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## ST. JIMS' CURATE.

LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF TOM MERRY.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD



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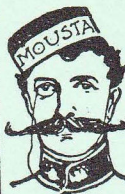
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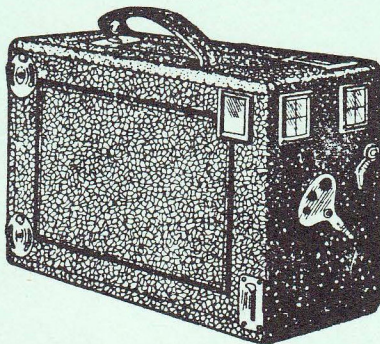
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# ST JIM'S' CURATE



A New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### CHAPTER 1.

#### Tom Merry is not Pleased,

"A LETTER for Master Merry!" Buttons grinned as he put his head in at the study door.

Tom Merry looked up from De Bello Gallico. Buttons came in with the letter, still grinning. Tom knew the reason as he caught sight of the handwriting. The letter was from his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. That was why Buttons was grinning. He knew the writing, and so did nearly everybody else in St. Jim's; at least, in the School House. For Miss Priscilla could never feel quite satisfied that Tom was all right when her eye was not upon

him, and at times she simply bombarded him with letters. And Tom, like a dutiful fellow, sometimes read them.

Tom fixed a severe glance upon the grinning youth in buttons.

"Give me the letter. Next time you bring me a letter, don't forget the silver salver—do you hear? And don't turn on that grin till you're outside the study. It worries me. Now get out, quick, or I'll read the Gallic War to you."

"He, he, he, Master Merry!"

And Tom kept his word.

"Itaque vastatis omnibus eorum agris, vicis—"

But Buttons fled.

"Another letter from the old lady?" yawned Mauvers. "You had one yesterday."

Grand, New, Long, Complete SCHOOL and DETECTIVE Tale NEXT THURSDAY.

"And one the day before," growled Tom.

"I say, Miss Fawcett must be awfully rich; she spends a lot in postage-stamps," said Manners sympathetically. "Couldn't you suggest to her, in a gentle way, that she should write only once a month, and enclose the rest of the stamps in the letter? Then you could cash them at the post-office, and—"

Tom Merry grinned.

"I wouldn't hurt the dear old soul's feelings for worlds," he said; "but really, she is a champion letter-writer, and no mistake."

"Well, read the letter," said Manners. "There may be a lot of valuable advice in it about keeping your chest protected and your tootsies dry, and—"

"Oh, dry up! I suppose I had better read it."

And Tom Merry opened the letter. He glanced at the contents, and a look of dismay spread over his usually cheerful countenance. Manners, who was watching him, chuckled.

"Is the dear old soul going to pay you a visit, Tom? It's about time; it's nearly a week since she was here last."

"Worse than that," groaned Tom. "Oh, my word!"

"What's the row?"

"My hat!"

"Tell me what the trouble is, and receive my gentle sympathy," said Manners. "Lay your pretty golden head on my left shoulder, and—"

"Oh, don't rot, old chap!" said Merry. "This is serious. It's too frightful for anything. I know it will turn my hair grey. Oh crumbs and Christopher Columbus!"

"My dear kid, why don't you confide in me?"

"Read the letter yourself," groaned Tom.

And he pitched the letter across to Manners. His chum caught it and commenced to read it aloud, punctuating it with grins and chuckles without limit.

"My dearest Tommy,—"

"It is so long since I have seen you or heard from you—"

"She saw me last week," growled Tom.

"That I am feeling quite anxious about you. I think you told me in your last letter that one of your friends is away from St. James's College at present, a nice boy named Montague Lowther. I'll tell Lowther that when he comes back," said Manners, looking up.

"Oh, get on!" said Tom.

"I am afraid you will be feeling rather lonely, though, of course, you have the society of that charming lad, Manners, who was so attentive to me the last time I visited you, and explained to me all about the strange customs that obtain in the other house at your school."

Manners went off into a roar.

"You've been rotting, you bounder?" exclaimed Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha! I only told her that Figgins & Co. go to bed with their boots on, and eat with their knives, and that it's a deadly strict rule in the New House never to wash one's neck in the morning."

"Oh, get on with the letter!" said Tom, grinning in spite of himself. "Poor old Figgins! A nice character to give him!"

"Let me see; where was I? Oh, here I am. 'I am so glad you have a nice friend like this dear boy, Manners, whom, I am sure, is a good and truthful boy, and never likely to lead you into any mischief. I like him very much.'"

"She doesn't know you!" growled Tom.

"Tom, my boy, you have a governess who's a lady of good judgment," said Manners.

"I like him very much. But with your other friend away, I have no doubt you are somewhat lonely, and so I have asked my dear friend, the Rev. Mr. Dodds—"

"A giddy curate!" groaned Tom.

"Mr. Dodds," went on Manners, "'is to see you as much as he can while he is staying in Rylcombe. You have never met Mr. Dodds, but I am sure you will be charmed with him, and I have talked to him so much about you that he says he feels as if he quite knows you already.'"

"She's always talking about me to somebody," said Tom ruefully; "I don't like curates as a rule, but I pity Dodds if she got him at her mercy and started on that topic when he couldn't get away."

"Mr. Dodds," Manners went on reading, "'is an old acquaintance of your headmaster. I want you to see him as much as possible while he is in the neighbourhood, Tommy; you will find his conversation so improving.'"

"Don't miss a chance like that, Tommy," Manners broke off. "This is a chance that comes only once in a dog's age, and—"

"Oh, get on!"

"Mr. Dodds will arrive in Rylcombe by the afternoon train to-morrow. I thought you could not spend your half-holiday better than by going to the station and meeting the dear young man. Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the match with Greyfriars Juniors coming off next week," said Tom; "and we wanted to stick in as much practice at cricket as we possibly could. I shall have to cut the practice to-morrow afternoon."

"Never mind, Tom; I'll cut it too, and come with you," said Manners. "We're in fine form, you know, and there's every day this week we can put in some time at the nets. I believe we shall be able to handle Greyfriars Juniors all right. Our first eleven beat their first team, you know."

"You're a good chap, Manners. I don't think you need read any more—that's all the news, and—"

"Wait a tick," said Manners, glancing at the letter again. "Here's something important."

"What is it?"

"Mind you do not allow the heat of the summer to tempt you to be careless in the matter of underclothing. Your vests and—"

"Here, shut up!" said Tom, turning red. "Give me my letter, you beast!"

Manners tossed it back to him.

"Tommy, old dear, you're lucky to have a dear old soul like that to look after you. You might go about being awfully careless in the matter of—"

"Shut up!"

"In the matter of underclothing, and—"

"Chuck it!"

"And your vests and—"

Tom hurled the Gallic War at Manners's head, and Manners gave a yell as it smote him. Tom picked up a Latin dictionary to follow it, but it wasn't needed.

"Pax!" exclaimed Manners. "Pax, old kid! But I say, Tom, what the dear old lady says is quite true; things have been a bit dull since Lowther's governor took him off for a holiday. We want to dig up some fun somewhere, and I think the giddy curate will give us a chance."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom meditatively. "I haven't seen him, but I know exactly what he's like, of course. A little skinny chap—"

"With sandy hair," said Manners.

"Yes, and a big pair of spectacles."

"And a lisp."

"And a couple of tracts in his coat-tail pocket, all ready to spring on you when you're not on your guard."

"And a face like a churchyard."

"And he'll think all boys are troublesome animals. He'll be down on cricket."

"Like a load of bricks."

"He won't know the difference between fives and football."

"And he won't play either."

"He'll preach."

"He'll jaw."

"And he'll get ragged," said Tom darkly.

"He will, rather."

"If he bothers us we'll slay him by inches."

"We'll bring down his ginger whiskers with sorrow to the crematorium."

Tom looked a little more cheerful.

"After all, if we guy him, and make his life not worth living, he'll let us alone," Tom remarked. "Miss Priscilla says he is a friend of the Head. I hope that won't mean that he's going to put up at St. Jim's. If he does we must make the school too hot to hold him."

"Yes, rather! We must let some of the other chaps into this. There's Blake."

A tap came at the door, and the boy Manners was speaking of walked into the study. Jack Blake, the chief of Study No. 6, the cock of the Fourth Form, was very often on hostile terms with the heroes of the Shell; but just now his looks showed that his visit was a pacific one.

"Hallo, Blake!" said Tom Merry. "We were just speaking of you."

"Thanks!" said Blake. "You honour yourself. I wanted to know if you chaps are coming down to the cricket while there's still some light. You know we've got to meet the Greyfriars Juniors next week, and we want all the practice we can."

"That's so. We're coming. But I say, are you game for a little joke?"

"Rather!" said Blake. "Is it up against Figgins & Co.?"

And Blake looked eager at once. The ancient rivalry between the two houses at St. Jim's burned as keenly as ever in the breasts of the juniors, and the chief of Study No. 6 was always ready for the fray. Since Tom Merry had come to St. Jim's, the honour of leading the School House juniors against the New House had been rather divided, Merry and Blake being rivals for the post, but very cordial and friendly rivals usually.

When it was a question of tackling outsiders, they were always ready to stand loyally shoulder to shoulder as good comrades.

"No!" said Tom, shaking his head. "Read that letter—the first part of it, rather."

Blake did so, and grinned.

"I wish you joy of your new guide, philosopher, and friend," he remarked. "If he belonged to me, I'd give him away with a pound of tea."

"That's what I'd like to do. We're thinking of guying him. Will you take a hand? Between us we ought to be able to give him beans. I want you all to come to the station with me."

"Rather!" laughed Blake. "We'll all go to the station, and help you greet the dear man."

"Good!" said Tom. "We'll make it a party, and meet the bouncer with mouth-organs and tin whistles, and give him a guard of honour. We'll get Figgins & Co. to join in."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a go!"

"That will make him wish he had stayed at home in Huckleberry Heath!" grinned Manners. "It's a ripping wheeze. Now let's get down to the cricket."

And as they went down to Littleaside, the allies broke into frequent chuckles. They found Figgins & Co. at the nets, and the New House juniors joined in the plan for greeting Mr. Dodds with great heartiness.

"We're going to stop ragging each other till after the Greyfriars match," said the great Figgins. "But we must dig up some fun somewhere. I think this giddy curate has really come like corn in Egypt. He'll give us the fun we want."

And a party of nine was formed to meet Mr. Dodds at the Rylcombe station on the following afternoon.

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Meeting.

**T**OM MERRY thumped on the door of Study No. 6 in the School House. It was Wednesday afternoon, and Tom was ready for the expedition to Rylcombe station to meet the Rev. Mr. Dodds.

Tom and Manners presented themselves at Study No. 6, each wearing a tall silk hat, a high collar, and lavender kid gloves. Tom thumped at the door, and it flew open.

"Are you ready, kids?"

"Nearly," said Jack Blake. He looked at Merry and Manners, and grinned. "You look ripping! Daddies will be impressed."

Blake was clad like the two, and so were Herries and Digby, each in his best. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, was in his element. Blake had told him that there was to be a full dress parade for the polite purpose of "rotting" Mr. Dodds, and D'Arcy, whose chief delight lay in wearing gorgeous raiment, excelled himself.

The glossiness of his silk hat, the shininess of his patent leather shoes, the spotlessness of his lavender gloves, were only equalled by the height of his collar, the polish of his eye-glass, and the crease in his trousers. And his waistcoat was more startling in its pattern than any he had previously worn at St. Jim's, which is saying a good deal.

Tom Merry looked at Arthur Augustus and grinned.

"Bravo, Gussy," he exclaimed. "Are you going out like that?"

D'Arcy gave him a languid glance.

"Yaas, deah boy. Isn't it all wight?"

"All right? I should say so! It's ripping!"

"Yaas!" said D'Arcy, surveying himself in the glass with a great deal of satisfaction. "I weally think, Mewwy, that it is weally wipping."

"Ha, ha! When Mr. Dodds sees you he'll wish he had stayed in Huckleberry Heath. Come along, kids, we've got to call on Figgins & Co."

"We're ready," said Blake. "Got the music?"

"Yes; I've got a tin whistle."

"I've got a pair of castanets," said Manners, clacking them. "I can make a dickens of a row with them, too."

