a fatherly interest in that camera, and was always called upon to lend a hand if anything went "rocky." The camera lay on the table now, and there were various photographic paraphernalia lying near it.

The clock on the mantelpiece had stopped—not because it wasn't wound, but because it was wound too much.

The mantelpiece was dusty; but that wasn't the fault of the boys' maid. She had been threatened with sudden death if she dared to touch it. Manners had several films pinned up there, and if anything had happened to these films, the cause of the happenings would have heard emphatically from Manners.

The cupboard was open, and it disclosed the provisions the Terrible Three kept in their study, mingled with other articles that had been crammed into the cupboard to get them out of the way.

Perhaps the butter-dish was not exactly the most suitable place for a ball of twine. Possibly a punching-ball and a loaf of bread were not the best of company, especially when both were deposited in a box half full of firewood and shavings. It might have been that a jampot would have been better for having a lid on it, and that the coffee could have been kept in something better than an old mustard-tin, and the salt in a receptacle more imposing than a disused inkpot.

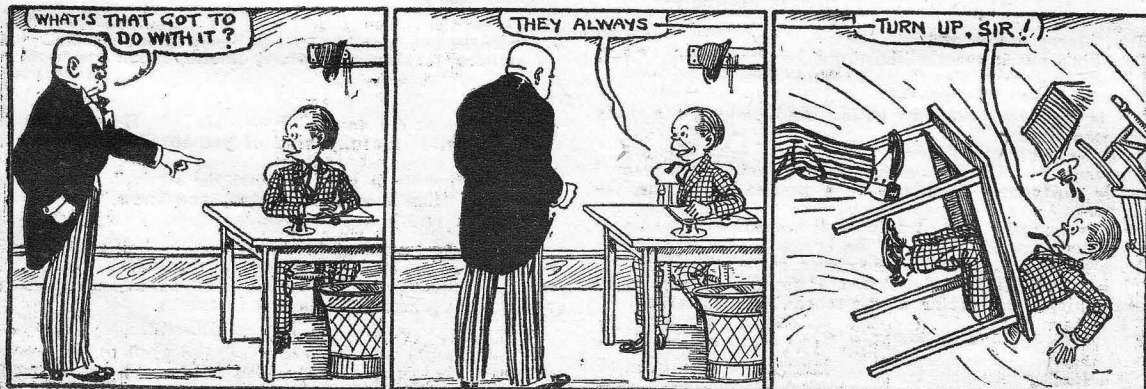
But these were trifles to the chums of the Shell. They were not trifles to Miss Priscilla.

She shuddered as she looked round her.
 "My darling Tommy!" she said faintly.

"Hallo!"
 "My sweetest boy—"
 "What's the row?"

"Is the study always in this state?"
 "Oh, no; it's untidy sometimes!" said Tom Merry

SNUBBED!



cheerfully. "I'm glad the maid has seen to it before your visit, dear."

Miss Priscilla shivered.

"Untidy sometimes, my dearest child!"

"Oh, yes! The fellows will leave things about, you know. But it's all right now."

"All right!"

"A!"

"But—but—but——"

"We want some new curtains," said Tom Merry, glancing at the window, where the curtains were certainly hanging in tatters; "they're worn."

"Good gracious!"

"It wasn't only wear that did that," said Tom. "Herries said his bulldog could climb the curtains just as easily as Kerruish's monkey. I said he couldn't."

"Dear me!"

"We put it to the test, and—that's the result. Of course, I couldn't guess that the beast would lose his temper and begin to chew up the curtains. He nearly chewed up Herries, too."

"Oh dear!"

"You can send me some new curtains from Laurel Villa, if you like."

"I shall do so immediately, my dear child, But——"

"There's nothing else the matter."

"The study is very untidy!"

"Oh, that's all right!"

"It is so dusty!"

"Oh, it's not so dusty!" said Tom Merry, looking round; but the slangy significance of the reply was lost upon the lady from Huckleberry Heath.

"My darling Tommy——"

"Come and have a look at Study No. 6——"

"Is that also in a dreadful state?"

"Oh, worse than this!" said Tom Merry anxiously. He knew now that Miss Fawcett was going to begin to dust, and he preferred to have the tidying done in Blake's study if possible. "Better come to Study No. 6."

"Yes, but——"

"They've got a nice new duster there—one of those nice striped dusters, as big as a towel, and it's never been used yet," said Tom Merry persuasively.

"But——"

"Just come and have a look——"

"Oh, very well!"

And Tom Merry, greatly elated at his success, piloted Miss Fawcett along the corridor and then down the Fourth Form passage to Study No. 6.

Arthur Augustus was there alone.

The swell of St. Jim's had changed his collar after the collision with Skimpole, and he was giving a final touch to his necktie when Tom Merry kicked open the door.

D'Arcy looked round.

"Bai Jove! Is that you, Tom Mewwy?"

"I believe so. Let's get at the glass and I'll look and make sure."

"Oh, pway don't wot! Have you come to give me those details?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Then pway why——"

"I've come to bring you a visitor."

"A visitah?"

"Yes, Miss Fawcett."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy whirled away from the glass in an instant, and bowed low to the old lady framed in the doorway.

"This is extremely kind of you, Miss Fawcett, to give me a look-in!" he said.

"Indeed, I am glad to see you," said Miss Priscilla. "Tommy says that the study is in need of dusting——"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry turned red.

"I didn't put it exactly like that," he stammered. "I—I said our study wasn't as dusty as Study No. 6."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"It is the same thing, my child. And, indeed, the study does need dusting."

Miss Fawcett looked round her.

The room was all right, as a matter of fact; but it seemed terribly dusty and disorderly to a precise lady from the country.

Arthur Augustus looked a little dismayed.

"Weally, Miss Fawcett——" he began.

Miss Priscilla smiled her charming smile.

"I have told Dr. Holmes that I am determined to be useful while I am staying at the school," she remarked.

"Bai Jove!"

"I am going to do everything I can to assist the House dame, and set an example to the maids."

"Weally!"

"I have dusted Dr. Holmes' study——"

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"Great Scott!" murmured Tom Merry.

"He was so pleased. I think you have a new duster here, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you lend it to me?"

"With pleasuah, madam. You are goin' to dust Tom Mewwy's study?"

"No, I think I will begin with this room."

"But——"

"I am afraid you boys are a little careless, and the maids do not look after you with the thoroughness that is to be desired."

"Yaas, but——"

"Hallo, are you going to be all day, Gussy?" said Jack's



"Shake hands and be friends," said Miss Priscilla. "I do not like to see juniors, looking particularly idiotic, shook hands all round, and sure you will not."

cheery voice at the door. "I—— Hallo! How do you do, Miss Fawcett? Awfully kind of you to give us a look in like this."

"Miss Fawcett is goin' to dust the study," said D'Arcy dismally. "She is so awfully kind, you know."

"Oh!"

Jack Blake looked at his tools, and his half-made rabbit-hutch in a corner. If anybody in the School House had touched those tools, and nails, and screws, and bits of wood, there would have been happenings.

But with Miss Priscilla it was different.

Miss Priscilla had been so good and kind to the juniors on many occasions, and she was really such an estimable character, that Blake would have sacrificed his rabbit-hutch rather than have offended her.

Besides, he could not punch a lady's nose, even if she wanted to put his study tidy. Diplomacy was the thing.

Miss Priscilla had already taken the duster in hand, and there was no time to lose. It was a fine large duster, and very clean. It was Digby who had first kicked against the dust in the study, chiefly caused by Blake's carpentry. Digby had insisted upon contributions of twopence from each of the four in the study, and had bought a nice new duster at Mrs. Taggles' shop. The duster had hung on a nail on the door of the cupboard, ready for use ever since. There was not a stain on it.

"You dear children had better retire while I dust the study," said Miss Fawcett. "You may run away and play marbles."



"are too old to kiss!" "My hat!" gasped Lowther. The Priscilla beamed upon them with gentle affection. "I am again," she said.

The juniors exchanged glances.

The infants in the Second Form played marbles; but for the heroes of the junior cricket eleven to be told to go and play marbles was an insult which—if it had come from a fellow at St. Jim's—could only have been wiped out in blood—from the nose, of course.

But the dear old soul from Huckleberry Heath was quite unconscious of giving offence.

Blake seemed to swallow something.

"Right-ho!" he said. "We—we'll go and play—er—marbles."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then," said Tom Merry. "Not much more time before dinner."

"Hold on a second! It's awfully kind of you to dust our study, Miss Fawcett—"

"My intention is to be kind, my dear boy. I love to make children happy."

Blake writhed.

"Ye-es, how—er—ripping of you, you know! But I don't want to be selfish. You really ought to dust Tom Merry's study, not ours."

"My dear boy—"

"I'm not going to be selfish. Come on, and I'll show you the way to Tom Merry's study," said Blake, in the most generous way.

"Perhaps you are right—"

"Not at all," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "On the contrary—"

"Look here, Merry—"

"Shut up, Blake—"

"I'm not going to be selfish—"

"Yaas, wathah! I absolutely wefuse to be guilty of the howwid selfishness of havin' our study dusted instead of Tom Mewwy's."

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I am quite wesolved, Tom Mewwy."

"I say," exclaimed Tom Merry, struck with a sudden and brilliant idea. "There's a study at the end of the passage that's much dustier than ours. Kangaroo's study, you know. The state that chap Glyn makes it in with his experiments is fearful, and Clifton Dane's pets make it—make it awfully dusty, too. As for Kangaroo, he likes the place to be tidy, and I saw him dusting the mantelpiece once himself."

"Bai Jove!"

"This way, dear," said Tom, leading Miss Fawcett from the study and talking so quickly that the good lady was quite unable to interrupt him. "You know, Kangaroo—his name's Harry Noble, you know, but we call him Kangaroo because he comes from Australia—he's a ripping chap, and a splendid cricketer, too, and we like him. As—as he's a son of the Empire, you know, and a giddy Imperialist, he ought to have his study dusted first. It's only fair to treat a Colonial with proper distinction. And he would be so jolly grateful, too."

"I don't think!" murmured Blake.

"Really, Tommy—"

"This way."

"But—"

"That's the study—"

"Tommy—"

"Here you are."

"But—"

Tom Merry threw open the door of the end study in the Shell passage.

"Come in, dear!"

And Miss Fawcett entered the study of the three Shell chums—Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane, who were called the New Firm in the School House.

CHAPTER 11.

Cornstalk & Co. Are Not Pleased!

THE end study was fortunately unoccupied. The New Firm were not likely to be indoors at that time of day. Glyn might have been there, at work with his experiments, but, as a matter of fact, he was not. Kangaroo had dragged him off for cricket practice, and the study was empty.

Miss Fawcett gazed round the room with more horror than she had shown in either Tom Merry's study or Blake's.

The end study was the largest in the Shell passage, but there was none too much room for the New Firm and their belongings.

Bernard Glyn's apparatus took up a great deal of room, and filled a good many boxes and shelves, and the belongings of Clifton Dane and Kangaroo were not small.

The study certainly was a little untidy.

Miss Fawcett's eye gleamed as she looked round it, and her hands closed upon the duster with a businesslike grip.

"Awfully dusty, ain't it?" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kangaroo will be so pleased," murmured Tom Merry.

Miss Priscilla smiled beamingly.