"Good! We have a mouth-organ each, except D'Arcy, who is too aristocratic to take a hand in anything so vulgar."

"Oh, weally, Blake," said D'Arcy.

"But he looks funny enough," said Blake; "so he'll do. Let's go across and fetch those New House bouncers out."

And the party issued from the School House. It was a fine, sunny afternoon, and most of the boys of St. Jim's were going down to the cricket-ground, or were already there. The appearance of six juniors gorgeously clad was quite sufficient to attract general attention, and a hundred eyes were soon upon them.

"Hallo, Blake," exclaimed Percy Mellish, "are you taking that little lot off to Colney Hatch?"

It was a rude question, and some of the little lot turned red. Blake waved his hand haughtily.

"Begone, catiff. Pollute not the air with your presence. Avaunt! Scat! Bunk!"

Percy Mellish started back in sheer astonishment. The six marched on. A curious crowd followed them across to the New House.

"It's a joke on Figgins," said Percy Mellish. "I don't see where the joke comes in, though."

"Nor do I!" exclaimed Walsh. "Let's see it out."

"I say, the chaps are following us," said Herries.

"Let 'em," said Blake. "They're admiring D'Arcy's walk, that's all."

"Oh, weally, Blake!"

"Yes; They are, Aubrey. Why do they call you a Gibson Girl?"

"Blake, I'm sure you do not weally mean to be impertinent, but weally——"

"D'Arcy, I am sure you do not mean to be an ass, but weally——"

"Here we are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they arrived at the steps of the New House. "Chuck a pebble up at the window of Figgins's study, so that he'll know we are here."

"Certainly!" said Herries.

He threw up the pebble, rather a big one, and it crashed through a pane of glass, and there was a shout from Figgins's study. Herries was always clumsy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Percy Mellish and his crowd, believing that they had got to the joke at last.

Figgins's wrathful face looked out of the window. A high collar was tight round the long neck of Figgins, and a silk hat was cocked rakishly on his head.

"Who threw that stone?" shouted Figgins.

"I did," said Herries. "It was to let you know we were here. I didn't mean to—ha—ha—break the beastly window."

"Oh, all right. You are a clumsy ass. We're ready."

"Buck up, then. Don't forget the orchestra business."

"Right-ho!"

Figgins disappeared from the window. He had said that they were ready, but it was full five minutes before the three juniors of the New House came out. But when they came out their appearance fully compensated for the delay. They were beautifully clad. They equalled in splendour everybody in the party, with the exception of the gorgeous Augustus.

Blake murmured to Dig that Figgins' long thin neck, enclosed in a high, tight collar, gave him a graceful, giraffe-like appearance, and Dig confided to Blake in return that he expected every moment to see the buttons fly off Fatty Wynn's new Eton suit.

But this disaster did not happen, and the party formed up to march out of St. Jim's.

Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr had armed themselves with tin whistles. The nine juniors marched off to the gates. The crowd looked disappointed.

"Ain't you going to have any fighting?" demanded Percy Mellish, in an injured tone, as if he considered that he had been led into taking the trouble of crossing the quadrangle for nothing.

"Ain't there going to be a row?" demanded Walsh.

Blake grinned.

"My dear kids, if you are eager for fights and rows, nobody's stopping you," he said. "You can go and have a fight with Walsh, Mellish. You can have a row with Mellish, Walsh. Then you'll both be satisfied. But don't suggest such things to nice, quiet, orderly, chaps like us. You shock us."

And Blake, with his nose in the air, walked off.

The party of juniors arrived at the gates, followed by many a wondering glance. Mr. Kidd, the house-master of the School House, met them en route, and looked at them in amazement.

"Where are you going, my boys?"

"For a little walk, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

The house-master's eye wandered over them.

"Only for a little walk?"

"Well, sir, we're going to the station to meet a friend of my old governess, Miss Fawcett."

"Indeed! So many of you!"

"Yes, sir. We want to do him honour, sir."

The house-master looked keenly at Tom Merry. But Tom's demure face told him nothing.

"Very well, I hope you will have a pleasant walk," said Mr. Kidd, and he passed on. But he glanced back at the juniors once or twice, as if he wasn't quite satisfied in his mind.

Wherever Blake, Merry, or Figgins happened to be, there was generally some mischief brewing. But where all three got together on terms of alliance, it was pretty certain that there was something in the wind.

Still, there was no law against nine juniors going out for a walk on a fine afternoon in their best clothes; and Mr. Kidd, as a matter of fact, was not given to asking awkward questions. So he let the matter rest.

But the juniors were not quite out of the wood yet.

"Seemed to be uneasy in his mind," grinned Tom Merry, "Funny, how people always suspect us of getting up to something! There must be something in the air at St. Jim's that makes masters suspicious."

"Hallo, here's another!" groaned Blake. "I thought we were all well out of it."

Mr. Railton was standing in the ancient gateway talking to Herr Schneider, the German master. Mr. Railton was now second master at St. Jim's, and was to become house-master of the School House when Mr. Kidd left, as he was shortly doing. He knew Tom Merry of old, and so did Herr Schneider, for that matter. Mr. Railton made the juniors a sign to halt. Tom Merry had hoped to march past, pretending not to see him; but that would not work with Mr. Railton.

"Going for a walk, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, touching his cap.

"And Blake, and Figgins, all going for a walk together?"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins. "It's such a lovely afternoon, sir."

"And everything in the garden is so lovely, sir," said Blake.

Mr. Railton's features twitched for a moment.

"I am very glad to see you all on such friendly terms together," he said. "I hope that this unusual alliance does not mean mischief, Merry?"

Tom Merry looked shocked at the idea.

"Oh, sir!"

"Of course, it is hard to suspect you of planning any mischief," said Mr. Railton. "That sort of thing is so entirely out of your line."

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"Mein Gott!" murmured Herr Schneider. "Tat poy has as mooch sheek—vat you call sheek—as feevty poy in Shermany."

"Yes, sir," said Tom, looking as wooden as he could.

"Thank you, sir."

"Mein Gott! I tink—"

"You may go, Merry," said Mr. Railton, laughing.

"Mind, we are all keeping an eye on you."

"Yes, sir."

The nine raised their hats and caps simultaneously, as if all moved by the same spring, and marched on past the master. They left Mr. Railton laughing and Herr Schneider muttering words in German.

"How people seem to pick on us!" said Tom Merry.

"Thought we should never get away! We must not keep Mr. Dodds waiting. It wouldn't be respectful."

They went in line down the lane. It was not a long walk to Rylcombe by the way they took, and in a short time they were at the railway-station.

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Good time," he exclaimed; "I can hear the train coming in now. Now, this is the way Mr. Dodds will come out, and here we are to receive him."

"But shall we know him?" said Kerr.

"Of course. A little, sandy chap in spectacles—"

"Sure he wears spectacles?"

"Well, no; but I expect he does. Anyway, he will be a little, weedy waster, with a face like a kite, so we're sure to know him."

"Certain," said Figgins. "If we don't know him by his chivvy, we shall know him by his togs. What shall we do when he comes out, Merry?"

"All of us place our left hands on our hearts, and raise our hats with our right," said Tom. "All at once, and in line. That will please him for the start."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "We're ready. And then the music."

"Just so. Now, look out; the people are coming out."

Several stout, country people, evidently returning from a rare visit to town, came out of the station. Then a big, broad-shouldered fellow in a clerical collar—a fair-headed giant, six feet high, with massive limbs and a handsome, good-natured face, and a pair of very pleasant blue-grey eyes.

He stopped near the station entrance and looked curiously at the boys.

Tom was still watching the entrance anxiously, and he took no notice of the broad-shouldered stranger.

A few more people came out, and then the station was evidently empty. The train had disgorged its passengers, and they had dispersed; but still Mr. Dodds had not put in an appearance.

"I say, the bounder's not coming!" exclaimed Figgins. "This is a sell."

"Perhaps he's still on the platform, eating a bun or something," suggested Blake. "I've heard that curates live on milk and bathbuns."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, we'll wait a little longer, anyway. It's a rotten sell if we've come all this way for nothing, to say nothing of the music being wasted."

They waited a few more minutes. But the station was evidently empty. It was a keen disappointment.

"I say, Merry, it's no good waiting any longer," exclaimed Blake. "The chap's lost himself somewhere, I expect, or got out at the wrong station. Perhaps he missed the junction at Wayland. Anyway, he's not come."

"There's a chap there who came by this train," remarked Figgins, nodding towards the big gentleman, who was still standing near at hand, a peculiar smile upon his face. "Suppose we ask him if he's seen a little waster anywhere along the line?"

"Good idea!" said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

The juniors marched up to the stranger. He looked at them good-humouredly.

"If you please, sir," said Tom, raising his hat, "you came by the train from London just now, didn't you?"

"Yes, my lad."

The stranger's voice was deep and quite pleasant to listen to.

"Do you mind telling us, sir, if you saw a—a—"

"A little chap," said Figgins.

"A funny little waster," said Blake. "Most likely he's got weak eyes and spectacles and sandy hair and a thin chivvy."

"Yes," agreed Tom Merry. "Have you seen him, sir? We're waiting for him."

The stranger reflected.

"No," he replied, a smile lurking about the corners of his mouth; "I don't think I've seen anybody like the person you describe. Is he a great friend of yours, my lads?"

The juniors grinned at one another.

"Not exactly, sir," said Tom. "He's a giddy curate—# And then Tom broke off in confusion, as he noted the signs of a clerical profession about the stranger. "I—I mean, he's a little bounder my old governess asked me to meet—and we've come here to meet him, and to rot him a little, you see."

"Oh, yes, I see! I am sorry I have seen nothing of the man you describe. So far as my knowledge extends, there was no such person changed at Wayland. By the way, I also am expecting to meet someone here, whom I do not know by sight—that is to say, I have only seen his photograph," said the stranger, looking very straight at Tom Merry. "Perhaps some of you may know where he is. I guess that you belong to the school near Rylcombe—St. Jim's. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sir."

"I expected to be met here by a boy belonging to the School House at St. Jim's."

"Yes," said Tom faintly. "What's his name, sir?"

A dreadful suspicion had flashed into his mind. The stranger was looking him straight in the eyes.

"His name? His name is Tom Merry!"

"Oh, my only top-hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "Then you are—you are—you are Mr. Dodds?"

The stranger smiled.

"Yes, I am Mr. Dodds!"

And the silence of astonishment and dismay fell upon the juniors from St. Jim's.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Something Like a Frost!

**T**OM MERRY was the first to recover himself. It was a knock-down blow, but Tom was never dismayed for long.

"You—you are Mr. Dodds?"

"Yes; and you, I presume, are Tom Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am very pleased to meet you, Tom!" said Mr. Dodds.

And he held out his hand, which poor Tom took mechanically. The curate gave it a squeeze—a squeeze which proved that muscular development was the curate's strong point, for it made Tom simply wriggle. Mr. Dodds appeared to be unaware that he was putting an unusual pressure into the handshake, but there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"And these are your friends from St. Jim's?" said Mr. Dodds, looking pleasantly round at the amazed juniors. "They have all come down here with you to meet me? Now, I call that very kind."

The juniors turned red. They were so utterly flabbergasted by this unexpected encounter that their plans had been shattered to pieces.

The musical instruments remained where they were, and Fatty Wynn, who had a mouth-organ in his hand, hastily thrust it out of sight.

Even Blake and Figgins were abashed. But Tom Merry, as we have said, quickly began to recover. After all, this wasn't the kind of curate he had been expecting; but there was no reason why the reception shouldn't come off.

And so Tom, with a glance at his companions, gave the signal for the concerted greeting that had been arranged.

His left hand was pressed upon his waistcoat, his right went up, and he raised his top-hat and bowed profoundly.

Figgins followed his example, but a little late, and Blake, catching the peculiar expression upon Mr. Dodds's face, stopped his hand half-way to his hat.

As for the rest of the juniors they were too flabbergasted to do anything but stand still and stare at Mr. Dodds.

"My dear Tom," exclaimed Mr. Dodds, looking concerned, "whatever is the matter with you? Have you a pain in your stomach?"

Tom straightened up as if moved by a spring. His face was scarlet. Somehow or other, the "rotting" idea did not seem to work with Mr. Dodds.

The curate's face was deeply serious and concerned.