"I shall be very glad to clear up the study and dust it, as a surprise for those dear boys," she said. "Don't tell them anything about it."

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!"

"I want it to come as a complete surprise to them."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They will be delighted."

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry.

"You may run away now, and I will begin."

And the juniors ran away, and Miss Fawcett began. As soon as they had turned the corner of the passage, the three juniors stopped, to lean up against the wall and yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"This will be the joke of the season upon the Cornstalk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am sowwy for Glyn's appawatus."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Oh, that's all right! Come on—let's get to the cricket and prove an alibi."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors went down to cricket practice.

Cornstalk & Co. were at the nets, and they greeted the juniors with a yell as the latter arrived on the ground.

"Now, then, you slackers! Play up!"

"Bai Jove! I decline to be chawactewised as a slackah!"

"Play up, then!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors joined Cornstalk & Co. till the bell rang for midday dinner.

Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy grinned to themselves and one another when they went into the School House.

By that time, they had no doubt, that dusting of the end study was over, and they wondered in what terrible state of complete tidiness Miss Priscilla had left it.

They were curious to see, but they did not care to go upon the spot till Kangaroo and his chums had made the discovery for themselves.

Noble, Glyn, and Dane had no suspicion. They ate their dinner, and left the Hall afterwards, and then Kangaroo wanted to go down to the nets again.

Bernard Glyn shook his head.

"I'm going to shove in some work on my mechanical man before afternoon school," he said. "I'm going up to the study."

"Rats! Come to the nets!"

"Oh, I can't fag at cricket just after dinner. You come up to the study and help me."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," grunted Kangaroo. "You coming, Dane?"

The Canadian nodded.

"I'll come."

And the New Firm went upstairs together.

Tom Merry grinned at Blake and Arthur Augustus.

"This is where we smile," he murmured.

"Kangy won't smile."

"Wathah not."

"Come on, kids; we must see this!" said Tom Merry, following the New Firm up the stairs at a respectable distance.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They stalked Cornstalk & Co. along the Shell passage. They watched them enter the end study, and they listened for what would follow.

It was not long in following. There was a yell of wrath from the end study.

The juniors hurried along and looked in at the door, with gleeful grins.

Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn were standing in the study, looking around them with blank dismay and wrath.

Miss Fawcett had dusted and tidied up the study. She had done it—with a vengeance.

The room was undeniably tidy. Everything was in apple-pie order. The books were put away upon the shelves. The papers were tidied up in a heap on a shelf—papers upon which Kangaroo had been writing out a Latin imposition being mixed up with the sheets containing Clifton Dane's half-written contribution to "Tom Merry's Weekly," and the still more important sheets upon which the Liverpool lad had jotted down facts and figures for his experiments.

The task of sorting them out was likely to be quite an exhilarating one.

But that was not all. Glyn's dynamo had been packed away in a corner, as an unsightly thing that was better out of view, and a few odd ends of wire showed that Miss Fawcett had not handled it with an experienced hand.

In another corner was a little stack of dry batteries, coils of wire, and other electrical necessities, packed up most tidily. But the foundation of the stack was a cardboard box of sal ammoniac, and over it were stacked the cells of a wet battery Glyn had been using. One of the jars had been cracked, and the water had run out, and was soaking into the sal ammoniac below.

The looking-glass had been carefully cleaned. On that glass Glyn was accustomed to making calculations with chalk, and all the figures relating to the construction of his mechanical man had been chalked there. But they were gone now.

Glyn stared at the glass, and round at the other tidinesses of which the study was full, and howled like a Red Indian.

"Who's done this?"

"What beast—"

"What idiot—"

"What dangerous maniac—"

"Who's been here?" finished all three together.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

The New Firm turned to the door.

The three juniors were there roaring with laughter; they could not help it. Cornstalk & Co. jumped to a conclusion—natural enough, though erroneous.

"You rotters!" roared Kangaroo. "You've done this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go for them!"

"Here, I say! Hold on—"

"Bai Jove! You see—"

"Sock it to 'em!" roared Bernard Glyn.

And the New Firm did not hold on. They rushed at the three juniors, and in a moment the half-dozen of them were rolling over in the passage, fighting like wild cats.



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CHAPTER 12.

Only a Misunderstanding!

"GOODNESS gracious!" Miss Fawcett uttered the exclamation in tones of horror.

It was very unfortunate that she should have come along at that moment. But Miss Fawcett was turning up in all sorts of places, at all sorts of odd moments that day.

The good old lady looked down upon the half-dozen juniors as they rolled on the linoleum, and she could hardly believe her eyes.

"Tommy, my darling!"

"Take that!"

"Rotter!"

"Ass!"

"I tell you——"

"Bai Jove!"

"I——"

"Tommy!" shrieked Miss Fawcett. "My sweet darling! My precious Tommy! Don't fight with that great, rough boy, Tommy!"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Tom Merry, suddenly recognising Miss Fawcett's voice through the noise and the dust. "Hallo!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Tommy!"

"Phew!"

"Tommy!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors jumped up. They had been very excited, and they had exchanged some hard knocks, and they looked very dusty and dishevelled. They looked very sheepish, too, as Miss Priscilla's horrified eyes were fixed upon them.

"My darling!"

"Oh!"

"You—you were fighting!"

Tom Merry turned scarlet.

"Not exactly fighting, you know," he stammered.

"Oh, no!" said Kangaroo. "Not exactly fighting! It was just a—just a—sort of a kind of a dust-up."

"My darling boy!"

"I'm not hurt. It's all right. It was only a misunderstanding."

"You are injured!"

"Not a bit."

"Your dear little nose is swollen."

"It's all right."

"You have a cut on your sweet, little mouth."

"Oh, I—I— It's all right—indeed, it is!"

"What were you fighting about?"

"A—a—a misunderstanding."

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"They've been japing us," said Bernard Glyn. "But it's all right——"

"We didn't, you ass!"

"You didn't!"

"Wathah not!"

"You didn't muck up our study?"

"No, duffer!"

"Perhaps we were a little hasty," said Kangaroo. "But we saw you sniggering at the door, you see, and that was the how of it."

"Bai Jove! I——"

"You see——"

"I decline to have my laughtah chawactewised as snig-gewin'! I——"

"Oh, cheese it, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to cheese it! I wegard——"

"But some idiot has been——" began Bernard Glyn.

"Shut up, Glyn!"

"Rats! Why should I shut up? I must explain to Miss Fawcett. You see, Miss Fawcett, we thought these young bounders had been mucking up our study for a jape—a joke, you know."

"Dear me!"

"Some idiot has been here, and——"

"Shut up!"

"Rats!"

"Some dangerous lunatic has been in the study," said Clifton Dane, taking up the tale. "Everything is simply mucked up."

"All our papers——"

"And books——"

"And tools——"

"All my calculations——"

"And my literary work——"

"Dear me! Has somebody been making the study untidy again, after I tidied it up?" said Miss Fawcett, much distressed.

Bernard Glyn jumped.

"You—er—you tidied it up, Miss Fawcett?"

"Certainly!"

"Oh!"

"I was very careful," said Miss Fawcett. "I put everything neat and tidy. I am so sorry if it has been disturbed since."

Kangaroo & Co. smiled a sickly smile.

"Oh! We—we didn't know that," stammered the Australian.

"We—weren't aware of it," said Dane.

"So—so good of you," groaned Glyn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tommy dear thought that you would like your study to be dusted," said Miss Priscilla, with a beaming smile. "My dearest Tommy is so thoughtful for others."

The New Firm gave her dearest Tommy an expressive look; but what that look expressed was not gratitude.

"Now, you must not quarrel again," said Miss Fawcett. "You see, that is all due to a misunderstanding."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Shake hands, and be friends. I do not know whether you are too old to kiss one another."

"My hat!"

The juniors, looking particularly idiotic, shook hands all round, and Miss Priscilla beamed upon them with gentle affection.

"Now I may safely leave you," she said. "I am sure you will not quarrel again."

"Honah bwright, deah boy—I mean, deah gal—that is to say, dear madam."

"It's pax," said Tom Merry.

"I have dusted some other studies, too, and I am going to make myself useful to Mrs. Mimms this afternoon," said Miss Fawcett. "Dr. Holmes does not expect a reply to his letter until to-morrow morning at the earliest, and I shall not leave till after he has received it. Ah, I forgot, you do not know about the matter! I hope to inaugurate quite a new era of tidiness in the School House while I am here."

And Miss Fawcett went her way.

The juniors looked at one another rather doubtfully.

"I suppose we were rather hasty," said Kangaroo at last. "But it was you that set her to dusting the study, though, wasn't it?"

"Well, what were we to do?" demanded Tom Merry. "She was going to dust ours, and we shifted her off to your room. I suppose you wouldn't like us to refuse a kindness?"

"All my apparatus mucked up," grunted Glyn. "I——"

"Bai Jove! What's that wot?"

It was a roar from up the passage. Lowther and Manners were going into Tom Merry's study, and that roar had burst from the two simultaneously.

Kangaroo gave a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha! She's dusted your study, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Dane and Glyn.

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as wathah funnay! She has dusted Tom Mewwy's study, aftah all! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry gave a gasp, and rushed away up the passage. Had his diplomacy been exerted in vain, after all?

The other juniors followed him at a run, anxious to see what havoc had been wrought in his quarters by the kindness of Miss Priscilla.

They reached the doorway, and looked in. Manners and Lowther were dancing with rage, and bore a striking resemblance to a couple of dancing dervishes.

The study had been dusted.

CHAPTER 13.

Not So Dusty!

THE wrath of the juniors was pardonable.

Miss Fawcett, after finishing the end study, had found sufficient time to attend to Tom Merry's quarters, and she had attended to them—thoroughly.

Everything was as clean as a new pin. The untidy films hanging to the wallpaper over the mantelpiece, round the little glass, had been taken away, and where they were, goodness only knew. No doubt Miss Fawcett had regarded the curly scrolls as so much useless lumber, and imagined that it had been pinned up there out of the way. She knew that boys had curious manners and customs, and perhaps thought that that was one of them. The camera had been taken off the table, and packed away tidily in the cupboard. Manners dragged it out.

Miss Fawcett's ideas on the subject of photography must have been absolutely elementary.

She apparently regarded a camera as a receptacle for packing things into. She had packed oddments of various kinds—odd rolls of films, backs of printing-frames, and so forth, into the camera, till all available space was filled. Other rolls of films she had undone, and rolled into one big roll, to take up less room, in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that they were ruined by exposure to the daylight.

There were other symptoms of the magic touch of a woman's hand in the room.

Everything the juniors used, whether for amusement, for work, or for their hobbies, was packed away neatly in some unseen and inaccessible place. The study had not, perhaps, been very tidy; but the boys had known where to find a thing when they wanted it. But that was over now.

When they went to look for a fountain-pen, they would probably find a football inflater, and, looking for a back number of the "Magnet," might lead to the discovery of a classical atlas, and so on. The study was tidy.

Kangaroo & Co. roared, and Blake and D'Arcy joined them. Tom Merry did not roar. He gazed blankly into the study.

Manners and Lowther glared at the group.

"Who's done this?" roared Manners.

"What dummy has been here?" shrieked Lowther.

(Continued on page 19.)