"Have you a pain, my dear boy?"

"No, sir," stammered Tom.

"Then why were you twisting in that peculiar manner?"

"I—I—I—"

"I think perhaps I had better take you in to the doctor's—"

"I'm all right," howled Tom. "I was only—only—"

Mr. Dodds laughed.

"Very well, I will take your word for it, though certainly I was alarmed for a moment. Do you think you will wait any longer for the friend you were speaking of, or will you show me the way to the school?"

"The—friend?"

"Yes; did you not say you were waiting for a little chap with sandy hair and weak eyes and spectacles and a thin chivvy?"

Mr. Dodds asked the question with perfect gravity.

Figgins giggled, but poor Tom was red with confusion.

"N-no, no," he stammered; "it's all right! It's all a mistake! We're ready to go to St. Jim's, sir, if you are."

"I don't mind waiting a little longer if you wish it, Tom."

"N-no, sir; it's all right. We'd rather go."

"Oh, in that case, we will go! I think we will walk, as it is such a pleasant afternoon. I suppose you are a pretty good walker, Tom?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Then come along, my lad!" said Mr. Dodds.

And he started off at a pace that sorely tried Tom to keep up with it. The rest of the juniors followed, looking somewhat sickly. The joke had not panned out well at all.

"Fancy the giddy curate turning out to be such a Brobdingnagian bouncer as that!" muttered Manners. "I never expected anything like it. Hang it, he'll walk us off our legs if he keeps on at this rate!"

Mr. Dodds was striding along the lane like a giant. Tom Merry was a good walker, but he had to break into a trot to keep pace with the curate.

"Am I tiring you?" asked Mr. Dodds, looking down from his great height upon Tom's curly head.

"Oh, no, n-no," gasped Tom; "not at all!"

"Miss Fawcett says you are a delicate lad, and—"

"I'm not; that's all rot!"

"I'm pleased to hear it. Then we will walk a little sharper."

Poor Tom thought they were walking sharply enough already, but he did not like to object. He wasn't going to be thought a weakling by a curate. So when Mr. Dodds put on the pace, Tom ran to keep up with him, his cheeks red with the knowledge that he was cutting a ridiculous figure in the eyes of the juniors behind.

"Hallo! Merry looks as if he was enjoying himself," grinned Figgins. "I'm blessed if I'm going at that pace! That chap can walk! Ease off a bit."

"Right-ho!" said Blake, slackening down. "Tom Merry and his blessed curate can go ahead like steam-engines if they like. That chap has deceived us. I fancy Tom Merry will have his hands full in trying to squeeze any fun out of him."

The juniors were soon left behind. Tom fagged on beside the stalwart son of the Church, who seemed to be quite unconscious that he was putting the junior to unusual efforts. They arrived at the gates of St. Jim's.

"Ah, this is the school!" exclaimed Mr. Dodds, looking up in admiration at the grey old pile which had withstood the storms of centuries.

"Yes, sir," said Tom, breathing hard now that they had at last come to a halt, "and there's the cricket-ground. But, of course, you don't play cricket?"

The curate looked down at him with a smile.

"Why, of course?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I play cricket?"

Tom coloured.

"Why, I—I—thought—"

"You are thinking of the sandy, weedy little chap you were going to meet at Rylcombe Station, but who didn't turn up," said Mr. Dodds gravely. "I dare say he wouldn't play cricket. But I do, Tom. I'm very fond of the old game."

Mr. Dodds rose several degrees in Tom Merry's estimation. They went in and crossed the quadrangle, very pleasant on the summer afternoon, with its shady old elm-trees.

"Which is the principal's house?" asked Mr. Dodds.

Tom pointed it out.

"Then I will say good-bye for a time," said the curate.

"I must see Dr. Holmes. I shall see you again soon, Tom."

"I hope so, sir," said Tom dutifully.

"I have heard so much of you from Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Dodds, "that I feel as if I have known you for a long time. I am sure we shall like each other, Tom. I am going to stay in the neighbourhood for a week or two, and so we shall have every opportunity of improving our acquaintance."

And Mr. Dodds shook hands with Tom and went up to the principal's house. Tom put his hands into his pockets and strolled down to the gate in a very dejected mood. Mr. Dodds certainly was not the rank outsider he had expected him to be. But the adventure had turned out in the favour of the fellow who was to be victimised, and the joke had gone so entirely against Tom Merry that it required a little time for him to see the fun of it.

He was standing at the gate when Blake and Figgins & Co. came in. The juniors were looking very red and perspiring. The afternoon had turned out hot and dusty, and the juniors, in their best clothes and silk hats and gloves, had felt the heat keenly. As they came near St. Jim's and saw fellows in boating and cricketering-flannels enjoying the fine weather, their jackets seemed tighter, their gloves hotter, and their hats heavier than ever.

They were in a mood to turn and rend the individual who had projected the adventure, and they were all pleased to see Tom standing in the old gateway.

"Hallo, chaps!" said Tom.

"Hallo, ass!" said Figgins. "Nice sort of silly cuckoo, ain't you?"

"Next time you get an idea in your head," said Kerr, "you'd better take it out into the garden and bury it!"

"Of all the howling asses," said Fatty Wynn, "that I ever came across, you are about the howlingest, Tom Merry."

And Figgins & Co. marched indignantly in.

"Oh, go and eat cocoanuts!" said Tom Merry. "You New House wasters wouldn't have been much good, anyway. I say, Blake—"

"Oh, don't say anything to me!" said Blake crossly. "I'm a patient chap. But the weather's too hot to be patient with a chap like you."

"Same here," said Herries. "I'm not going to dot you on the nose, Merry, but I'm exercising a lot of self-restraint."

"Rather!" chimed in Digby. "Hang it, of all the rotten wheezes ever wheezed, this silly wheeze has turned out the rottenest."

"Oh, it's weally too warm to talk!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, fanning himself with a glove. "Othahwise I should certainly use some vewy stwong expressions to you, you howwid boundah!"

And Study No. 6 marched off.

"Oh, rats, and more rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Nice lot of kids, I must say! What do you think, Manners, old chap?"

Manners wiped the perspiration from his streaming brow. "What do I think?" he said deliberately. "I think you're about the biggest ass in the school, Tom, and the next time you start out to catch a Tartar, you can leave me at home."

And off went Manners.

Tom thrust his hands deeper into his pockets and whistled. "My hat! It's a giddy frost, and no mistake, from beginning to end! What a deceiving bouncer that curate is! Never mind. I'll take a rise out of him somehow."

And Tom found that reflection grateful and comforting.

# ANSWERS

**CHAPTER 4.**  
**The Curate Plays Cricket.**

“**CRICKET!**” exclaimed Manners scornfully.  
“He said so.”  
“He was pulling your leg.”  
“Oh, I don’t know,” said Tom Merry thoughtfully. “He looks like an athlete.”

“My dear chap,” said Manners, with a wave of his hand—  
“my dear chap, I admit that he has disappointed us. He ain’t the kind of a sort of a specimen of a variety of a funny fish as we expected. But you can’t get away from the fact that he’s what he is.”

This was undeniable, and Tom Merry did not seek to controvert it.

“But I say, Manners—”  
“He can’t play cricket. It stands to reason he can’t. Of course he can’t. He knows as much about cricket as I do Hebrew!”

“Well, if you think so—”  
“Oh, of course I do! Curates don’t play cricket. They drink weak tea with queer old ladies of an afternoon,” said Manners, with an air of knowledge. “Don’t I know ’em? My aunt at home has a tame curate, and he comes in of an afternoon and she orders him about. I admit this chap has got a size on him, and he can walk. But it don’t follow that he’s different from the rest of his sort in other ways.”

“I dare say you’re right.”  
“Of course I am! I dare say he thinks he can play cricket. It would be a good joke to put him to the test. He’s bound to get leg-before-wicket, and we’d give him a warm time.”

Tom Merry’s merry eyes sparkled.  
“By Jupiter! That’s a good idea, Manners.”  
“Yes,” said Manners; “it’s mine, not yours, so it may work out all right.”

But Tom only laughed.  
It was a couple of hours after the sad adventure in Rylcombe. Tom and Manners had been out for a bathe in the Ryle, and then had tea in the study, and so they were both feeling much better. Tom had mentioned Mr. Dodds’s remark that he played cricket, and the statement had been received with derisive scorn by Manners. Tom, having been deceived once in his estimate of the curate, was inclined to be wary in dealing with him a second time, but Manners’s confident assurance convinced him.

“Well, it would make a splendid joke if he can’t play,” he said. “We’ll get him out on the pitch this afternoon. We ought to be able to give him a warm time between us. Suppose we make up two teams for practice and ask him to take a hand?”

“Good wheeze! We must get Blake and Figgins to help.”  
“I’ll go and speak to them.”  
“Better let me do it; they’ll be a little bit nervous of your ideas after what’s happened to-day.”

“All right,” laughed Tom. “You go. Cut off! I’ll go and speak to Mr. Dodds.”

They left the study. Manners hastened to No. 6, where Blake and his chums were at tea.

Blake and the rest looked at him as he came in.  
“Hallo!” said Blake. “Have you come in to tea? You’re late, my son, but sit down. There’s a few sardines left, and a cup of tea. It’s jolly weak, but you must take this study as you find it.”

“Thanks,” said Manners; “I haven’t come to tea. Tom Merry and I want you—”

Blake held up a warning finger.  
“No more of Tom Merry’s wheezes for me!” he exclaimed. “If he’s got an idea, he can kill it, or do what he likes with it; but we’ve got no use for it.”

“But it isn’t his idea; it’s mine!”  
“Well, you haven’t much more brains than the law allows,” said Blake. “How you chaps in the Shell can aspire to leading the School House Juniors, considering the sort of brains you’ve got, is a deep mystery to me.”

“Oh, rats!” said Manners. “I didn’t come here to rag. It’s a new idea. That curate chap has done us brown. The fun was all on his side this afternoon.”

“Yes, as I said, it was a rotten wheeze, and—”  
“Listen to me. The chap thinks he can play cricket. Of course, he can’t. He won’t know one end of a bat from the other. Our idea is to get him on the cricket-field and guy him. He will have a high old time, I should think.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”  
“Good wheeze!” exclaimed Herries. “We’ll run him off his legs, and whenever he gets a leg-before-wicket, we’ll let him know it.”

“I see you catch on,” grinned Manners. “Is it a go?”

“Rather!”  
“Then I’ll cut off and ask Figgins.”

Manners hastened across to the New House. He found

Figgins & Co. in their cricketing-flannels just going out for practice. Figgins, like Blake, was inclined to be suspicious at first.

“You see,” he said. “I don’t have any faith in Tom Merry’s mouldy old ideas. Besides, you School House chaps never think of anything really good. The best you can do is to bag a concert after somebody else has got it up, or—”

“Never mind all that now. Are you on?”  
“Well, yes,” said Figgins. “We all owe the curate one, and it will be funny. We’ll make him captain, and make him go in first and put on the best bowler we’ve got to pepper him.”

“Good!”  
And the juniors were speedily busy making the arrangements for the cricket-match that was to end in the discomfiture of the Rev. Mr. Dodds.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had sought out the enemy. Mr. Dodds had finished his conversation with Dr. Holmes, and was about to stroll down to the cricket-field and look on at the boys playing there, when he caught sight of Tom Merry. Tom looked a fine lad in his cricketing-flannels, and Mr. Dodds’s eye dwelt upon him with approval.

“Hallo, Tom!” he said, in his deep, pleasant voice. “So you are going cricketing?”  
“Yes, sir,” said Tom; “we’re meeting Greyfriars Juniors next week, sir, and they’re an awfully strong team. We’re putting in all the practice we can.”

“That’s right. I suppose I shall see the great match.” said the curate, with a smile, “as I am staying at St. Jim’s.”

“You are staying at St. Jim’s, sir?”  
“Yes; my business will keep me in the neighbourhood for a fortnight or so, and Dr. Holmes has been kind enough to ask me to stay at the school. You are in the junior eleven?”

“Oh, yes, sir!” said Tom, with pride. “We haven’t decided yet whether Blake or I shall captain the Saints against Greyfriars. Figgins thinks he ought to, but we’re not going to be captained by a New House bounder. Not much, sir!”