ANOTHER INTERESTING PAGE IS REACHED IN—



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

HALLO, chums! Here's all the news about next week's GEM! Martin Clifford contributes a ripping long, complete yarn, entitled:

"MISS PRISCILLA'S BODYGUARD!"

in which Tom Merry and Co. go to Huckleberry Heath on the trail of the blackmailer. It's packed with thrills and fun, and is a story that none of you should miss. Jerry Garrison and Fusty will again be to the fore in their efforts to settle up with Jasper Privett, and you will be enthralled by the further chapters of our gripping Western adventure yarn,

"RED STAR RANGER!"

Potts, the office-boy, will be on parade again, and there will be another column of readers' jokes, for each of which I pay half-a-crown. To complete the box of tricks there will be another page from my notebook.

£10,000 CAR!

There is in England to-day a car that cost ten thousand pounds to build! This is the new super racing car of 500 horse-power, which has been specially built to gain for Britain all the long-distance records which are held by foreign cars. The car will make its first public appearance on July 1st, at Brooklands, in the British Empire Trophy race, before going to Montlhery to attack the records.

"THE CRASHER!"

They called Lieutenant Arthur Danby the "Crasher," because he couldn't land a plane for toffee! They called him an "outsider" because he wouldn't make friends with anyone! They called him a spy—because—

Boys, take my advice, and read this thrill-packed story of the Great War, featuring Baldy's Angels, the crack fighting squadron on the Western Front. This story has been specially written by popular Hedley Scott, who was a flying officer during the war, and it appears in this week's Free Gift issue of the "Ranger," out on Saturday, price 2d. Order a copy right away, chaps!

A LINK WITH THE CUTTY SARK.

Every boy knows the name of the Cutty Sark, the famous tea-clipper of last century, and in Poplar, London, to-day, there is to be seen a strange link with this ship. Seventy years ago, John Watts, a seaman in the Cutty Sark, brought home to his mother's garden in Poplar a vine slip from Spain. The slip was planted in the garden at THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,325.

back, close to the kitchen window. And now, although all the rest of the garden is covered with paving-stones, the vine reaches to the roof, and only last year it produced nearly a hundred pounds of fine black grapes.

LEG-THEORY.

A week or two ago I asked readers who were interested to write to me on the above subject. I have a letter from E. J. Banks, of West Bridgeford. He says that he does not altogether approve of it, and then goes on to say that as a member of a local team he has tried to bowl it, but given it up as he has found it very difficult. I assure you, E. J. B., that only a really first-class bowler, like Larwood, can possibly hope to succeed in bowling leg-theory. But surely that is nothing against it? You say, E. J. B., "Larwood, the man who developed it, deserves all the praise he gets, but he also deserves all the criticism and barracking." How do you make that out? Surely he can't deserve both? As you say, the relations between England and Australia are somewhat strained, so perhaps the best thing is to ban leg-theory. What do you others think? Thanks for your letter, E. J. B.

GREAT NEWS.

Are you going to the seaside this summer? If so, here's great news for you. (Or, maybe you live by the sea, anyway!) Messrs. Cadbury Brothers of Bournville have contributed a quarter of a million of their Dairy Milk Chocolate bars for the consumption of all readers buying the GEM from beach-sellers, kiosks, and other such places at most of our popular seaside resorts. In addition they have provided ripping pound boxes of their famous assorted chocolates, as prizes at our Concert Party, Cinema, and Gala Competitions. What a chance for all you fellows! Keep your eyes open when you go to the sea!

THE WEEK'S BEST STORY!

Maybe you have heard tales of giant fish that have wrecked ships and overturned boats, but here is a story of fish who did just the opposite.

The 342-ton steamer Admiral, of Liverpool, arrived at Wicklow with a cargo of coal and grounded near the entrance to the harbour. Immediately her hold began to fill with water. The pumps were set working, and 150 tons of coal were taken ashore. Then, to the amazement of the captain, it was found that the hold contained no water at all. A closer examination was made and it was then found that six inches of the tail of a large fish had become wedged in the hole, and though the fish was wriggling and quite alive, it was unable to release its tail.

It was decided that the best thing to do was to cement the tail into position, and this was done. Then a certificate of seaworthiness was obtained and the Admiral set off for Liverpool.

ODDS AND ENDS.

The very latest material for dresses is made of glass! It is said that it can be cleaned just like a window!

At Bankura, near Calcutta, a young Bengali was attacked by a man-eating tiger. He seized the tiger by the tongue and held it until his friends had killed it!

Postal authorities at San Antonia, Texas, wondered why there were so many unstamped letters. They found that ants ate the stamps, because of the gum, while they were in the pillar box.

SAILORS WHO CRY!

Have you ever heard of sailors crying? Or of a skipper who spansks his crew? Nor had I till the other day, when I heard of the barque L'Avenir. This sailing ship is a 3,650-tonner, and she was brought 11,000 miles from Fremantle by her crew of thirty-one, whose ages range from fourteen to twenty-one. Among her crew there is a policeman's son, aged fourteen, while the mess-boy is a Swedish baron of the same age. Captain Nils Erikson is the skipper, and his uncle owns a fleet of twenty-six sailing vessels. He will have nothing to do with steam ships, and his idea is to train real sailors. Captain Erikson says that sometimes the young boys do not like having to do certain work, so he spansks them, and then later they are ashamed of themselves! But taken all round they are a very happy crew and they find sailing the seas a grand life.

SOMEWHAT COLD!

Mr. S. R. Bonnett and Mr. A. Fisher are the only two men in the world who have flown over both Everest and Kinchinjunga. They spent their time on these flights taking photographs, cinematic and otherwise, but they found it very difficult because they were so hampered by the many appliances which were necessary to keep them alive on their journeys. One of them, Mr. Fisher, accidentally exposed a hand while over Kinchinjunga, and his nails became so brittle that they broke at a touch! There were seventy degrees of frost above Everest, and the flyers' goggles were interlaced with heating wires to prevent their eyes getting frostbitten.

"THE CASTLE OF FEAR!"

An old Spanish castle in Bellton Woods! Protected by tigers, bloodhounds, and dangerous traps. What's the meaning of it all? That's what the chums of St. Frank's want to know, so they make a night exploration to the mysterious castle, and experience the adventure of their lives! Nipper's number looks "all up" when Stanley Waldo makes a timely rescue by leaping on the back of a tiger! But who lives in the castle? Nipper & Co. suspect it is the headquarters of a powerful criminal organisation known as the "Brotherhood of the Brave." This hundred per cent thrill-story, starring Rupert Waldo, the "Robin Hood" crook, appears in this week's "Nelson Lee." Get a copy to-day!

YOUR EDITOR.

RUCTIONS AT ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 17.)

"Bai Jove!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "If this is a jape——"
 "It isn't a jape," said Tom Merry, almost with tears in his eyes. "It's all right——"
 "All right! Mad?"
 "Duffer! Ass! All right! Why——"
 "I mean——"
 "What idiot was it? I suppose he was tired of life!" shouted Lowther. "Where is he? What's his name?"
 "It was——"
 "Quick!" yelled Lowther, picking up a cricket stump.
 "Who was it? What's his name?"
 "Miss Fawcett!"
 "Wh-wh-what!"
 The cricket stump went to the floor with a crash.
 "Miss Fawcett!"
 "Yes. She's dusted the study!"
 "Yaas, wathah, bai Jove! A most estimable lady, and awfully tidy," said Arthur Augustus. "She's dusted Kangaroo's study, too, and Kangawoo is quite pleased."
 "Of all the——"
 "Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry. "It can't be helped. These things will happen!"
 "That's so," said Blake philosophically. "Take it calmly."
 "Calmly! Why——"
 "Look at this camera——"
 "Look here——"
 "My only hat!" said Blake. "I'm jolly glad that Miss Fawcett didn't have time to dust No. 6, too!"
 "Bai Jove, yaas!"
 "How do you know she didn't?" grinned Kangaroo. "As she found time for this one, she may have found time for Study No. 6 as well."
 "M-my hat!" gasped Blake, struck with horror at the thought.

He dashed away down the passage.
 They all dashed after him, eager to see whether the general misfortune had gone further.
 Arthur Augustus gave a wail as he dashed into Study No. 6.

There is no need to dwell upon the harrowing details, to borrow an expression from the novelist. Suffice it to say that D'Arcy's silk hat was packed away on a dusty shelf, which was too high for Miss Fawcett to reach to dust. It was standing there in a nice little pool of treacle which had been spilt there some time back. The neckties D'Arcy had left about the study were out of sight now; they subsequently turned up, on the following term, nicely folded in a cardboard box, at the back of the cupboard. But it was Blake who had most cause to yell. His half-made rabbit-hutch—alas!

He sat down on the table, and groaned.
 To have had his tools tidied up was bad enough—it was infuriating!

But his rabbit-hutch—alas!
 He sat on the table and groaned again.
 Where his tools were he had no idea. Perhaps they would turn up again from the tidy places they had been packed into, and perhaps they wouldn't!

But his rabbit-hutch! All the pieces he had made with great care to put together had gone. Miss Fawcett had no doubt wondered why the juniors should keep fragments of wood in the study. As for the nails and screws, all placed just where Blake wanted them when he finished the hutch, of course, they had vanished.

That was not all. But that was enough!
 "I say, Tom Merry," murmured Blake softly.
 "Yes?"
 "Could you take your old governess out somewhere to-night, and lose her?"
 "Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It would be worth a fivah!"

But Tom Merry only chuckled and departed.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole is Just in Time!

THERE were thoughtful faces in the Shell and the Fourth Form that afternoon. By that statement we do not mean to imply that the juniors were paying unusual attention to their lessons.

They were thinking of Miss Fawcett.
 The tidying of the three studies had been told all over

the school as an excellent joke, and it had seemed excruciatingly funny to all but the owners of the studies. But it had occurred to some of the juniors that during afternoon school Miss Fawcett might carry her tidying proclivities further. The whole Shell passage might be tidy by the time they were released from classes, and the possibility was enough to make the juniors look grave.

Skimpole leaned towards Tom Merry, and whispered to him in class.

"Merry——"
 "Don't jaw!" muttered Tom.
 "But this is important——"
 "Oh, chuck it! I haven't any details to give you!"
 "I was not thinking of details," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "As for the mystery of Miss Fawcett, I have come to the conclusion that the case could be better worked out at Huckleberry Heath than here at the school."
 "Dry up!"

"I am going to ask the Head's permish to go to Huckleberry Heath and take up the case."
 "You frabjous ass!"
 "Really, Merry——"

"Linton will look round in a tick!"
 "I cannot see him looking. You see——"
 "Yes, I see, but you don't. Shut up!"
 "But it's important! I was thinking of my study."
 "Blow your study!"

"Is there any danger that Miss Fawcett may go to it and dust it?" asked Skimpole anxiously.

Tom Merry chuckled.
 "I shouldn't wonder."
 "But—but, you know, my manuscript is there!" said Skimpole, in great distress. "All the notes for my book of Determinism, of which I have completed only three hundred and fifty-four chapters out of the nine hundred and eighty, and——"

"Let's hope there will be a clean sweep."
 "Really, Merry! Besides, there is the rough draft of my pamphlet, in which I prove clearly that man is the outcome of his heredity and environment, and that everything which is, is, exactly as it is, and in no other way—one of the great truths discovered in modern times."
 "Go hon!"