Mr. Dodds laughed.  
“You see,” explained Tom. “The school second eleven is formed of the best players in both houses, picked out of the junior house teams. Figgins is captain of the New House second team, and he ain’t a bad cricketer. But, of course, the School House wouldn’t be led by a New House chap. But I wanted to speak to you about something else, sir. You told me that you played cricket.”

“Certainly, Tom.”  
“Would you like to bat for us, sir?” said Tom glibly. “We’re getting up a practice-match, and we’d be glad if you would, sir.”

The big man gave him a curious glance.  
“My dear Merry, I should be delighted. Perhaps I can show you a wrinkle or two in cricket?”  
“I hope so, sir,” agreed Tom. “It will be very interesting to watch you at the wicket, sir.”

“I have no flannels with me, but I suppose that won’t matter?”  
“Not at all, sir, it’s only a practice-match, and it will be easy to borrow some pads and gloves. Can you come now?”

“Certainly.”  
Tom led off his prize in triumph to the cricket-field. There he was presented to Manners and Figgins and Blake as a new recruit.

“It’s jolly good of you to bat for us, sir,” said Manners. “We’re a— a man short, and we are sure you will put up a good game.”

The big young man nodded.  
“I will do my best,” he said. “You must not expect great things of me.”

“We’ve only got an hour for play,” said Figgins. “Let’s get to work. The stumps are pitched already. Who’s your captain, Merry?”

Figgins was to captain one team. The juniors, who had entered into the joke, kept their faces perfectly solemn. The best bowlers of both houses had been put into Figgins’s team, on the understanding that they were to pepper Mr. Dodds more than the wicket.

“Mr. Dodds,” said Tom instantly. “He’s going in first, aren’t you, sir, to open the innings with me?”

“Certainly, if you like,” said Mr. Dodds.  
“I’ve borrowed Kildare’s bat for you, sir,” said Manners. “You wouldn’t find any of ours quite up to your weight. Here it is, sir.”

“Thank you, Manners!”  
The curate took the bat belonging to the captain of St. Jim’s.

“Are we going to toss for innings?” asked Blake.  
“Oh, no,” said Figgins carelessly. “We’ll leave that to Merry.”



Of course, it was understood beforehand. The whole game was a device to get Mr. Dodds to the wicket, and pepper him there. Mr. Dodds appeared to see nothing.

"First man in," said Tom.

"Come along, Merry," said the curate with a smile.

Figgins led his men out to field. The bowling was given to Blake, who had the novel experience of playing in a team captained by Figgins. But Blake would stand anything for the sake of a joke.

"I say," murmured Manners, "that chap shapes all right. Perhaps I've been a little too hasty in setting him down for an ass."

Mr. Dodds certainly adopted a very business-like attitude at the wicket. Blake bowled against him first, and there was a knowing smile on Blake's face as he took a little run, and sent down the ball.

If Mr. Dodds had been leg-before-wicket, or leg anywhere near the wicket, he would have come in for that ball. But Blake's calculations did not seem to work out correctly. For the ball broke, apparently, just as the batsman wanted it, and the clack of the bat followed. The leather went whirling, too fast for the eye to follow its flight.

Where was the ball?

A yell from Big Side, where the Sixth Form cricketers were at practice, soon told. On the St. Jim's ground there was plenty of room for four matches to be in progress at the same time. But a specially hard hitter, naturally, was no respecter of boundaries. The curate had dropped that ball within an inch of Monteith's head. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was fielding in a senior match.

That strange ball dropping down from the skies made him jump. It grazed his shoulder, and fell at his feet.

Mr. Dodds was running. Tom Merry was running too, and the batsmen crossed the pitch time and again, while Figgins and the fieldmen tried to discover where the ball was, and then hurried over towards Big Side to recover it.

"Give us our ball," said Figgins.

"Hang your ball!" snapped Monteith. "What the dickens do you mean by shying a beastly ball over here on our ground?"

"We didn't; it was a batsman hit it here."

"Rats! You haven't got a kid that could do it!"

"Oh, give him his ball," said Baker. "If it comes this way again, Figgins, we'll make you eat it. Cut off with you!"

Meanwhile the batsmen were still running. Six runs had been made. Tom Merry was a fine cricketer for his age, and he could run well, but he wasn't quite up to the form of that terrible curate. Each time Mr. Dodds had to wait for him. The sixth run, all in double-quick time, naturally made Tom pant and gasp. But Mr. Dodds seemed as fresh as ever, and he started on a seventh, and Tom wasn't the fellow to hang back. So off he went again, his face burning with heat, dropping with perspiration, and his flannels sticking to him. And then Mr. Dodds started on an eighth run.

"I say, sir!" gasped Tom. "I say! That's enough! They're coming in!"

"Played out?" was the unsympathetic question in reply.

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "Only——"

"Then let us make it eight. Don't give in!"

The suggestion of being played out, and of giving in, would have made Tom run if his legs had been amputated. He raced across the pitch again, and just got in in time, as Figgins sent the ball in to the wicket-keeper.

"Eight!"

Figgins made a long face.

"Oh, my aunt! We've made another bloomer!"

Undoubtedly, the juniors had misjudged the curate again. He could play cricket! After taking eight for the first ball of the first over, Mr. Dodds seemed as fresh and smiling as ever, while the boys were looking very dubious. Blake sent down the next ball with all his skill.

Clack!

Where was that beastly ball?

"Come, Merry," cried Mr. Dodds, "nine more if we can!"

He ran like lightning. Tom fagged across and across the pitch. He was accustomed to playing hard and fast, but cricket like this was a little above his form. But he wouldn't give in.

Figgins & Co. were hunting for the elusive leather way down in the long field. The batsmen ran and ran. Four, five, six! The ball came in from the country straight for Tom Merry's wicket. The curate had already made his end good, but Tom was simply spent. His bat clumped home seconds too late. There was a crash of falling stumps and balls.

"Out!"

Tom Merry was not half sorry to carry out his bat. He was streaming with perspiration, and his knees were knock-

ing together. Manners made a grimace as he passed Tom to go in and join the curate at the wicket.

"Another frost, Tommy!"

"Your idea, this time," growled Tom. "The man's a perfect demon. You ass, to let loose on us a chap like that—a giddy Jessop and Ranji all rolled into one! Yah!"

Manners took his place at the wicket. Blake began to wonder just how many runs that over would give the curate. He sent down the third ball, and again it went careering over the boundary. This time Mr. Dodds did not run, perhaps thinking four enough, and wanting a little rest.

The fourth ball disappeared when he hit it, and while Figgins & Co. were hunting for it, Mr. Dodds and Manners ran six. Manners got in too late at the last, and was stumped. Percy Mellish took his place at the wicket.

The fifth ball was another boundary. Blake breathed a sigh of relief when he prepared to deliver the sixth, and last ball of the over. But Mr. Dodds had a little surprise in store for the luckless juniors. He hit that ball away with a mighty swipe, and ran, and ran, till Percy Mellish thought that his legs would drop off.

When seven had been taken the young man appeared to take pity on him, for he remained at the wicket he had reached, though the ball had not yet come in. Percy was only too glad of a rest.

Blake bowled.

"The horrid boulder! See what he's done! Now he will still have the bowling when we cross over!"

Mr. Dodds looked so innocent that it seemed impossible to suspect him of planning any such thing; but certainly he had run an odd number, and changed ends, and the bowling was still to his wicket. The ball came in at last, and the field crossed.

"I'll give the brute an over," said Figgins. "You haven't been able to touch him, Blake."

"Never had a chance," said Blake. "I tried to hit the wicket, and I tried to hit his legs, but I couldn't hit anything excepting his bat. You try."

"The next time I act on any of your silly School House schemes, you can use my head for a football!" said Figgins in disgust.

And he began to bowl.

That over was a repetition of the previous one. Percy Mellish was run out, and in the course of the over two more batsmen came and went. Mr. Dodds, as fresh as paint, scored twenty-five for the over, and had all the batting to himself. Figgins's fieldmen were looking as if they thought life not worth living. Fatty Wynn, indeed, had walked off the field, determined not to fag there any more for love or money.

Figgins and Blake exchanged glances. They had had about enough of this very peculiar match. Tom Merry was taking a well-earned rest on the grass. The school-clock chimed out.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake, in well-simulated amazement. "Do you hear the time? We can't finish, or we shall be late for tea."

"By Jove!" said Figgins. "So we shall!"

As the juniors usually had tea in their studies, and never went into hall for it unless they had absolutely run out of provisions, it might not have seemed so very serious if they had been late for tea at any other time.

Now, they were resolved not to be late for it. Anything to get off the cricket-field! Tom Merry jumped up.

"Late!" he exclaimed. "That will never do!"

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Manners.

"It would be shocking," said Blake.

"But we had tea in our study," began Herries, who never saw things till it was too late. Blake trod on his toe.

"I'm afraid we shall have to knock off, sir," said Tom Merry. "Thank you so much for playing for us. It was awfully good of you, sir."

A smile was lurking round the corners of Mr. Dodds' mouth.

"Not at all," he said. "Quite a pleasure, I assure you. If you should be a man short at any time while I am staying at St. Jim's, I shall always be happy to make an eleventh for you."

"You are very kind, sir," gasped Tom. "Thank you so much."

The juniors thankfully went off the field. Not till they were safe within the School House, out of the sight of Mr. Dodds, did Blake tell Tom Merry any of the things he had been thinking. Then he told him.

"I think," said Blake, wagging his forefinger at Tom Merry, "that I'm getting fed up with the ideas that come out of your study. I've had about enough of your blessed bloomers. If you come to Study No. 6 with any more ideas, we'll slay you! Understand that?"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom.

Blake and his chums marched off indignantly.

"It's a sell," said Manners. "I admit I was taken in."  
 "Yes; you were a champion ass," said Tom Merry. "I think I shall give that curate a rest. We'd better fill in the time by giving old Schneider a turn. The fat old chap has had a long rest, and he wants waking up. He gave me an imposition to-day, simply because I spoke to French about the cricket, while he was explaining some rotten, German irregular verbs. Nice sort of a state of things we are coming to, when German irregular verbs are supposed to be as important as cricket."

"Oh, he's an ass!" said Manners. "We'll make old Schneider—"  
 "Himmel!"

Manners broke off suddenly. The German master, with his face as red as a turkey-cock, came out of a study, and stood glowering at the two comrades of the Shell.

"So you speak of your master in tat vay after!" he exclaimed. "You vas te pad poy as nefer vad before. Merry, have you done dat imposition tat I gif you?"

"Not yet, Herr Schneider."  
 "Den you vill write him out, and feefty more lines also mit dem, Merry. As for you, Manners, you vill write down a hundred lines from te Schiller, and bring them to me to-morrow after."

"Oh, sir!" said the chums together.  
 But Herr Schneider only shook a warning finger at them, and stalked away.

Tom sighed.  
 "We're in for bad luck to-day!" he exclaimed. "First, that bounder of a curate, and then old Schneider. Life won't be worth living soon, unless we can contrive to make Herr Schneider sit up somehow. I've had an idea in my head for some time—"

Manners grunted expressively.  
 "Look here, I'm beginning to feel like Blake. I'm rather fed up on your ideas, Tom. No more bloomers for me!"

"Oh, we can handle the German all right," said Tom confidently. "It's in pulling the leg of the Dodds-bird that we make a slip. I've got an idea—"

"Then go and boil it!"  
 "Look here! It's a ripping idea."  
 "Let it rip!" said the unsympathetic Manners.

Tom Merry seized him by the shoulders, and ran him against a wall.

"Now, you bounder, are you going to help me, or shall I knock your head against the wall, and go and ask those kids in Study No. 6 to lend a hand?"

"Oh, I'm on!" said Manners. "Chuck it! I couldn't in mercy let you go to Study No. 6, and get the reception you'd get, if you told them you had another idea. I'm on!"

"Listen, then, while I explain the plan."  
 And as Tom proceeded to darkly unfold the scheme, even Manners's incredulity relaxed, and a cheerful smile of anticipation overspread his face.

## CHAPTER 5.

### In the Stilly Night.

**N**IGHT upon St. Jim's!  
 Boys, weary with the healthy fatigue of boating, swimming, and cricketing, slept the sleep of the just in the long, dark dormitories. The School House was dark and silent.

Herr Schneider, who boarded in the School House, had stayed up rather late that night, smoking a German pipe, and reading a German paper. At last, however, even the news of the beloved Vaterland failed to keep him awake; he nodded over his paper, and nodded over his pipe, and at last nodded himself off to bed.

He little dreamed that two pairs of eyes were watching the light in his study window from the dark, shadowy quadrangle. The light went out, and Tom Merry nudged Manners.

"The bounder's gone to bed at last, Manners, old son."  
 "Yes," said Manners, with a sigh of relief. "He's stayed up unusually late to-night, I believe. He's always doing something to worry us."

Tom chuckled.  
 "He'll be all the more sleepy in the morning," he re-

marked, "so that doesn't matter. The more sleepy he is to-morrow, the better the little joke will work."

"Yes, that's so, so we'll forgive him. Hallo, there's the light in his bed-room window!"

Tom glanced up at the little square, old-fashioned window, which he knew belonged to the bed-room of the German master. A light was gleaming in it, showing that Herr Schneider had just arrived there. The clock from the school tower was booming out twelve. The two boys watched the light, and at last it went out. The German master had gone to bed, and undoubtedly he was safe in the arms of Morpheus. Herr Schneider was a heavy sleeper, as the boys well knew.

"Now, let's get to work," said Manners impatiently.  
 "Wait a bit. We must give him time to get sound asleep."

"He always snores like a beastly grampus the moment he closes his eyes," said Manners. "Let's go and get the ladder."

"All right. I suppose ten minutes will be enough?"  
 "Ample."

The chums hurried away. They had borrowed Taggles's long ladder—without the formality of asking permission—during the evening, and had placed it in readiness, concealed behind a tree that grew close to the wall. It did not take them long to get out the ladder and carry it to the wall underneath the German master's bed-room window.

"Careful," said Tom. "Don't put the beastly thing through the glass. That would wake up even Herr Schneider."

"That's all right. It's resting on the sill now. It's safe."  
 "Good! You hold it while I go up."

"Right you are! Got the stuff there?"  
 "Yes; I don't forget things."

Tom opened out a roll of black cloth, which he had purchased at the undertaker's in Rycombe. With the cloth over his arm, he mounted the ladder, and Manners held it at the bottom for security.

About a quarter of an hour had elapsed since the German's light had gone out, so there was little danger of his being still awake. The starlight was glinting on the diamond panes of the window, and Tom could not see an inch inside the glass when he reached it, and the German master might have been standing just within the window looking at him without his being any the wiser.

Fortunately, however, Herr Schneider was not on his guard, and he was sleeping like a top in his big, comfortable bed, and Tom Merry, putting his head very close to the window, thought he could distinguish the sound of snoring within.

The ladder was resting against the sill, and Tom, standing on the fourth rung from the top, could reach the window very comfortably. He opened out the black cloth, and spread it carefully over the window. The next step was to fasten it there. Tom had at first thought of tacking it, but there was danger of even a sound sleeper like the Herr hearing the sound of a tapping hammer at his window.

Manners had suggested secotine, and they had borrowed all the tubes of it they could find in the Shell studies. Tom squeezed out some of the sticky liquid, and began to stick down the top edge of the square of cloth over the window-frame. The weather was dry, and was certain to remain so over night, and so there was no danger of the sticking becoming undone when it was once effected.

It was neither an easy nor a pleasant task, but Tom stuck to it manfully. The secotine stuck to him, too, to his fingers and cuffs and sleeves and waistcoat. He finished a whole tube very quickly, and even the top edge of the cloth was not yet quite secured. He laid the empty tube on the sill, and took another from his pocket. Manners looked up at him anxiously.

"How are you getting on?" he whispered.  
 "First rate," said Tom cheerfully. "I'm awfully sticky, but it's all for the good of the cause. Hallo, look out!"

"What is it—gerrooh!"  
 The tube had slipped from Tom's hand, and it alighted fairly on Manners's upturned face, and Manners let go the ladder and clasped his nose with both hands.

"Gerrooh! Yah! You ass!"  
 "Hang it all!" said Tom. "I told you to look out, didn't I?"

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"You've nearly busted my beastly boko!"  
 "Keep your beastly boko out of the way, then. You've let go the ladder."

Tom returned to his work. Manners, holding his nose with one hand, and the ladder with the other, kept a wary look-out for further missiles.

"Done the top edge," said Tom, at last, with a sigh of relief. "The stuff holds it first-rate. Now for the rest of it."

He trailed the sticky fluid down the sides of the wooden window-frame, and stuck the cloth tightly down with it. Then the bottom edge of the black cloth was secured.

Then Tom went carefully over the whole of it, stopping up every possible crack or cranny, till he was certain that none were left. The cloth was very thick, and of such an opaque blackness that it was certain that, when the sun rose, not a single one of his beams would penetrate into the bed-room of the German master.

Tom's work was done. He crammed the squeezed-out tubes back into his pocket, and descended the ladder. He was cramped with standing on it so long, and he went down by putting his legs round it and sliding. He came down like a shot, and nearly startled Manners out of his wits.

"Oh! Ow!" yelled Manners. "What the—how the—who the—"

"Shut up, you silly ass! It's only me!"

"What did you want to come down like that for?" howled Manners. "You made me jump out of my skin, you cuckoo!"

"Never thought about that," said Tom cheerfully. "What did you want to yell out for? You've woke up somebody."

There was the sound of a window opening.

"Quick!" whispered Tom. "The ladder! Quick!"

They dragged the ladder away and laid it quickly down close to the wall in the shadow, and then darted into the blackness under one of the elm-trees. A window was thrown up, and a head looked out into the starlit quadrangle.

"The curate!" muttered Tom Merry.

Manners gave a grunt.

"That horrid bounder seems to haunt us."

It was the Rev. Mr. Dodds who was looking out of a window. The curate's eyes swept the quadrangle, but he could see nothing suspicious. The ladder was hidden by the shadow of the wall, and the juniors were out of sight. Mr. Dodds looked up and down and round about for a few minutes. He was evidently suspicious. The juniors remained as still as mice.

The curate had certainly heard something. But the silence and stillness of the quadrangle reassured him, and at last he withdrew his head, and his window closed down. Tom drew a breath of relief.

"That was a narrow shave. Let's get the ladder back into its place and cut back to bed. There's one striking; we shall miss our beauty sleep."

They seized the ladder and ran it off. They stopped at Taggles's lodge, and a brilliant idea occurred to Tom Merry. Taggles's door opened outwards. Tom laid the ladder with its end against the door, and the other end he jammed against a tree. Manners went off into a chuckle.

"Ha, ha! Poor old Taggs won't be able to get out in the morning. He'll report somebody for this. He's always grumbling about something; it's only charitable to give him something more to grumble about."

"My son, listen to the words of wisdom," said Tom Merry sagely. "When that ladder's found out of its place they'll jump to the conclusion that it was taken out wholly and solely on account of Taggles, and won't tumble to the wheeze about Schneider's window. See? We can't put it back where it belongs, as the place is locked up. This is the way to cover our trail."

"Tom old dear, you're not half such a fool as you look," said Manners. "Now, let's get back to our little bunks. We've got to be up early in the morning to see the fun."

"Yes, and this is going to be our last night out before the Greyfriars match," said Tom seriously. "We've got to be in form for the match, and there's nothing like staying up late at night to put a chap off his form."

"You're right. But this was too good a wheeze to be missed."

They hurried back to their quarters. They had escaped by a window in the rear of the School House, and they re-entered in the same way and made their way quickly to their Form dormitory. In about two minutes, they were undressed and in bed. A quarter-past the hour chimed from the clock on the tower.

"This is a first-rate wheeze," said Tom. "The old bounder won't have the faintest idea when it's daylight, Manners."

"Nunno," said Manners drowsily.

"He won't get up when they call him. He'll think he's being fooled. It will be a ripping joke, won't it?"

"Ye-e-e-es—gerrooh!"

"We shall have to be up early to see the fun. It will be funny."



Snore!

"I say, Manners, old chap!"

Snore!

"Good-night, Manners!"

Snore!

Manners was evidently fast asleep. So Tom went to sleep, too, and did not unclothe his eyes till the rising-bell clanged the next morning.

**CHAPTER 6.**  
**Herr Schneider is Late!**

**TAP!**

Herr Schneider turned drowsily in his bed. He opened his eyes and blinked. The room was pitchy dark. Not a glimmer of light penetrated into it from the window. Herr Schneider had awakened thinking he heard a knock at the door. He sleepily decided that he had been mistaken, and turned to go to sleep again.

Knock!  
The German started again. It was decidedly a knock at the door.

"Who was dere?"

"It's your hot water, sir."

"Ach! And vat for pring you hot vatter in te middle of te night, ain't it? Go away mit yourself after, and not play shoke on me, ain't it?"

The maid-servant only imperfectly heard the Herr's reply, and she set down the can of water and went her way. She had instructions to knock, to wake the Herr, because he was a heavy sleeper, and her business ended there.

Herr Schneider growled to himself. He was only half awake, and the room was pitchy dark. It was excusable for him to think that he had been awakened too early. He went to sleep again comfortably.

The can of hot water was steaming away there when the young gentlemen of the Shell Form came out of their dormitory.

Tom was the first to spot it as he came along the passage. "Hallo, old Schneider's not up yet!" he remarked, laughing. "He doesn't know it's morning. I suppose we ought to give him a tap. The door's locked, of course. He's kept it locked of a night ever since some evilly-disposed person chucked a cracker in one night. Ought we to wake him, chaps?"

The whole Shell were in the secret—at least, that part of the Form that boarded in the School House. There was a general assent.

"Certainly," said Manners. "If he hears your sweet voice, Tommy, he'll feel certain that it's a joke, and that it's still night-time. Of course, it's not our fault if he makes a mistake like that. We wouldn't wilfully delude anybody, anyhow, for anything, anyway."

"Of course not. I'll wake him."

Tom Merry knocked at the door.

"Keep quiet, you others," he said. "We don't want to let him know the whole house is awake. Herr Schneider, Herr Schneider!"

There was a growl in the room.

"Who was dere?"

"It is I, Tom Merry."

"I vill punish you to-morrow, den, Tom Merry. Go pack to ped."

"But it's time for you to get up, sir."

"Go away!" roared the German. "If I come out to you I vill make tings varn for you mit yourself after. Go away."

And Herr Schneider turned over in bed, and began to snore again.

Tom grinned.

"He thinks he's got about half the night before him," he remarked. He pushed the little mat which lay outside the door close with his foot, so that not a gleam of daylight should enter underneath. "Well, we've done our best."

The Shell went down to breakfast. Herr Schneider usually took charge of one of the tables in the dining-hall of the School House, but this morning his place remained empty.

Mr. Kidd, the housemaster, glanced across at the empty seat as the boys sat down to breakfast.

"Herr Schneider appears to have overslept himself this morning," the housemaster remarked. "Will one of you go up and call him?"

Tom Merry was on his feet in an instant, in the most obliging way.

"Certainly, sir."

And he was off before anybody else could offer his services. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had half-risen, and he sat down again. Tom Merry hurried upstairs and stopped at the German master's door. Tap, tap! went his knuckles on the panels. A loud snore from within was the only answer.

Thump, thump! Then the German master awoke.

"Vat is tat?"

"It is I, sir. Tom Merry, sir."

"Oh, you Tom Merry! I vill hurt you mit myself ven I see you. Go away!"

"Aren't you going to get up yet, sir?"

"Nein," roared the German—"Nein!"

"When are you going to get up, sir? Don't you want to be woke?"

"Nein!" bellowed Herr Schneider.

And Tom departed.

Mr. Kidd glanced at him as he entered the hall.

"Have you awakened Herr Schneider, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he say?"

"He doesn't want to get up, sir."

"H'm, h'm!" said Mr. Kidd, looking puzzled.

"I asked him when he wanted to get up, sir, and he said 'nein,'" said Tom innocently.

"Ninc," said the housemaster, making a natural mistake, and glancing up at the clock. "Very well, you will go up and call him again at nine o'clock, Merry."

"Yes, sir," said Tom sedately. And he resumed his place at the table. Manners nudged him, and giggled.

"Quiet, you ass!" said Tom. "Don't give the game away."