"If Miss Fawcett should happen to destroy these papers——"

"Quite likely."
 "Really——"
 "But if she does it really won't matter; you can't blame her, Skimmy. It will be due to her heredity and her environment."

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully.
 "Yes, but——"
 "What's the good of bothering! You can't resist the combined influence of heredity and environment!"
 "No, but——"

"You are talking, Skimpole!" suddenly broke in the voice of Mr. Linton.

"Ye-es, sir——"
 "Take fifty lines!"
 "Ye-es, sir; but——"
 "Take a hundred lines!"
 "Yes, sir, but——"
 "Skimpole——"

"If you please, sir——"
 "What is the matter with you, Skimpole?"
 "If you please, sir, I am afraid——"
 "Afraid!" ejaculated Mr. Linton, in astonishment.
 "Yes, sir. I am afraid somebody is dusting my study, sir!"

"Oh!"
 "I have a great number of valuable papers lying about there, sir. Would you mind if I left the class-room for a few minutes to lock my study door?"

Mr. Linton thought of Miss Priscilla, and suppressed a smile.

"You may go, Skimpole."
 "Thank you, sir!" And Skimpole went.
 He hurried up to the Shell passage, and, sure enough, the door of his study was open, and the sound of movements came from within.

Skimpole hurried to the open door in dismay. Miss Fawcett was there. She had a duster in her hand, and was dusting—her favourite occupation. Skimpole blinked into the study.

"Goodness gracious!" said Miss Fawcett aloud. "What a great mass of papers! Waste-paper, I suppose, bought to light the fire with—a boy could never have written so much! Yes, and it is not sensible writing upon it. Heredity, environment, Determinism—some nonsense! I suppose it had better be burned!"

Skimpole gave a gasp.
 "Really, Miss Fawcett——"

The good old lady looked round.
 "Ah, it is you, Skimpole!"
 "Yes, ma'am; this is my study!"
 "It is the untidiest study in the passage," said Miss Fawcett. "I was going to dust it for you. I have dusted some of the studies, and the dear boys were so pleased!"

"H'm!"
 "I am going to dust this—"
 "If you please—"
 "I shall soon make a change here—"
 "Madam—"
 "You will not know the study again."
 "But—"
 "It will not take me long to make a complete clearance."
 "You—you must not disturb my papers!" gasped Skimpole. "I cannot have them mixed, or I may forget which papers refer to Determinism and to Comtism. I have also some papers on the Darwinian theory. They are all much alike, you know, and would take a great deal of time to sort out."

"Did you write all this nonsense, my dear boy?"
 "It is not nonsense," explained Skimpole. "That is Determinism."

"What is the difference?"
 Skimpole scratched his head.
 "Well, I could hardly explain the difference off-hand, but—"

"Are the papers any good?"
 "Great Scott! I should say so! They are worth thousands of pounds!"

"Dear me!"
 "Pray do not touch them! Instead of you dusting the study, ma'am, I will explain to you some of the matters dealt with in these papers. Take the subject of Determinism. I will deal with it exhaustively from the very beginning."

"Good gracious!"
 "Take man—man in his natural state—"
 "My goodness!"
 "Consider him—mere man, without any of the adjuncts of civilisation—wild, untamed, uncivilised, unclothed—"
 "Bless my soul!"
 "Consider him—are you going, Miss Fawcett?"

"I—I think I will go to the House dame's room now."

"But—"

"I—I—I—"

Skimpole blinked after Miss Fawcett as she disappeared. The good lady was beginning to think that the genius of the Shell was a little wrong in his head.

"I really do not understand," murmured Skimpole. "It was very unpleasant to find her here, but we were really getting along nicely, after all, when she suddenly departed. I really do not understand. However, I will take the opportunity of locking the door on the outside."

And Skimpole did so, and went back to the class-room with the key in his pocket, feeling that his valuable papers were quite safe now, and that his three hundred and fifty-four chapters ran no risk of sharing the fate of the less important Alexandrian library.

CHAPTER 15.

Rebellion!

DR. HOLMES wore a worried look. He had taken the Sixth for the second lesson that afternoon, and had returned to the study with a weight on his mind.

He had half-feared to find Miss Priscilla there, but he found the room empty, and was relieved.

But his relief was short-lived.
 If Miss Fawcett was not there, she was somewhere else—and wherever she was there was pretty certain to be trouble.

Estimable old lady she certainly was, but her determination to make herself useful was turning the whole place to sixes and sevens.

She had commenced by dusting the Head's study. Her further little kindnesses among the Shell and the Fourth Form we have described. Since then she had put Kildare's study to rights, Kildare was an Irishman, and willing to take anything from the gentle sex.

But that was not all.
 She had looked in at Mr. Railton's room, and put his papers in order for him. Then, like Alexander seeking fresh worlds to conquer, she came over to the Head's house.

At St. Jim's the two Houses—School House and New House—were each governed by a Housemaster, the house-keeping being in the hands of a "dame," as they called the housekeeper.

The Head's house, however, was independent of either, and there Mrs. Holmes reigned supreme.

Miss Fawcett would gladly have given Mrs. Holmes the benefit of her advice and assistance, but the Head's wife gently but firmly declined.

Whatever Miss Fawcett might do in the two Houses, in the Head's own house she was a guest—merely that and nothing more.

Disappointed of this outlet for her usefulness, Miss Fawcett turned her whole attention to the School House. The New House would come later, if she stayed long enough at St. Jim's. The School House naturally came first, as it was in the School House that her dear Tommy resided.

And Miss Fawcett made herself very useful.
 She visited the kitchen, and exasperated the cook—she visited the House dame and exasperated her. She discovered traces of dust on all the wainscots, and exasperated all the maids.

She made suggestions for a better airing of the beds in the dormitory—she offered valuable recipes for the cooking. She suggested earlier rising and harder work for the maids as the only possible way of coping with the dust, and she was greatly surprised that the proposal was not received with enthusiasm.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Mimms and her staff kept the School House in very good order, but to the precise old lady from Huckleberry Heath the slightest departure from exactitude was an eye sorrow.

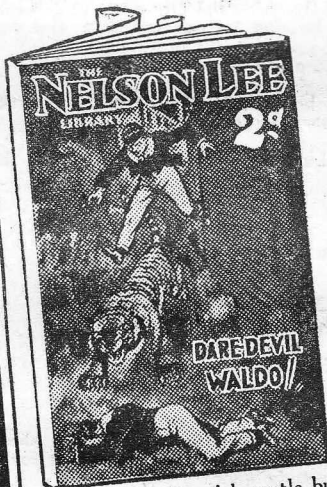
Miss Priscilla found many things capable of improvement, and in the fullness of her heart she explained them to everybody.

After all, why should not people be willing to improve themselves and their surroundings, especially with a kind friend at hand cheerfully to point out all the shortcomings?

Miss Fawcett did her duty. She was kind and useful, and before tea-time the whole of the School House was in a state of revolt.

To crown matters she had insisted upon giving the juniors instruction in the matter of keeping their studies clean, and had instituted a sort of domestic squad. She soon gave it up! By the time Tom Merry & Co. had had their first lesson, the study chosen for the purpose—Tom Merry and Blake had carefully pointed out that their own studies were already attended to—was like a shambles.

Gore, who had joined in with the best intentions in the world, was standing on top of the table dusting the ceiling



The Castle of Fear!

A sinister old Spanish castle built near St. Frank's—safeguarded by a massive wall, a moat, and lions, tigers, and dangerous traps! What does the owner fear? What secret does the castle conceal? That's what Nipper & Co., the cheery chums of St. Frank's, want to know. So they go on a tour of exploration at night, and meet with the nerve-tingling adventures of their lives! You simply mustn't miss this super new, extra-long school story, starring Stanley Waldo, the wonder boy of the school, and Rupert Waldo, the "Robin Hood" crook. Ask your newsagent to-day for

NELSON LEE
 On Sale Now 2d.

with a feather duster when Blake decided to tidy the table drawer. Unfortunately, the drawer stuck and refused to open. Blake tugged hard, and the table tilted! Gore gave a yell and tried to save himself, and at the same moment the drawer came out!

"Look out!" yelled Gore.

Whoosh!

Blake shot backwards and landed fair and square in a bucket of water!

"My hat! I'm soaked!" shrieked the unfortunate junior.

But that was not all. In leaping backwards to avoid Blake, Herries swept a bowl of goldfish from a pedestal and sent it crashing to the ground.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" gasped Miss Fawcett, standing in the doorway. "My dear little boys, are you hurt? I really think perhaps I had better tidy the place myself."

"Come in," said the Head wearily. Mrs. Mimms came in.

The fat, and usually good-natured face of the School House dame was dark and lowering, and there was a curious light in her eyes. She was evidently labouring under great and suppressed excitement.

Dr. Holmes looked at her.

"Mrs. Mimms."

"Yes, Dr. Holmes!" jerked out the good lady. "Yes!"

"What—"

"I have been House dame of the School House for nearly twenty years, sir."

"Dear me! So long?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I dare say you are right, Mrs. Mimms," said

WHO'S WHO AT ST. JIM'S!



GEORGE FIGGINS.

George Figgins is leader of the New House Juniors, a fact which remains undisputed—*for Figgy is a fighting man second only to Tom Merry among the juniors!* His friendly enemies, the School House juniors, say that Figgy's chief claim to notability is the length of his legs—but as Figgy says, a fellow with long legs can run, and certainly Figgy can. He is the champion athlete of the New House Juniors and plays for the School junior teams at all sports. A staunch friend in times of trouble, Figgins never bears malice against anyone. Actually Figgy is rather a shy fellow, a fact which causes much amusement to his friends when Ethel Cleveland is about the place—for Figgy has a soft spot for Ethel. Finally, let it be said that George Figgins is universally popular with all the decent fellows in both Houses and all Forms.

"I think perhaps you had, dear!" said Tom Merry tactfully.

And that was the end of the domestic squad!

But it was only one of the efforts of Miss Priscilla to better things at St. Jim's.

Murmurs of revolt had reached the Head's ears, and as he sat in his study now, he wondered uneasily what was transpiring.

He had sent off the letter to Scotland Yard at the earliest possible moment, and had expressed it in order to save time.

How long he would be in receiving an answer he did not know; but he had urged the detective authorities to let him have one at the earliest possible hour, though he had not explained the exact cause of the haste.

If Miss Priscilla received the assurance of the Criminal Investigation Department experts that the letter had never borne any writing at all, she would doubtless be convinced that the whole thing was a delusion, and would leave St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes would never have been discourteous or inhospitable, especially to such an estimable character as Miss Priscilla. But he was fervently longing to say good-bye to her.

He was thinking over the matter when there came a tap at the door.

Dr. Holmes, wondering what on earth the good lady was mentioning that circumstance for.

"I hope, sir, I have always given satisfaction?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Mimms!"

"There was a little difficulty, I know, sir, at the time when Mr. Kidd left, and Mr. Railton first became House-master, but that was some time back."

"Certainly!"

"Since then, I think the boys have been satisfied?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you have always seemed satisfied, sir?"

"Indeed, I have been satisfied, Mrs. Mimms. I—"

"And Mrs. Holmes, sir, has always been satisfied?"

"Quite so. But—"

"And at the meeting of the governors, sir," went on Mrs. Mimms, with rising excitement, "at the annual meeting of the governors, sir, Lord Eastwood himself was pleased to mention me, sir, by name, as a competent and painstaking House dame."