"He, he, he!"

"Quiet, donkey! Here comes old Kildare."

"Kildare," said Mr. Kidd, "kindly take Herr Schneider's place, as he does not wish to rise this morning until nine o'clock."

"Certainly, sir," said the captain of St. Jim's.

He dropped into the seat that should have been occupied by Herr Schneider. He looked rather suspiciously at Tom Merry. It was a peculiar circumstance that Herr Schneider should have elected to stay in bed till after breakfast that morning, especially as he was to take the Shell in first lesson. And Kildare had learned to know Tom Merry. But Tom was as grave as a judge. He ate his bread-and-butter, and drank his tea as if he was devoting his whole thoughts solely to that occupation, and when he met Kildare's eyes fixed upon him, his glance was so innocent, that even the captain of the school was deceived.

Breakfast finished without the appearance of the German master. When the boys filed out, Tom Merry went upstairs to carry out the housemaster's instructions in his dutiful way. He gave a mighty thump at the door of Herr Schneider. The fat German started out of a beautiful dream, in which he saw himself in the Vaterland once more, smoking a big German pipe, and taking deep, deep draughts of the good Rhine wine. Naturally, he was not pleased to be suddenly startled up out of that entrancing vision.

"Who is dere?" he roared.

"It is I, sir—Tom Merry."

"Ach! Himmel! Mein Gott! I vill hurt you soon, if you do not go away, and leave me in der peace mit meinselb."

"Aren't you going to get up, sir?"

"No!"

"It's getting quite late, sir."

"Poy, how dare you say so, ven dere is not yet a gleam of twilight? Go away! Go pack to bed! Do you hear me mit yourself after? Go pack to ped!"

Tom Merry grinned, and went downstairs again.

"Is Herr Schneider coming down, Merry?" asked Kildare, meeting him at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, no! He doesn't want to get up yet."

"Do you think he is ill?"

"His voice didn't sound as if he was ill, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's looked very suspiciously at Tom Merry.

"You can go into your Form-room, Merry," he said.

"I will go up and speak to Herr Schneider."

"Right you are, Kildare."

The captain of the school went upstairs. Herr Schneider was sinking into balmy slumber again, and trying to recall the delightful vision from which Tom had aroused him, when Kildare's loud rap fell upon the door.

The German started up in a fury.

"Go away!" he roared.

"Herr Schneider—"

"Go away!"

"But—"

"Himmel! Prute of a poy! Go away!"

"It's time—"

"Ach! Mein Gott! Vill you leave me in peace mit meinselb."

Kildare gave it up. He was considerably puzzled, but it was evident that the German master was in no mood to be argued with. Kildare went downstairs, and to the Sixth-Form room. Meanwhile Tom Merry had rejoined his Form in the apartment sacred to the young gentlemen of the Shell. A chorus of questions rained upon him.

"Where's old Schneider?"

"Is he coming down?"

"What's the verdict?"

"Schneider's not coming down," said Tom. "He wanted me to go back to bed. He's going to stay there all day, I suppose. We've got half an hour to ourselves."

The whole Shell gave a whoop of delight.

As Herr Schneider was to take first lesson that morning,

no other master had come into the room. And as Herr Schneider wasn't there, the heroes of the Shell had the place to themselves. It was an exhilarating prospect.

"What shall we do?" asked French, of the New House. The New House boys had been told the secret of the trick played on the German in the School House, and they knew just how matters stood. "We've got half an hour!"

"Touch, is a jolly good game," said Tom. "Let's begin. It's very likely some beastly master will come shoving his nose into the room soon—"

"Ahem!"

Tom gave a jump as he heard that "ahem."

Mr. Railton had opened the door of the Form-room, and was looking in. Tom turned red. But Mr. Railton was not the man to take note of words accidentally overheard. He appeared to be unconscious of Tom Merry's beautiful blush.

"Why are you boys not in your seats?" he asked. "What does this noise from your room mean? Which master is taking you this morning?"

"Herr Schneider, sir," said Manners.

"Has he left you alone?"

"He hasn't come down yet, sir."

"Dear me! That is very peculiar. Does he know the time? Has he been called?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is very strange. Merry, I leave you in charge of the class, to keep quiet and order, while I go and speak to Herr Schneider." And Mr. Railton closed the door.

The uproar re-commenced the moment he was gone.

"Here, I say; that won't do!" exclaimed Tom. "Didn't you hear what Railton said? He's left me to keep order."

French sniffed contemptuously.

"Catch us taking any notice of you, you School House bouncer!" he exclaimed. "Think we're going to let you put on the airs of a giddy prefect? Yah!"

"Yah!" howled all the boys of the Shell, who belonged to the New House.

Tom's eyes flashed with the light of battle.

"Shut up!" he bawled, stamping his foot. "Mr. Railton put me upon my honour to keep order, and I'm going to do it, or bust something."

"Then the only question is, what will you bust?" exclaimed French.

"Ha, ha, ha! Down with Tom Merry and order!" howled Jimson.

"When you want a prefect, or a giddy monitor," said French, "see that you get the genuine article. No half-baked juniors need apply. Beware of imitations!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry; "I tell you you've got to keep order. French, are you going to keep order, or are you not?"

"I are not," said French—"I mean, I am not! Not by long chalks!"

"Then I shall have to teach you a lesson!"

"I'm ready to be taught!"

"Order!" bawled Manners. "Don't you New House cads dare to make a row when we tell you to be quiet! Order!"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Yah!"

Tom Merry wasted no more time in words. He was determined to have order, if he had to create endless disorder to get it. He went for French, and French, nothing loth, closed with him, and they grappled and staggered about in deadly conflict.

Manners seized Jimson at the same moment, and there was soon a general row going on.

Tom Merry soon had French on the floor, and sat across his chest. Manners jambed Jimson down on a form and sat astride of him.

"Lemme gerrup!" roared French.

"Get off me chest!" gasped Jimson.

"Are you going to keep order?"

"No!" roared French.

"Are you going to be quiet?"

"No!"

"Then you don't get up!"

French struggled desperately, and Tom was overturned. But he grappled valiantly with his adversary, and rolled on the floor with him—sometimes one uppermost, and sometimes the other. In the wild excitement of the moment nobody heard the door re-open, or noticed that Mr. Railton was looking in in profound amazement.

"Boys, boys, boys!"

The uproar died away. Tom had succeeded in getting his adversary under, and was sitting on him again. He was covered with dust, his collar was torn off, and he was gasping for breath. But he was victorious.

"Merry!"

Tom looked up, breathless but cheerful.

"Yes, sir?"

"Merry, what are you doing?"

"Keeping order, sir," said Tom cheerfully.

"Keeping order, Merry! So that is how you keep order, is it?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

Mr. Railton coughed violently.

"Merry, let French get up instantly! Go to your seats at once!"

There was a twinkle in the master's eyes, but he would not laugh. The Shell, looking decidedly crumpled and dusty, went to their seats.

"This is a most disgraceful scene!" said Mr. Railton.

"I trust that you are all properly ashamed of yourselves. Boys, I think Herr Schneider must be ill. He answered me in a strangely excited way when I knocked at his door.

What are you laughing at, Merry?"

"Was I laughing, sir?"

"Yes, you were. You will take fifty lines!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"I shall send in a prefect to take charge of this class," said Mr. Railton severely. "The German lesson will be missed this morning, but you shall have Latin instead. Mind, if there is any further disorder, I shall inflict an imposition on the whole Form."

And he went out. A couple of minutes later Kildare came in, and found the Shell looking very demure. The captain of St. Jim's glanced over the Form with a twinkle in his eyes. The signs of the late conflict were very evident.

"I am going to take you in Latin, boys," said Kildare. "There is still a quarter of an hour left of your lesson. I suppose you don't know anything about this peculiar affair of Herr Schneider, Merry?"

"I, Kildare," exclaimed Tom reproachfully—"I? Oh, Kildare!"

Kildare laughed.

"Well, never mind; let us get to work!"

Meanwhile, Mr. Railton had sought the master of the New House. Mr. Kidd left the Fifth Form to the French master, while he came out and consulted with Mr. Railton about the exceedingly peculiar conduct of Herr Schneider.

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Railton. "I tapped at Herr Schneider's door, and he began to shout at me in a most outrageous manner. He actually used threats of physical violence. It is most peculiar."

"Strange, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Kidd. "I should hardly think that he can have been drinking. He is usually a most temperate man. There must be something wrong."

"The door was locked, or I should have been tempted to enter and see for myself if anything was wrong," said Mr. Railton. "He will not listen to reason. It would be a serious step to force the door, but I am really very uneasy."

Mr. Kidd wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Ah, here is Mr. Dodds! Let us ask his advice."

The curate willingly stopped and listened to the strange matter. A twinkle came into his eyes as he listened.

"You seem to regard it in a humorous light, Mr. Dodds," said the housemaster.

Mr. Dodds smiled.

"I fancy it is some little joke of the boys," he replied. "Let us all go up and speak to Herr Schneider, and if he cannot be induced to open his door, we can then try his window."

"Yes; that is a good idea."

The three went up to the German master's room. Mr. Dodds knocked at the door. A formidable roar came from within. Then a boot crashed on the door.

"Dear me!" ejaculated the big curate. "He seems quite excited."

"Go away!"

"My dear Herr Schneider—"

"Himmel! Go away!"

"It is getting quite late, and—"

"Ach! Peast! Prute! Go away!"

The curate turned to the two masters.

"It is evidently useless to talk to him," he remarked.

Mr. Kidd knocked at the door.

"My dear Herr Schneider, are you aware that it is late—"

"Go away! I come to keeck you!"

Mr. Kidd coloured a little.

"This is very strange!" he exclaimed. "He seems to be too excited to recognise my voice. It is exceedingly strange!"

"Let us try his window. There is certainly something wrong. If he is delirious he ought to be secured," said Mr. Railton. "He may do himself some harm."

The curate nodded, still with a twinkle in his eye.

"Let us borrow the porter's long ladder," he said. "It is at hand. I have just seen Taggles in a high state of

indignation about that ladder. Someone blocked up his door with it in the night, and he was a prisoner for a long time this morning. He had to get out of a window to take it away."

"Ha, ha! Let us go!"

"It looks as if somebody had the ladder out in the night," said Mr. Dodds. "Perhaps we are not the first to pay a visit to Herr Schneider's window. As a matter of fact, I have a suspicion of what has been done; but we shall soon see."

It did not take long to get the ladder and plant it against Herr Schneider's window-sill.

"If he is delicious, it may be dangerous to approach the window," Mr. Kidd remarked.

Mr. Dodds shook his head.

"As I have said, I think it is a joke. With your permission, I will mount first."

While Mr. Railton and Mr. Kidd hesitated to allow the curate the dangerous task, Mr. Dodds settled the matter by running lightly up the ladder. The two masters watched him anxiously from below. A roar of laughter came to their ears.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whatever is the matter, Mr. Dodds?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The curate was clinging to the window-sill, and laughing like one possessed. The two masters ascended the ladder quickly, one after another, and as they came high enough to see the window, they, too, shouted with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The black cloth, covering the German master's window and shutting out every gleam of daylight from the room, explained everything.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three men looked at each other, and laughed till they could hardly hold on the ladder. The misapprehension under which Herr Schneider laboured was explained now.

"It is some joke of the juniors," gasped Mr. Kidd. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I dare say Tom Merry could tell us how that black cloth came there," said Mr. Railton. "My word! Herr Schneider evidently does not know that it is daylight yet. Ha, ha, ha!"

"We had better remove it," said Mr. Dodds.

He tapped on the window, the tap muffled by the thick cloth.

"My dear Herr Schneider—"

Crash!

"Hold on!" yelled the curate.

He dodged his head, and the two masters ducked and held on. A boot came crashing through the window, smashing a couple of panes to atoms.

The German was evidently in a state of frantic fury. He thought that his persecutors were coming from a new direction, and he had hurled the boot in a paroxysm of rage.

The impact dragged the black cloth down, of course, and the bright sunlight streamed into the darkened room.

The cloth hung by one corner, and the boot dropped on the sill. Mr. Dodds was faint with laughter. The daylight streaming into the room in a golden blaze made the German aware that the night had indeed departed, and he sat up in bed, blinking with amazement. Mr. Dodds ventured to look in.