"Quite true, Mrs. Mimms," said the perplexed Head.

"You are really a most valuable person, Mrs. Mimms."

"Then, sir, I am sorry to be giving you notice, sir."

The Head jumped.

"What?"

"I am sending in my resignation, sir."

"Dear me!"

"And I should take it as a favour, sir, if you would replace me at the earliest possible moment, sir, so that I can leave the school."

"Bless my soul!"

"There is a lady now present in the House who might be quite willing to take my place till you are suited, however."

"Oh!"

"And that is all, Dr. Holmes. I am sorry to part with a kind and good gentleman like yourself, sir; and Mrs. Holmes has always been so kind. But to be told that the wainscot was dusty! It's more than flesh and blood could stand, sir!"

"Oh dear!"

Mrs. Mimms, evidently on the verge of hysterics, turned blindly towards the door.

Dr. Holmes rose from his chair.

"My dear Mrs. Mimms, pray do not go! Pray sit down! I am greatly distressed. What is the trouble?"

"If I was standing before the whole board of governors, sir, at this identical moment, I'd say, with my last breath, that it was not dusty, Dr. Holmes."

"But—"

"In a big House like the School House, and with so many boys, of course there will be dust."

"Why, of course there will, Mrs. Mimms!" said the Head soothingly.

"It was caused by Master Reilly bringing his bicycle into the House to mend a puncture, sir, so I believe."

"Dear me!"

"A mere speck, sir."

"Quite so. I—"

"And, in any case, sir, am I to be dictated to in my own House?"

"Certainly not!"

"I mean in the House under my charge—am I?"

"Oh, no!"

"I know Miss Fawcett means well!"

The Head drew a deep breath.

"Oh, Miss Fawcett!"

"Yes, sir. But I cannot—"

"My dear Mrs. Mimms—"

"Flesh and blood will not stand it. Not well aired, indeed! As if I should let the boys go into beds that were not well aired!"

"Certainly not!"

"I'm sorry to leave the school, sir," said Mrs. Mimms, shedding tears. "I am very fond of the place, and very fond of the dear boys. I think they like me, sir."

"I am certain they do, Mrs. Mimms."

"But flesh and blood cannot stand it, sir. Well aired, indeed!"

"My dear lady, you—you must not take it so much to heart. Miss Fawcett probably did not mean exactly that the wainscots were not well aired—"

"The beds, sir."

"I—I mean the beds. That the beds were dusty. You see—"

"Flesh and blood cannot—"

"You see, she has a kind heart—"

"Flesh and blood—"

"She only wishes to be useful."

"Flesh—"

"Will you not try and be patient for a few days, Mrs. Mimms, for—for my sake!" said the Head. "Miss Fawcett is a most kind lady, and my good friend. You see that I am in a—a somewhat difficult position."

The House dame softened.

"Well, sir, if you have every confidence in me—"

"Every confidence, Mrs. Mimms, I assure you. I should be most sorry to part with you—very sorry indeed!"

"You do not think that I allow the maids to leave the wainscots dusty?"

"Decidedly not!"

"You have no doubts about the beds being well aired, sir."

"Not in the least."

"Well," said Mrs. Mimms, relenting—"well—"

"Pray be patient for a day or two, Mrs. Mimms. Miss Fawcett only wishes to be kind."

Mrs. Mimms sniffed.

"I will try, sir."

"Thank you! You are a good soul, Mrs. Mimms."

And the House dame left the study. Dr. Holmes fanned himself with a sheet of foolscap.

"Dear me!" he murmured.

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CHAPTER 16.

Pleasant for the Head!

DR. HOLMES' brow was damp with perspiration. He had come successfully through the interview with Mrs. Mimms; but he had a feeling that this would not be the end.

And he was right.

Ten minutes later there was another tap at his door, and the door opened, and a very plump and red face appeared in view.

The Head gazed helplessly at the School House cook.

"If you please, Dr. Holmes—"

"Ye-es?"

"I wish to speak one word to you, sir—"

"Oh, go on, please! My goodness!"

"How long will it be, sir, before you could replace me?" asked the cook, in a trembling voice.

"Er—replace you?"

"Yes, sir."

"But—but I have no wish to—er—replace you."

"You must please take notice from me, sir."

"But—"

"Any cook," said the good lady, her voice still shaking—"any cook would have said that the apple dumplings were done to a turn."

"The—the apple dumplings?"

"They would not have caused indigestion to the most delicate—"

"Ahem!"

"To the most delicate stomach, sir. Which I've cooked apple dumplings for forty years, sir, and never had a complaint yet."

"My dear good soul—"

"I should like to leave at once, sir, if convenient to you."

"But—but why?"

"Perhaps Miss Fawcett will take my place, sir, and cook better apple dumplings."

"Bless my soul!"

"That is all, sir."

"But—but stay a moment—"

"Not if I am to be talked to in my own kitchen, sir. Why, Mrs. Mimms never talks to me in my own kitchen as I have been talked to this day!"

"But—"

"Perhaps Miss Fawcett knows a better cook, sir. In that case, she will be able to recommend her, and you will be satisfied."

"But—but I am satisfied now—more than satisfied."

"They were done to a turn, sir."

"I'm sure they were."

"Never had I turned out nicer apple dumplings, sir, since I've been cook in the School House, and that's seven years come Christmas."

"But—"

"So I shall be glad, sir, if you will replace me as soon as possible," said the cook firmly.

The Head wiped his forehead.

"My dear—er—Mrs. Towle, I—I assure you—I firmly believe that the apple dumplings were well aired—I—I mean, that they were not dusty. I hope you will not be hasty. Pray think about it!"

"Seven years come Christmas I've been cook in this 'Ouse, sir, and I've never been talked to so before."

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Holmes sank into his chair again in dismay. The cook, who was almost in hysterics, hurried from the study. Dr. Holmes gasped.

He was still gasping when there was another knock at the door, and a red-faced housemaid came in.

"If you please, sir—"

"Oh dear!"

"I wish to go, sir—this very day, sir!"

"Oh!"

"My box can be sent on afterwards, sir."

"Oh!"

"I've been in this House two years, sir, and Mrs. Holmes has always been satisfied with me, and now a person—"

"Oh!"

"Which I will not call her a lady, sir—"

"Come, come!"

"So I must go, sir. And I'm sorry to leave a good place, and sorry to leave Mrs. Holmes, which has always been kind to me. And I polished the silver as bright as it would come, and the person should try to polish silver herself, sir. And as I said, I won't call her a lady, sir, so my box can be sent after me," said the maid, somewhat incoherently.

"You must settle this with Mrs. Mimms," said the Head.

"Surely she is the proper person to speak to!"

"Which she's going herself, sir, and—"

"Upon my word!"

"And they're all going!"

"What!"

"Mary and Alice and Jane are coming to give you notice, sir."

"What, what!"

"And so is the gardener—"

"The gardener!"

"And the coachman!"

"Upon my word!"

"They're all coming, sir. And it's that person, which I won't call her a lady. And the maid fled."

Dr. Holmes stared after her for a moment or two, and then hastily left the study. He had no desire to run the gauntlet of a whole household giving notice in turn. He went quickly down the wide corridor that led to his private house, and as he departed he heard a sound of many footsteps in the passage where his study was. He had escaped only just in time!

CHAPTER 17. The Expedition!

TOM MERRY went to bed that night in a somewhat worried mood. He knew the havoc which Miss Priscilla was causing in the School House, and he knew that it would grow as long as she remained.

He had asked her for an explanation of her mysterious visit to the school, but it had not been accorded to him.

Miss Fawcett did not want to trouble her ward with her peril, real or supposed. She told him that he should know everything later, and with that Tom Merry had to be content.

He knew that the Head was expecting a letter, which would perhaps determine the length of Miss Fawcett's stay; but that was all he knew about the matter. And he was in an anxious state of mind.

Look Out For Thrills In Next Week's GEM! "MISS PRISCILLA'S BODYGUARD!" Ripping Long Complete Yarn of Tom Merry & Co.!

The day had been full of trouble of various sorts; but what was the morrow to be like?

On the morrow Miss Fawcett would be fairly upon the war-path, so to speak, and what had happened so far would be nothing to what would happen then.

And Tom Merry, fond as he was of his kind old governess, sincerely wished that she had remained at Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath. He looked forward to a continuation of her visit with great uneasiness.

He was fully prepared for more news in the morning; and he received it, too, when the Shell went down to breakfast.

Two of the maids had left, and the others were going that day. The gardener had given notice, and Taggles was also to depart the next day.

Most of the fellows took it as a joke. But Tom Merry could not help being serious about it. If Miss Fawcett went on making herself useful at this rate, the School House would soon be uninhabited, or else the boys would have to cook their own meals and make their own beds.

Miss Fawcett was down early the next morning, and she looked round the grounds at St. Jim's before breakfast, and exasperated two under-gardeners into resolving to give their notice that day.

Then she came in to breakfast in the Head's house. She found Dr. Holmes with a letter in his hand.

The Head was staring blankly at the letter, an expression of the greatest astonishment upon his face.

Miss Fawcett looked at him quickly.

"Upon my word!" said the Head.

"Is it a reply from Scotland Yard, Dr. Holmes?"

"Yes, Miss Fawcett."

"What do they say?"

"That there is really writing on the letter you gave me—invisible writing, which had faded out, but left traces which their expert declares to be unmistakable."

"Yes; I told you there was writing on it," said Miss Fawcett wonderingly.

The Head coughed. It came as a great surprise to him to learn that the whole matter was not a delusion on the part of Miss Priscilla; but he could hardly explain as much to the old lady from Huckleberry Heath.

"They've offered to send a competent officer down to Laurel Villa to investigate the matter," said Dr. Holmes. "You cannot do better than accept the offer, Miss Fawcett."

"I suppose so. In that case, I had better return home, to be there as soon as the officer arrives."

"Exactly."

"I shall be sorry to cut my visit short—"

"Not at all. I—I mean, you must consult your interests—your safety. I will wire to the detective department to send the officer."

"Thank you so much, Dr. Holmes. You are very good!"

"Not in the least."

"I should have been glad to stay a few more days, in order to make myself useful to you."

"I—I could not think of imposing upon your kindness in that way," said the Head hurriedly.

"You are too good!"

"Not at all. I will send Binks with the wire at once. You might like to send a wire to Laurel Villa announcing your return this—this morning."

"Oh, thank you so much! You are so thoughtful. But there is another matter, sir. I should not feel quite safe without my darling boy."

"Er—Merry?"

"Yes. You will give him leave to come with me?"

The Head would have given the whole of the Shell leave to go with Miss Fawcett, if that would have induced her to depart by the next train.

"Certainly, my dear madam."

"Yet, will my dearest Tommy be safe there?"

"I—I should think so, with a detective officer present."

"Yes; but perhaps you would give leave to a few of his friends to come with him," suggested Priscilla.

"Oh, certainly!"

"You are very kind."

"Oh, no! I will speak to Merry—"

"Perhaps you will allow me to take the news to him. The dear boy will be so delighted to spend a few days with me."

The Head nodded acquiescence. He had no doubt that Tom Merry would be delighted to spend a few days away from lessons, anyway.

And immediately after breakfast Miss Fawcett broke the news to Tom Merry.

"My dearest Tommy," she said, taking him by the hand in the passage, "I have news for you."

"Yes, dear?"

"Would you like to come home for a few days?"

"Ye-es."

"And bring some of your friends?"

Tom Merry's eyes danced.

"Yes, awfully."

"I have been threatened by a dreadful man, Tommy."

"The rotter!"

"There is a detective coming to Laurel Villa—"

"My hat!"

"But I should feel safer with you there, too, Tommy darling."

"Of course you would, dear."

"And the Head has given you permission to bring a few of your friends."

"Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry rushed off to tell his friends the news.

And when the news spread, it was surprising to see the number of friends Tom Merry had. Fellows he hardly knew by sight assumed the chummiest airs towards him, and everybody who could boast of the least acquaintance made the very most of it.

If Tom Merry had taken all the hints given him, he would have made up a party consisting of the whole of the Shell, half the Fourth Form, and a good proportion of the Fifth.

But as that was not possible, he had to be a little more careful in his selection. The Head had not fixed the number of the party, but it was necessary to keep within bounds.

Monty Lowther and Manners, of course, were coming. The chums of Study No. 6 had to come. That made seven. Skimpole explained that his services as an amateur-detective would be wanted, and Tom had not the heart to say him nay.

Then there was Harry Noble, the Australian. He explained that he could not be left out, after the way his study had been mucked up.

Then Figgins & Co. of the New House, hearing what was in the wind, came over. But Mr. Railton gave a hint that Tom's selection must be confined to boys of his own House; so Figgins & Co. could do nothing but see the party off.

And that morning they started with Miss Fawcett.

Kind and good as that dear lady was, Dr. Holmes and his wife bade good-bye to her with a great deal of pleasure.

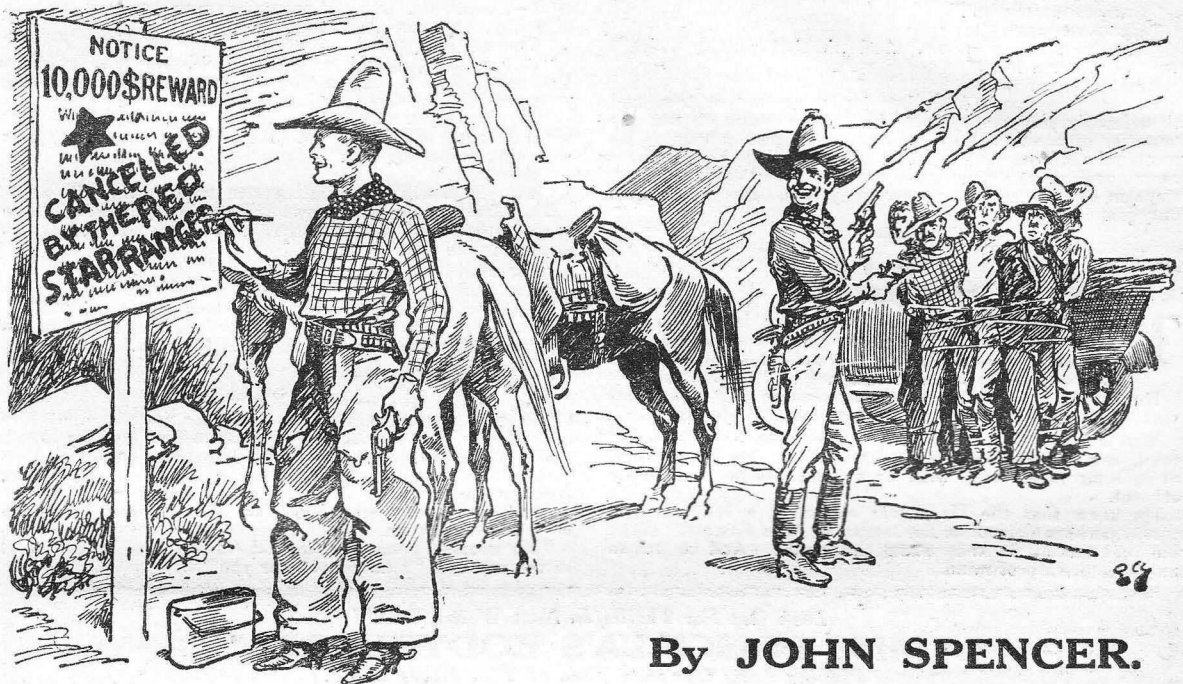
A brake bore the party to the station, and as the train rolled out, Figgins & Co. stood on the platform, waving their caps to Tom Merry & Co., as they started on their adventurous expedition to track down the dreadful man.

THE END.

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MORE THRILLING CHAPTERS OF OUR GREAT ADVENTURE STORY!

RED STAR RANGER!



By JOHN SPENCER.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED:

JERRY GARRISON, and FUSTY his pal, are wrongfully outlaid by JASPER PRIVETT, the rascally Mayor of Red Rock. They know that Privett is in league with bandits who have a stronghold in the mountains, and at length the two pals find it and blow it up while the bandits are away. SLADE, the leader of the bandits, returns to the scene of destruction and urges his men to kill Jerry and Fusty, who are still in sight.
(Now Read On.)

Red and Fusty Double Back!

A HAIL of bullets whistled wide of the Red Star Ranger, chipped the rocks above the trail, kicked up dust in the hoof-churned, rutted road behind. Up on the hill-top Slade, a broad-shouldered and powerfully built bandit, was urging on his band of robbers to kill. Fusty, the Ranger's pal, doubled over the neck of his pony, rode hard on Garrison's heels.

"Mind they don't drill you, Red," he shouted. "It'd only need one bullet to end your fell career. What say we hide?"

"We don't want to hide, Fusty," Garrison shouted as he swung himself erect in the saddle, and whipping off his sombrero waved it defiantly. "Those guys couldn't hit a cowshed from the other end of a farmyard. Go on! Shoot away, Slade!"

The bandits could not hear his words, but they were maddened by his defiant gestures, and the firing burst out with additional violence.

The Ranger ducked, turned Paintbox, his piebald pony, into a sheltered side track, and drew rein. His weather-tanned, good-natured, boyish face spread one big grin.

"What now, old-timer?" he asked.

Fusty, who had swung his dun pony, Jenny, behind a protecting wall of rock, stuck out his head cautiously.

"Dunno," he barked. "Jerry, we'll have the whole mob down on us in a brace of shakes, and if they get near enough we'll eat dust for shore."

"Oh yeah!" mocked the Red Star Ranger. "Waal, I've no appetite for dust just now. Besides, they'll never catch us!"

"Why won't they?" demanded Fusty, otherwise Joe McKraw, Ex-Deputy Sheriff of Red Rock City, and now an outlaw with a price on his head like the Red Star Ranger.

"If your head was filled with brains instead of putty, pard," said Jerry, with a grin, "you'd know. They left headquarters this morning at sun-up, rid into Mongoose and held up the State Bank, then kem back again. Their ponies is dead tired, while ours is as fresh as a dewy morning."

McKraw grinned, but the grin faded as quickly as it came.

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"Mebbe there's some more of 'em comin' up the trail," he said dismally, "and then what? Us shut in two sides. Fresh ponies won't help us then, will they?"

"No, but six-guns will, and he-man grit," retorted Jerry Garrison. "I never knew such a prize grouser as you, Fusty. Always hangin' crepe. There are no more bandits to come. They're all up there. And the laugh's with us. Didn't we burn up their quarters and blow up the drawer-bridge leadin' into their fort while they wuz down in Mongoose sticking up that bank?"

"Shore we did, Jerry."

"And for that reason haven't they a darn sight more reason to be afraid of us than we of them?"

"What you say sounds like sense, Red. But what are we gonna do? A hundred to one we git that bank robbery palmed off on us. We've no place to go to, nowhere to hide."

The Red Star Ranger pushed his broad-brimmed hat back on his curls and beamed at Joe McKraw.

"Just so. And do you know what we're going to do?"

"I'm listenin'."

"Fusty, we're turning on our tracks. I know a way up close to hyar. Found it when I first rode into Red Rock. It'll be night before we get far. But a moon's due. That bunch of bandits will camp up near that chasm back of Misfire Canyon. They want to eat and rest and feed their hosses."

"What we want to go back to the bandits for?" asked Fusty.

"Because, old-timer, they've got with them the gold bars and the gold coin they stole from the bank at Mongoose. Ordinarily they'd have taken it into the fort and hid there while the hunt was on. But as we razed the place and blew up their bridge, they can't. But where they are is one of the few safe places round here, an' so if they've any sense they'll hide there for a bit and bury the gold till it's safe to deal with it."

"But whadda we want to go back to them for?" repeated Fusty.

"So's we can find out where the gold is hid, pard. It's not a long ride back. And when we find out where the gold is hid then we'll ride into Mongoose, see the bank

manager, tell him about it, get them to send a posse of vigilants up here who'll route the bandits and recover the gold—and then—why then—” Jerry Garrison's face was one big expanding grin.

“What then?” asked Fusty grumpily.

“Then the folks down at Mongoose will be so pleased with you and your boy pal, Fusty, they'll see that the decree of outlawry issued against us by that crook mayor, Jasper Privett, of Red Rock, is repealed. They'll give us a nice, handsome reward, pard, and being made honest guys again, you and me will snoop around lookin' for honest work.”

“And we'll both live happy ever after,” piped McKraw. “If you believe things'll work out thataway yore just plumb crazy.”

“That's how they're going to work,” grinned the Ranger. “Kem on, Paint, old hoss. It's us for the steep trail. Fusty can do what he likes. We're going.”

Paintbox, straining every sinew and muscle, began to hoof it up a stony rise, and vanished between towering boulders. And, of course, Fusty, who cared more for Jerry Garrison, the Red Star Ranger, than anyone else on earth, followed without a moment's hesitation.

Later, as the purple shadows deepened to funereal black, he rode hard on the pinto pony's heels along a narrow and dangerous ledge of rock, and in the distance they picked up the flicker of a light. It was a flame from a camp-fire, and it marked the spot where the bandits had outspanned.

The Camp in the Mountains!

JERRY and Fusty approached the camp against the wind. They left their ponies tethered to the stump of a dead tree a mile from the place and did the rest of the journey on foot.

By this time the moon was up and the heavens spangled with twinkling stars. In the open it was almost as bright as day, but among the boulders and the rocks the shadows hung heavily. Warily the Red Star Ranger and Fusty kept to the shadows and advanced with such caution that they did not disturb even a stone.

The bandits had lit three fires and piled the brushwood high, the crackling sticks and the roaring flames killing every other near-by sound, barring the rough voices of the men.

Jerry Garrison and Fusty came cautiously along a rain channel between two rocky walls, and on their bellies pulled their heads slowly into view. They were up above the hollow chosen by Slade and his bank robbers for their hiding-place. The bandits' ponies were bunched in a far corner, tied together by their halters, and were browsing off such scant starved grass as they could find.

“I hope them cayuses were fed and watered down in Mongoose, Fusty,” Jerry said. “They'd starve here with their stables burnt down and the fodder gone. Which favours a quick flit of the bandits, maybe in the morning.”

In a sheltered spot some men were digging holes with the blades of their knives, and cursing at the inadequacy of their tools. One little group of bearded toughs was playing poker in the cheerful blaze of a fire. Two men were apportioning out scanty rations and eating a bit here and there on the side. Jerry looked round for Slade, and found him talking to two or three men in the moonlight away from the fire. On the ground, piled up, lay a heap of bags and sacks.