"My dear Herr Schneider—"

"Ach!" gasped the German. He sat with the bedclothes round him, staring towards the window, blinking in the blaze of sunlight. "Himmel! Der teufel! Vat is all dis?"

Mr. Dodds smiled.

"We thought you had overslept yourself, Herr Schneider."

"Ach! I understand not. Vun moment it is dark, and te next it is taylight. I tink I am dreaming tat I am in te tropics!"

"Ha, ha, ha! The fact is, Herr Schneider—"

"Am I dreaming? Are you vun nightmare?"

"That's complimentary!" murmured Mr. Kidd.

"Not at all, my dear Herr. The fact is, some humorous person fastened a black cloth over your window, which led you to imagine that it was still night."

"Ach, himmel!"

"It is ten o'clock now."

"Himmel! Ach!"

"I am sorry—ha, ha!—but—ha, ha!—"

"I will get up mit meinsel!" exclaimed Herr Schneider, jumping out of bed. "And ten I vill find out te shoker, and he shall smart for his leedle shoke!"

Mr. Dodds descended the ladder. He hung to it weakly while he laughed.

"I am afraid the Herr is on the warpath," he gasped. "There is a warm time coming for somebody, and I fancy it is Tom Merry. Ha, ha, ha!"

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Very Peculiar Cricket Match.

ALL St. Jim's laughed and cackled over the adventure of the German master. Herr Schneider was furious, and at first he breathed nothing but wrath and vengeance. Nothing would satisfy him but a rigorous search for the culprit, and a punishment inflicted on the whole School House till he should be found. The juniors were grim with dismay when there was a whisper that all half-holidays would be stopped until the delinquent was discovered. That meant the postponement of the Greyfriars Juniors match.

Tom Merry would have confessed at once, but as he was one of the best cricketers on the St. Jim's side, that would not have helped matters much, as the side would have had to play without him. Already there had been one bit of ill-luck for the side. Digby had been called away from the school by the illness of a relation, and his place in the second eleven was not yet filled.

"What's to be done?" asked Manners glumly.

Tom Merry had been thinking it out, and a brilliant idea had flashed into his mind.

"Mr. Dodds!"

"What about the Dodds-bird?"

"We'll ask him to intercede for us."

"What! After the way we've ragged him?"

"Certainly. He's a jolly good sort, and he'll do it like a bird. We've left off ragging him now, haven't we? Anyway, it's a chance."

And Tom Merry sought the curate without delay.

Mr. Dodds had become very popular at St. Jim's during his brief stay there, especially, as it happened, with the German master. He read Goethe and Schiller with Herr Schneider, and delighted the German by talking to him in his own language. He listened to Tom with a twinkle in his eye when the scamp made his appeal.

"H'm!" he said. "You want me to use my influence with Herr Schneider, Merry, do you?"

"Yes, sir. You see, if we're detained on half-holidays we sha'n't be able to meet Greyfriars. They may think we're funking the match."

"That would be too bad. But if the culprits would confess—"

"He would be detained, sir, and he's one of the best cricketers on our side, sir," said Tom modestly.

Mr. Dodds laughed.

"Very well," he said. "I will see what I can do for you."

Tom Merry waited anxiously for the decision. What Mr. Dodds said to the German he never knew, but it was probably a long task to talk him over. But when the scamp of the Shell saw the curate again, the latter assured him that it was all right.

"Herr Schneider is going to look over the occurrence, Merry," said Mr. Dodds, "and I hope this will be a warning to you."

"Certainly, sir," said Tom. "I'll never play a trick on Herr Schneider again just before an important cricket-fixture, if that's what you mean, sir."

Mr. Dodds laughed heartily.

"I didn't mean exactly that, Tom. Never mind. You are excused, so the cricket-match will come off all right. I hope it will be a good one."

"Sure to be, sir. Greyfriars are awfully strong this year, we hear, but we're going to give them a good tussle for their money, anyway."

"Have you settled on your captain yet?"

"No-no. You see, that bouncer Blake is backed by all the Fourth, but, of course, a fellow in the Shell ought to captain the juniors. Neither of us is going to give in."

"Then you will be in rather a fix on Wednesday afternoon?"

Tom scratched his curly head thoughtfully.

"Ye-es, I suppose so, sir."

"May I make a suggestion?"

"I should be only too glad, sir," said Tom, brightening up. "You will never come to an agreement with Blake. But why not settle the matter by neither of you captaining. There's only one New House candidate for the post."

"Old Figgins."

"That would settle the difficulty nicely."

"Would it, though!" muttered Tom, in dismay. "A New House bouncer captain! Oh, sir!"

"It would settle the knotty point."

"Ye-es, I suppose it would," said Tom. "I'll speak to Blake about it."

He spoke to Blake the same day, and after much stress of thought, it was decided to adopt Mr. Dodds's suggestion. There was no settling the rivals' claims of the two School House leaders, so the bone of contention was passed over to Figgins. Figgins, to do him justice, was quite willing to take it.

The thoughts of the juniors of both houses were now given to the approaching match. The exploits of the First Eleven, captained by Kildare, sunk into insignificance beside it, in the minds of the juniors. The Second Eleven was all the Shell and the Fourth talked or thought about in these days.

On Tuesday, the day before the match, Figgins came over from the New House with a letter in his hand with the Greyfriars postmark on it.

Tom Merry's study was empty, so he went to Study No. 6, where he discovered Tom and Manners at tea with Blake and his chums. The friendliness brought about by the near approach of the great match was in full blossom now. As Figgins came in, both Tom and Blake greeted him cordially. Tom dragged up a box for him to sit on, all available chairs being occupied, and Blake emptied the hot-water jug in the teapot to make a new supply for the New House chief.

"Hallo, Figgy! Any news?"

"A letter from Greyfriars," said Figgins.

"Christopher Columbus! They don't want to put off the match, surely?"

"No, but one of their fellows is ill, and they want to play a senior. But I'll read you the letter."

And Figgins read out the epistle from the Greyfriars Junior captain.

"Dear Figgins,—One of our fellows has gone off his form, and is laid up with a bad cold the silly ass caught by staying in the water too long. We want to play another chap. Now, he's our very best bowler, and we haven't anything at all like his form in the Lower Forms here. Have you any objection to our playing a Fifth-Form fellow? Of course, he's a senior, and we're a junior team, but he's not very big for his age, and he's not much above the form of the man we've lost. If you don't like the idea, say so out plain, and we'll postpone the match. You wouldn't like us to meet you a man short; you wouldn't get any glory out of licking us if we were below strength. Ask your captain and committee about it, and let me know to-night, or to-morrow morning.

"Yours faithfully,

"GEORGE YORKE."

"He's written to me as secretary," explained Figgins. Figgins was secretary of the junior cricket club before he suddenly jumped into eminence as captain. "I suppose we can't say anything? We shall have to agree. We can't put the match off very well. All our other dates are pretty well filled up. And if the match is cut, they'll think we were awfully afraid of their beastly senior."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"That's so," he said. "We shall have to meet them, but it's rotten. As a matter of fact, I know that Greyfriars Juniors are mostly fellows who are very near passing up into the Fifth, and they're above our size and age, anyway. With a full-blown senior in their ranks they will very likely walk over us."

"We'll give 'em a good tussle!" exclaimed Blake. "Anyway, we'd better agree. Write and say we don't care a rap, Figgy, and they can play their giddy senior, and then go and eat coke!"

And Figgins wrote it, in rather more polite language.

The next day dawned bright and fair. When morning lessons were over, the young cricketers gave all their thoughts to the coming match.

Greyfriars were expected early in the afternoon, and Figgins, as captain, prepared to receive them with due honour. It was fine weather for cricket, but the Second Eleven were in a serious mood. All they had heard lately of the Greyfriars Second had confirmed them in the opinion that they had taken on a large order. The age and weight of the 'Friars were above them, and now the new addition of a senior to the enemy's ranks made the odds still greater against the Saints.

Tom Merry was thinking over that when he came upon Mr. Dodds in the quadrangle. The big young man gave him a kind nod.

"What time is the match, Merry?" he asked.

"The stumps are pitched at two, sir," said Tom, "Greyfriars may be here any moment now."

"You are feeling pretty confident, of course?"

"Well, I don't know, sir. Greyfriars are older than we are, most of them close to their remove into the Fifth, and they're playing a senior because they're a man short. We couldn't very well refuse. The worst of it is, that we're a man short, too. Digby's uncle is ill, and Dig's had to go, and we've got nothing better than Percy Mellish to play in his place. It's rather rotten for us. Dig was one of our best bowlers."

Then Tom gave a jump.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?" asked the curate, looking at him in amazement.

Tom's eyes were flashing. A new and brilliant idea had evidently darted into his brain.

"You are coming to see the match, sir?" he gasped.

"Yes, certainly."

"Will you stay off the ground, sir, till I come and fetch you? It's important. I'll explain when I come."

And Tom Merry darted off, leaving Mr. Dodds in a state of amazement. Tom burst into the dressing-tent on the junior ground. He collared Blake and Figgins, who were talking just inside, and waltzed them round in a kind of war-dance.

"Hear me smile!" he shouted. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's mad!" gasped Figgins. "Collar him!"

Figgins and Blake speedily collared him. He was jammed upon a seat and held there.

"Now, what's the matter, you howling lunatic?"

"I've got an idea!"

"Yah! Rats! We know your ideas! Has it got anything to do with a curate?"

"Yes!"

"Then you can boil it! Don't tell us anything about it!"

"Look here! Listen! It's ripping—simply ripping!" gasped Tom. "Listen! Greyfriars are playing a substitute, ain't they?"

"They are. What about that?"

"Well, we're a man short—"

"Yes, poor old Dig."

"You were thinking of playing Percy Mellish, Figgy?"

"Yes, he's about the best we've got."

"I can suggest a better."

"Who?"

"Mr. Dodds!"

For a moment Figgins and Blake remained silent, struck with amazement. Then they hugged each other in ecstasy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Ho, ho, ho!" bawled Blake.

"We'll do it!"

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries came into the tent.

"Hallo! What are all you geese cackling about? Here's the Greyfriars brake coming in at the gates!"

"Mum's the word!" gasped Figgins. "Mind, not a whisper. We've got to ask Yorke. Keep the curate off the grass till he's agreed."

"I've seen to that."

Figgins went out to meet the Greyfriars contingent. He tried to recover his composure. Tom Merry explained to Herries, and he went off into shrieks. The idea of planting a cricketer like Mr. Dodds on the unsuspecting 'Friars was too funny for words.

Figgins greeted his visitors very cordially. Yorke was grinning as he shook hands with the St. Jim's captain. He pointed to a tall fellow, who towered head and shoulders above the rest of the Greyfriars cricketers.

"That's Ponsonby," he said. "I forgot to mention that it was the Upper Fifth he was in."

"Ah!" said Figgins. "He's the chap who's not big for his age. He must have a jolly lot of age, then. Never mind. We don't. How do you do, Ponsonby?"

"I see you've got the stumps pitched," said Yorke.

"Yes; we're all ready. By the way, I've got something I want to say to you. One of our chaps has been called away, a relation ill, you know. We want to play a substitute."

"A senior?" asked Yorke, suspicious at once.

"Oh, no; it's not a fellow belonging to St. Jim's at all," said Figgins. "As a matter of fact—don't laugh—he's a curate."

"A curate! Ha, ha!"

"He's a jolly decent sort," said Figgins. "The fact is, we only thought of him at the last moment, and—"

"My dear Figgins, play him if you like. Play him! We'll show him some cricket! We'll run him off his little legs. Ha, ha! A curate! My hat!"

"I don't want to take any advantage of you," said Figgins.

"He's twenty-three years old, Yorke, and—"

"My dear chap, he can be fifty-three if he likes."

"You've no objection, then?"

"Objection! Bless your heart, none in the world. Play him. We shall enjoy it. Play him, I say! Play him!"

"Thanks awfully," said Figgins. "Here's your quarters. I say, Merry, will you cut off and ask Mr. Dodds. Tell him we want him to keep his promise."

"Right-oh!"

And Tom Merry was off like a shot.

He found the curate where he had left him, sitting under an elm-tree with a book. Mr. Dodds looked up with a smile.