“What's in those sacks, old-timer?” whispered Jerry. “I give you two guesses.”

“Gold bars and gold coins,” answered Fusty, shoving his head up against Garrison's shoulder.

“Gold it is; which Slade and his bandits won't dare to carry down to Red Rock, if they're wise. Slade would have hidden it up in his secret stronghold, Fusty; but as we blew the place up he'll bury it here, and him and his boys will come back and get it at their leisure after the hue and cry has blown over.”

It was a shrewd guess of Garrison's, which was almost instantly confirmed, for Slade, strolling across to the fires, held up his hand and bawled to his men. They came shambling up, most of them looking tired, for they had been on the go since sun up.

“Boys,” cried the bandit, “we've decided to bury the gold up here! We'll all swear an oath not to touch it till we agree together to come up and fetch it after the hue-and-cry from Mongoose has blown over. In the morning we'll scatter. Some of you go home. The rest kem into Red Rock with me. But we won't ride all at once—understand? We don't want to set folks talkin'!”

“And what about the Red Star Ranger?” bawled one of the bandits.

“Yes, what about the Ranger and his pal who blew up our stronghold and stranded us out here?” shouted a bearded bank-robber.

“Nothing about them!” roared Slade. “Their numbers

are up. Don't forget a reward of ten thousand dollars is out against 'em, dead or alive. They'll get the credit for this bank robbery in Mongoose, too. They shore did blow up our fort, pards, but they've quit the mountains. Whichever way they go, they'll find a hangin' party of vigilants barrin' the road, an' they'll get their necks stretched for shore!”

He pointed towards the holes the men had been digging.

“Get a move on! Finish them holes. Then toss the bags in, cover up with soil, roll a rock or two on to the loose stuff, but not big ones, mind, and then come and eat and sleep. We've got to be movin' by the morning.”

“All very well to say eat, but we've got no grub!” snarled one of the men.

“Well, hitch yore belts a notch tighter!” jeered Slade. “You can't wear kid gloves while pluckin' nettles all the time!”

Jerry waited until he saw the first of the bags of gold bars tossed into the hole, and then he wriggled backwards, pulled Fusty by the ankle, to make sure he followed, and soon the two were hurrying back to their ponies.

“What now, Jerry?” asked Fusty, as he swung himself into the saddle.

“A quick ride into Mongoose, pard,” Jerry answered. “We'll nurse the hosses, in case of fire, and reach the bank at about the time the doors open. I'll tell the bank manager what we know, and he'll send a posse up here to fetch the gold. Then no more hidin' and skulkin' from the law for you an' me. We'll get our slates wiped clean.”

At the Bank in Mongoose!

THE main street of Mongoose was drenched in warm, golden sunshine when Fusty and Jerry Garrison rode their ponies to a hitching-rail outside a stores, and tied them up there.

Fusty lit a pipe, leant against the rail, and watched Jerry enter the bank, which was almost opposite. Then he turned his head and saw a bill stuck up on the window of the stores.

“10,000 Dollars Reward! Dead or Alive!”

the bill said. And then it went on to give full and clear descriptions of the two wanted outlaws—Jerry Garrison, known as the Red Star Ranger, and Fusty Joe McKraw, late deputy sheriff of Red Rock.

A man who was leaning on the rail from the stores side followed the direction of Fusty's gaze.

“Interested in that reward are yeh?” he said, spitting in the dust and looking Fusty over, then the ponies. “Well, if that ain't odd!”

“What ain't odd?” asked Fusty, sliding down his hand and unbuttoning a gun holster.

“Why, you're as bandy as that bill sez that Sheriff Fusty McKraw is!” answered the man. “And, bust me, if them ponies ain't exakkerly like the ponies mentioned in that bill!”

Fusty decided that it was no case for gun-play. Besides, he was on the side of law and order.

“An' you're exakkerly like President Roosevelt, but you're not him. Resemblances don't mean a thing. Look at the millions of gels who think they look like Greta Garbo?” Fusty said.

Meanwhile, Jerry had gained the bank. He swaggered in, his spurs jingling, and the apprehensive clerks, after yesterday's bank robbery, ducked behind the counter at sight of Jerry's holsters and guns.

“I wanta see the manager,” said Jerry.

“He's out,” said a voice from under the counter.

“Well, there's his office,” said Jerry. “I've got to take a chance.”

He stalked to the office door, opened it, and went inside. The manager of the bank was seated behind a flat table, and his eyes popped as he looked at Jerry. Quietly he pulled open a drawer.

“Who are you and what do you want?” asked the manager.

“There was a bank robbery here yesterday,” said Jerry. “And believe me, or believe me not, I heard it planned, and saw the robbers ride back with the gold. I know where they buried it, and I've come to tell you, so's you can get hold of the sheriff and a posse, and ride back and get it.”

“Oh, indeed!” The bank manager bared his teeth in a wolfish smile. “And whom may you be?”

“It don't matter at this stage,” said Jerry, setting his hands in his pockets, and unaware that his coat had flown open, displaying the star of blood-red enamel which Sheriff Sim Ross used to wear in Red Rock before Mayor Jasper Privett's gunmen bumped him off there. “All you're concerned in is getting back your gold.”

“And also the thief who stole it!” snapped the manager, as he pulled out a gun and covered Jerry with it. “Put

your hands up! I know you, Jerry Garrison! There's a reward of ten thousand dollars offered for your capture, dead or alive! You're the Red Star Ranger!"

Jerry stood motionless, his hands above his head, staring down incredulously at the grinning manager.

"Supposin' I admit it?" he said calmly. "It makes no difference. Listen! Yesterday, me and my pal Fusty blew up the bandits' stronghold up in the mountains. When they came back after robbing your bank we watched them bury the gold. And all we want to do is lead you to it."

"Lead us to where you buried it, Garrison," said the manager, with a grim smile. "That's what you mean. Do you expect me to believe your cock-and-bull story? I don't know why you've suddenly got cold feet, but I do know that we're going to hold you and drill you with the third degree until you tell us where the gold is hidden. And after that you'll hang."

The manager slid his left hand towards a touch-button, intending to summons his underlings. The gun covered Jerry unwaveringly.

"And this is all I get for being honest!" said Jerry indignantly. "Here are Fusty and me, standing by the law and fighting the crooks, and all we're offered is a neck stretch!"

He pretended to be terribly upset, but he was watching for the right moment to spring. Jerry switched his eyes to the door leading into the main room of the bank, and he smiled as if he had just recognised a friend.

"Why, if it isn't old Tumbledick!" he said, with a hearty laugh.

Just for a fractional part of a second the manager's gun wavered. Jerry asked for no more time than that.

Swoop! He tore the gun from the manager's hand, thumped him over the head with the butt of it, slid the weapon into his pocket, picked up a wastepaper-basket, and jammed it down on the manager's shoulders, the bits of torn paper fluttering like snow; then kicking the manager's chair from under him, so that the treacherous Mongoosean fell with a bump, he bounded to the door.

Into the bank he leapt, his own six-guns gleaming. Startled clerks ducked, or raised their hands.

"I'm no bank robber, boys," laughed Jerry, as he sped for the street. "S'long! Go and fetch yore manager some brandy! He needs it!"

Into the street leapt Jerry, to find Fusty seated in the saddle and holding Paintbox, released from the rail, ready.

The loafer who had twitted Fusty was striding along the street, followed by a dozen men with big hats, and on the breast of one of them flashed a silver star.

Jerry Garrison leapt into the saddle, turned Paintbox in the opposite direction, and galloped away like the wind.

A shot rang out behind, and a bullet crashed through a window-pane.

"There 'e goes! Cotch 'im!" bellowed the loafer, as he broke into a run. "He's the Red Star Ranger! I want that 10,000 dollars reward!"

"You would rid' in to Mongoose," said Fusty reproachfully, as he raced the dun pony to Jerry's side.

"Yes; an' now we're ridin' out of it," growled Jerry. "Make Jenny gallop, Fusty. The sheriff's comin'!"

And soon, indeed, the sheriff was coming with five-and-twenty armed vigilants, and the angry bank manager galloping at his pony's heels.

The Dash for the Mountains!

JERRY GARRISON had chosen Paintbox out of thousands of ponies he had ridden at different times, because of the horse's speed and pluck and stamina. He had never known a pony who could beat it.

Similarly Fusty had selected the dun pony Jenny for the same qualities, arguing that a sheriff had the right to be finely mounted if his business was to run down thieves.

They got away to a good start, and soon they were out of the town and galloping along the trail back to the foothills and the mountains, with the sheriff's posse toiling stolidly behind.

Jerry was a grand rider, and knew how to spare his horse. Fusty also was a pastmaster of the same art. Mile after mile they covered that sunny morning, and not a yard on them did the posse gain.

"The only trouble is, Fusty," said Jerry, as they swept on side by side, "the ponies have already had a big ride. What I aim to do is lead those guys right on to the bandits' camp. Slade said he would be leaving early in the morning, but I doubt me if he'd do it. And if him and his gang hear the sheriff comin'—my, how they'll panic!"

Fusty eyed wistfully the bush-clad mesa ahead of them above the lower hills.

"If only we could get thar before the sheriff nabs us, Red!" he groaned.

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"We'll get there, you cheery pessimist," said the Red Star Ranger, casting a glance behind. "Why, all they've gained is a furlong—if any."

Fusty brightened at the news.

"In that case," he said, "I know a short cut which will lead us to the trail down which Slade and his bandits will have to ride if they aim at making Red Rock," he said.

"You do? Good for you, punk!" laughed Garrison, who enjoyed nothing so much as a keen, hard ride. "My! If only we could lead the Mongoose sheriff and his posse there, and Slade and his guys saw 'em coming. My—my! Wouldn't Slade run?"

Jerry had not miscalculated; he and Fusty gained the mesa with a clear lead, which they soon widened, for there the level going was good.

Toiling up after the two the Sheriff of Mongoose saw the fresh, clean-cut hoofmarks in the yielding soil and followed.

"Take it easy, boys!" he called out to his men. "They're up on some smart cattle; but they're bound to kem back to us afore long. They've had a double ride."

Jerry and Fusty galloped steadily on, keeping to cover, and just when they were debating the point as to whether they should take the first narrow track which led up to the mountains, and hide above Misfire Canyon, or keep to the lower trails, the scenery before them opened out, and they caught sight of a body of horsemen riding in straggling order, heading for Red Rock.

"Hurrah!" shouted Jerry, whipping off his Stetson, and whirling it round his head. "There they go! Slade and his bandits! An' they started late, Fusty. Wonder if the Mongoose Sheriff will arrive in time to spot 'em?"

"Of course not," growled Fusty, who was a wee bit saddle-sore, and therefore grumpy. "Nothing's going right this trip. We're through with the good breaks."

But Jerry, reining in his pony, listened with bent head, and, hearing the dull beat of galloping hoofs coming from afar, turned Paintbox about, and swung up a steep trail.

"This way, Fusty!"

Joe McKraw obeyed, the Red Star Ranger drawing his pony aside to allow Jenny and her rider to pass. Then Jerry dropped from the saddle, ran back, and wiped out the shoe-prints where they were visible from the main trail. That done he climbed again, and when the posse rode into view he and Fusty and the two ponies were safely concealed among the rocks above.

A minute or so and the sheriff and his posse rode by. They were moving at a smart gallop, and in a bunch. Slade, on ahead, with his bandits, was going easy. They had not yet reached the forked roads where they were to split.

And no sooner did the sheriff catch sight of them than he let out a lusty yell.

"Look!" he roared, so loudly that Fusty and Jerry heard every word. "There they go—the whole bunch of 'em! Boys, we're got the Garrison gang! They're making for Red Rock. Let her go! This time, I reckon, we'll get the Red Star Ranger!"

They thundered on at racing pace, loose reined, bending in the saddle, and one of them, by way of warning to the bank robbers in front, shot off a gun.

The sharp crack caused the riders on ahead to look round. As he saw the mob of galloping vigilants, Slade's pasty face was a study.

"So help me Jonah!" he shouted. "If it ain't a gang of clean-ups from Mongoose! Scram, boys—scram! We don't want to answer no questions. We've hid the gold safe. We can kem back an' get it any time. Meanwhiles, scram!"

Suited the action to the word, he was the first to spur his horse, and that indignant beast, who missed his proper feeding, slammed into a crazy gallop, which soon took it to the head of the field.

So they thundered down the soft trail to the road below, and there, scattering, they fled in all directions, the sheriff's posse disintegrating into small parties that followed up behind.

When it was safe to show himself, Jerry Garrison rose from his hiding-place and waved his hat after the departing horsemen, now mere dots down the trail.

"S'long!" he shouted. "Dunno what you think you're going to catch, sheriff, but it won't be the Red Star Ranger."

Mongoose Gets a Surprise!

SLOWLY Jerry and Fusty made their way up to the hidden camp where Slade and his gang of bank robbers had slept last night. They took care not to show themselves, and scouted round to make sure that the place was abandoned before they rode their ponies, at a walk, into it.

Nobody was there.



A hail of bullets whistled wide of the Red Star Ranger and kicked up dust in the hoof-churned road behind. Up on the hill-top Slade was urging his robber band to kill. Jerry Garrison swung himself erect in the saddle and whipping off his sombrero waved it defiantly.

They let the ponies out to grass, if the scanty cropping could be called grass, and removed the boulders from the treasure holes.

"Wish we had them loose ponies we saw scrambling around as we kem hyar, Jerry," gloomed Joe McKraw, as he wiped the sweat from his brow. "We need 'em to carry these sacks back to Mongoose, if yo're bent on doing what you say."

Jerry Garrison grinned. The ponies were some of the six or more that he and Fusty had let loose from the stables in the bandits' stronghold yesterday. They had tried to capture them as they approached the camp, but the horses had shied and cantered away. Still, they would be hungry, Jerry knew, and there was a chance yet.

"Didn't you see them ponies slew round and watch us kem in here, old-timer?" he cried.

"Well, shouldn't be surprised if they show up. It's past feedin' time. And ponies are friendly creatures, once they're broken in."

They went on with their labour, laying bare the sacks, until they had lifted, and with difficulty, for they were mighty heavy, carried the bags containing the gold bricks and the loose money, out into the open.

The work done, Jerry and Fusty squatted on the ground without a fire as the night shut down, and with the aid of a pocket lamp, opened some canned food from their store, and ate.

Suddenly Paintbox whinnied loudly. Then Jenny joined in the chorus. The cries were answered by similar cries, and into the clearing stalked four or five ghostly shapes. Jerry pointed at them with a laugh.

"The ponies, Fusty. Here they are, large as life, an' friendly. More'n we want."

They rose and walked towards the horses, which did not move or buck. Each wore a headstall, and surrendered without fuss. No doubt they were longing for their stables and clean straw and fresh clean hay up in the fort not so far away. Perhaps they had already visited the spot where the drawbridge had spanned the deep gorge, and wondered; for Jerry Garrison had blown that drawbridge up with dynamite yesterday.

"What we've got to do is pack the gold bags on the cayuses, Fusty," said Jerry, "and when our ponies are rested, we'll ride down the hills into Mongoose and leave the stuff at the bank."

Fusty's jaw dropped, and the wedge of tinned tongue, impaled upon a knife-blade, which he was conveying to his gaping mouth, remained poised in midair.

"What?" he yelped. "You gonna take that risk again?" "We're in no hurry, Fusty," said the Red Star Ranger. "We'll take our time. The ponies are tired. Besides, I aim to reach the town when every good citizen is tucked up in bed."

"Yeah!" jeered Joe McKraw. "An' why?"

"Because they think we robbed the bank. That's why we've got to take the gold back, old sport. We're outlaws; an' I don't mind being stretched for something we done; but I draw the line at bein' lynched for something we never done. Do I make myself clear, Mr. Deputy Sheriff?"

"As clear as you mostly do," growled Fusty, swallowing the wedge of tongue in one gulp.

"Then play shut-eye for a spell," said the Red Star Ranger. "The spare ponies won't bolt. I've tied their heads together. Gee! Wish them clouds would roll by and give the moon a chance."

It was now pitch dark in the clearing, but presently, out came the moon, to flood the place with silver light, and by its aid they loaded up the spare ponies, managing, after some trouble, with the pieces of spare rope and their lariats, which were called into action.

The bags were very heavy, and the sharp edges of the gold bars, or bricks, threatened to burst the sacking. They packed the stolen gold upon two ponies, and set the others free to roam the mountains at will.

Then mounting Paintbox and Jenny, they began their third ride within twenty-four hours.

They moved on slowly, Jerry almost wishing that they had ridden two of the stray ponies, who were fresh; but that would have meant leaving their own precious horses behind, and the risk was too great to chance.

"Never mind, Paint," said Jerry, giving his pony's neck a pat, "you shall have a mighty long rest and plenty of eats when we get back to the hills."

They kept to the edge of the trail, creeping in the shadows, and stopping every now and then to listen. But no echo of hoof beats alarmed them, and in the small hours of the morning they passed along the deserted road to Mongoose, cheered by the thought that the town would be as silent as the dead when they arrived.

They had the road to themselves. No automobiles thundered along it, for it was too late for them; mechanical traffic between Mongoose and Red Rock had ceased hours ago.

They halted at a pool to let the ponies drink, and a while later they strayed off the road to let them crop the sweet,
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fresh, dew-laden grass. Then on they went again, arriving in the outskirts of the town just as a church clock boomed out the hour of three.

"Nice time, Fusty," said Jerry, in a deep, low whisper. "Guess the birds in this berg'll stir in search of early worms soon's day breaks. Thank goodness it's easier to unload than load. Them gold bricks sure is heavy."

Fusty answered with a grunt; talking, he considered, was dangerous. But the open windows of the upper rooms were dark, and the shops had blinds drawn down over the windows.

At a walk they came to the bank, and there they dismounted to untie the bags of bullion and gold bricks and deposit them in a pile underneath the bank windows. They eased the bags to the ground, making little noise. Then Jerry cut the sealed tape which closed the mouth of a big sack containing gold bricks, and drew out of the bag quite a few of these. He laid them on the sidewalk ready to his hand, a row of six, each bar weighing five-and-twenty pounds.

"Say, are you gonna steal them bars, Red?" Fusty demanded, with lowered brows.

"No, Fusty. I'm going to use them to rouse this old town as soon as I've left a message for the sheriff," answered Jerry.

"And how you gonna do that?"

"You'll see," answered Jerry, as he took out a sheet of paper and pinned it with some drawing-tacks to the stout mahogany door of the State Bank. It was a large sheet of paper, and Jerry, with a thick pencil, wrote upon it this:

"Have brought back the gold bars and the bullion. Slade and the bandit gang I drove out of the mountains took it. Now, unless the sheriff got 'em, they're safe in Red Rock. Fusty Joe McKraw and I never took the stuff. If the dumb egg of a manager had only listened, I'd have led the sheriff and his posse to where they could have got not only the gold, but the guys who stole it. Put this down to my credit. And let me add that, whatever I may be, that bow-legged old-timer, Fusty, ain't got the guts to be a thief. THE RED STAR RANGER."

Beneath the writing in the right-hand corner of the sheet of paper, Jerry stuck on a red paper star, the sign he always loved to use.

Then, as an afterthought, he added:

"P.S.—Sorry I had to break the windows."

The message completed, Jerry picked up one of the bricks and made a sign to Fusty.

"Hop into the saddle, bent-legs," he ordered, "and get ready to ride!"

"What you gonna do?" demanded Fusty, in alarm.

"You can't shy—"

"I can!" answered Jerry.

Smash!

The twenty-five pound gold brick hit the plate glass plumb centre, and shattered it to smithereens.

Crash!

Jerry hurled the second brick through the fanlight. The third he heaved through another window. With the fourth he knocked out some stray bits. Five and six he hurled inside the bank itself, and grinned as he heard smashes there.

A window squeaked up. Lights flashed in the opposite houses. A door opened, and a man came out.

In a trice Jerry was in the saddle and away.

"Ride, old boss!" he yelled. "Ride!"

And five or six minutes later, when a big crowd gathered outside the bank, the sheriff came, roused from his sleep and testy, with his star showing on the vest he had slipped on over his nightshirt, the ends of which were stuffed into the tops of sagging trousers.

The sheriff read the message, looked at the heap of gold, opened a sack and made sure. And then, pushing knotted fingers through his sparse, coarse hair, he said, with an incredulous grunt:

"The gold all back. And the Red Star Ranger sez he done it—well, I'll be cattle drove and gold durned!"

Outside the State Bank in Mongoose a huge crowd swarmed.

A man named Lane—Squint Lane—one of the sheriff's men, seeing the crowd, edged away. With measured strides he made for the sheriff's office, and flung the door wide open.

"Hallo, sheriff!" he boomed. "There's a mighty big crowd down at the bank. They say—"

He stopped, for the office was empty. A peep into the room beyond showed him that was empty, too. He turned the key in the lock, slumped into the chair at the desk, and reached for the telephone. He asked for a Red Rock number and waited. The door leading out into the sunlit street stood wide open. He had left it that way so that he might see anyone heading for the office.

Soon an answer came.

"That Red Rock 1001!" he grated, speaking in low, measured tones, and using his hand to shield his mouth. "I want Jasper Privett, the mayor. No, nobody else won't do. Say it's Squint Lane—urgent. I've gotta get the mayor."

Lane tapped his foot impatiently while he waited. Soon an angry voice shook the diaphragm of the receiver.

"That you Lane? I'm Privett. What's 'eatin' you? Didn't I say you wasn't to call me? Waal, what then? Don't what I say go?"

"Not always, Jasper. Listen! This is important! You know Slade and the gang robbed the State Bank here in Mongoose?"

"Yes. An' they buried the stuff in the mountains. We're movin' up there to get it soon."

Lane twisted a smile.

"Get this," he said. "There ain't no gold buried up in the mountains. The Red Star Ranger and Fusty Joe McKraw dug it up, an' rid with it into Mongoose in the small hours. The sheriff found it stacked outside the bank, right down to the last twenty-dollar gold piece."

Jasper Privett's language at the other end of the wire in Red Rock, over thirty miles away, nearly burnt the cable.

(Jasper Privett will redouble his efforts to "get" Jerry and Fusty now—but the pals have other plans! Look out for thrills next week!)

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