"If you please, sir," gasped Tom Merry.

"Well, what can I do for you, Tom?"

"You remember what you said the other day, sir, after

the—the cricket." Tom coloured under Mr. Dodds's humorous glance. "You said that you'd always play for us, sir, if ever we wanted somebody to make up a team."

"Yes," Mr. Dodds laughed. "Do you want somebody now?"

"Yes, sir. You know I told you Dig was out of it. Figgins wants you to play. He's sent me to ask you. Greyfriars have agreed."

Mr. Dodds looked serious, though his eyes were twinkling.

"Do Greyfriars know all about me, Tom?"

"Well, to some extent," said Tom cautiously. "We've told them you're a curate, sir, and they're quite willing that you should play."

"But perhaps they have formed an erroneous idea—as certain young gentlemen belonging to St. Jim's did, when they went to a railway-station to meet a little, skinny, weedy chap with sandy hair and spectacles," said Mr. Dodds.

Tom blushed to the roots of his hair.

"Oh, sir! I—I—I—"

"Never mind," laughed Mr. Dodds. "I don't bear any malice, Tom, and I am sure you think better of me now than you did."

"Oh, yes, sir! We all like you. Honest."

"I am glad to hear you say so. But about this game—"

"Greyfriars have palmed off a great, big senior on us, sir," said Tom eagerly. "We sha'n't have an earthly. If you'll play for us it will be a leaf out of their own book, sir. And—and you said you would."

Mr. Dodds rose.

"If I said I would I suppose I must, Tom."

"Shall I tell Figgins you're coming, sir?" asked the delighted Tom.

"Certainly."

Tom cut off, leaving Mr. Dodds laughing heartily. The big young man went into the house to get his flannels. He had had them sent down, as he had played a good deal of cricket on Big Side while he stayed at the school.

Greyfriars juniors were still in their quarters in the dressing-tent when Tom returned.

"He's coming, Figgy," panted Tom.

"Good!" grinned Figgy. "Oh, my hat, what a surprise for Greyfriars!"

A few minutes later the curate arrived, and entered the home quarters. Figgins went out to toss with Yorke for choice of innings. The Greyfriar's fellows were coming out in spotless white.

Greyfriars had brought an umpire with them, and Kildare had offered his services. The captain of St. Jim's was smiling. He knew the little joke of the Saints.

Yorke won the toss.

"We shall bat first," he said. "I say—ha, ha!—put your curate on to bowl, will you?"

"Certainly," said Figgins.

The St. Jim's Second came out to field. The Friars started at the sight of the towering form of the flaxen-haired giant in flannels.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Yorke uneasily. "Who's your giddy Goliath?"

"That?" said Figgins carelessly. "Oh, that's the curate."

"The—the what?"

"The curate. Our substitute."

"You don't mean to say you're going to play that Broddingnagian?" gasped Yorke.

"Certainly."

"But—but—but—"

"He's not very big for his age," said Figgins, "any more than your Ponsonby is. Ha, ha!"

"Done!" growled Yorke. "Oh, my hat!"

But he had consented to the substitute, and he had only received tit for tat. Figgins led his men out to field, and tossed the ball to Mr. Dodds.

Greyfriars opened their innings with Yorke and Ponsonby. Mr. Dodds went on to bowl against Yorke's wicket.

Yorke took his middle, and looked out for the ball. After all, skill does not go by size, and he thought he might be able to handle the curate all right.

He looked for the ball. He might as well have looked for a lightning flash. The curate's powerful arm went up and over, and the ball came down like a four-point-seven shell.

Crash!

Yorke stared at his wrecked wicket.

"How's that?" yelled Blake.

"Out!" said Kildare.

Yorke carried out his bat. Some fellows round the field asked him the price of duck's eggs on the market as he went to hide his blushes in the dressing-tent.

The fame of that peculiar cricket match was already all over St. Jim's, and boys of all Forms were gathered in scores to watch it. The seniors had all left their own ground to come and see the discomfiture of Greyfriars.

Another Greyfriars batsman came in, and Mr. Dodds delivered his second ball.

Crash!

The middle stump was out of the ground.

"How's that?" shrieked Figgins.

It was out. A third batsman came in, only to meet with a similar fate, and the field rang with a cheer for the "hat trick." But the deceiving Mr. Dodds was not finished yet. A fourth wicket fell to the fourth ball of the over, a fifth to the fifth ball, and a sixth to the sixth ball. Six wickets down for the first over, and not a single run scored!

The crowd round the ropes were shrieking with laughter.

Greyfriars looked at each other in a sickly way.

Their big Ponsonby was standing idly at his wicket, not having had occasion to move. Six wickets were down, and the field crossed over. Tom Merry took the ball.

Tom was a demon bowler, and he put out his best against Ponsonby. Ponsonby stopped three balls in succession, and then hit out.

Click!

It was the sound of hard leather meeting the palm of a hand.

"Well caught!" yelled Blake.

The ball was in Mr. Dodds's hand. He was fielding at point.

"Out!" said the umpire.

And Ponsonby carried out his bat.

Another man came in, looking grim and blue. He lived through the over, but that was all. Then the field crossed again, and Figgins put Mr. Dodds on to bowl once more.

"My word!" groaned Yorke, as a wicket fell to the first ball. "Did you ever see a bowler like that off a county ground? Talk about the hat trick! That fellow wants a whole shopful of hats!"

Clack again! Another wicket down!

"Last man in!" giggled Blake. He was laughing so much that he wasn't much use in the field; but that didn't matter, as no fielding was required. The bowler did all that was necessary.

Last man in remained in about ten seconds. Then he stared at a wrecked wicket, and went out again. Greyfriars were all down for 0.

The big round 0 on the score-board almost brought the tears to the eyes of Yorke. The spectators were crammed a dozen deep round the ground, and all of them were simply screaming. There was only one grave face on the home side, and that was the curate's. He was looking quite serious.

The innings had lasted a quarter of an hour. It was now St. Jim's turn, and Yorke led his men out to field. He wondered whether that dreadful curate batted as well as he bowled. He was soon to see.

Figgins opened the innings with Mr. Dodds. He had the longest legs among St. Jim's juniors, and that was why he went in first. Yorke put Ponsonby on to bowl, and Ponsonby, who fancied himself as a bowler, sent down a ball to Mr. Dodds that had often baffled good batsmen at Greyfriars. It did not seem to trouble Mr. Dodds. He sent it over the boundary with a flick of the bat.

So with the rest of the over. Without any apparent effort, Mr. Dodds flicked each ball away to the boundary, and scored twenty-four for the over without the trouble of stirring from the crease. Then Figgins had the bowling. He contented himself with taking a single for the first ball, so as to give the bowling to Mr. Dodds again. Five successive boundaries followed.

"My horrid hat!" groaned Yorke. "How's this going to end?"

It ended when the St. Jim's score, in a quarter of an hour, had reached 100. Figgins, after consulting with Mr. Dodds, declared.

Then the unhappy Friars went on for their second innings. It was a repetition of the first. Every batsman was dismissed for a duck's egg by the terrible Dodds, and the Friars were all down in ten minutes. But nobody cheered this feat. Everybody was doubled up with laughter, and the Friars themselves had entered into the spirit of the thing, and they laughed good-humouredly as they came and went from the wickets.

The whole match had lasted less than three-quarters of an hour. St. Jim's Juniors had won by an innings and 100 runs, and the whole school was shrieking with merriment over the result.

# DAILY MAIL

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"Hurrah!" shouted Tom Merry. "Three cheers for Dodds!"

They cheered the curate. There was a rash proposal to shoulder him round the quadrangle, but this wasn't acted upon, somebody pointing out in time that it would require a steam derrick to get the giant on to their shoulders. They cheered and laughed, and laughed and cheered, and even the badly beaten Friars joined in both. It was the funniest cricket match that had ever been played on the St. Jim's ground, and one that the boys chuckled over for many a day.

Greyfriars Juniors were entertained to tea, and Mr. Dodds presided, and made them all very comfortable. When they departed, Yorke declared he had never spent such a jolly time, and they all said the same. They had come to con-

quer, and they went away conquered, but they all liked Mr. Dodds.

And shortly afterwards came the time when the curate's stay at St. Jim's terminated. The boys were sorry to see the last of him. He had confounded all their anticipations, and become the most popular fellow in the school while he stayed there.

"I hope you'll come again, sir," said Tom Merry. "We're sorry we rotted you like that, sir, when you first came. We won't do it next time." And as the hack rolled away with Mr. Dodds in it, Tom Merry shouted: "Three cheers for Mr. Dodds. Now then!"

And the boys of St. Jim's gave them with a will.

THE END.

(Our next issue will contain a splendid School and Detective Tale. Order in advance.)



# Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

READ  
THIS  
FIRST

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers. In return for spiteful tricks that Jardon and Symes play on the three chums, Bob one night pours a strange lotion into the bullies' water-jug. As Bob does not want to be found out, the next morning he pours the water that Jardon and Symes have used out of the dormitory window. Unfortunately, Parker is underneath, and he gives a awful yell, and then threatens to report Bob. Jardon and Symes then appear in a jet black condition, and accuse Rex of the trick. He is sent for by the Head, and assures him that he did not play the trick. Bob and his comrades intend to stay at an old

loft for a time, to hide from the bullies, and Bob gets in a large stock of provisions, which must have cost him a lot of money. Bob states that if ever they want any money he can always let them have it straight away. (Now go on with the story.)

## The Barn on Fire.

Rex and Jim asked no further questions, although they were considerably surprised, because they knew perfectly well that the only relative Bob possessed in the world was a stepfather, who hated him, and he always told them that they were the only friends he had in the world.

The afternoon passed away pleasantly enough, but just as they were preparing their tea they heard voices below, and looking through the trap-door they saw Jardon, Symes, and Perkins enter the barn.

"You can't come up here, Jardon," growled Bob, sweeping an armful of chaff and dust on his head, as he commenced to ascend the ladder. "Your face is in far too filthy a state for respectable company. Go into the pigsty and associate with the other swine."

"Oh, I say!" cried Perkins. "Wouldn't I give him something for that cheek!"

"I'll half murder the little demon," snarled Jardon, who received a second shower of dust on his head. Then, as that head came into the loft, Bob commenced to punch it, after which he shut the trapdoor down with a bang, and stood on it.

The most unearthly yells burst forth the next moment.

"Come and help stand on the trapdoor, old chaps!" bawled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jim. "I think Jardon will find you heavy enough! Ha, ha, ha! You've got his fingers under it!"

"So I have!" exclaimed Bob, calmly. "Who would have thought that, now!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He would. I feel quite certain that he not only thought it, but was positive on the point. Oh my eyes! If you haven't hurt his fingers, I shall be surprised."

"Get your fingers out of the road, you stupid, black-faced creature!" growled Bob, raising the trapdoor. "How could you have been such an utter idiot as to go and shove your fingers under the thing. It is a marvel that you did not hurt them!"

"Oh, you demon!" howled Jardon.

"Has he hurt you?" inquired Symes.

"You stupid blockhead!" snarled Jardon. "Of course he has hurt me! The little brute has slammed the door on my fingers, and stood on it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jim. "It sounds as though it had

hurt them, but they will get all right with a little time and patience. Go away! We don't want you here, and what is more, we don't mean to have you. Scoot!"

"Will I?" yelled Jardon, who was far too furious to consider discretion. "I'll break every bone—"

"Here, take your stupid head away, or else I'll punch it like that, and that. What! You will come! Then I'm going to shut the trapdoor again."

Bob did so. He brought it down with a sounding crack on the top of the bully's head, and it was lucky for Jardon that his fingers were not beneath it again, for this time all the chums stood on the trapdoor, and it would have been an utter impossibility to shift it from below.

Jardon soon discovered this fact, and they heard him descend the ladder. But they also heard his voice below, and his threat that he would remain there until the chums came down, if he stopped all night.

"That's a bit awkward," observed Bob. "All the same, we will have our tea. Just cart the things this way, old chaps, while I sit on the trapdoor. It won't do to let those bullies come up, 'cause they would be sure to hurt us, and there isn't the slightest sense in all getting hurt."

Rex and Jim quite agreed with this opinion, but they were exercised in their minds as to how it would be possible to escape from the place, provided Jardon carried out his threat, which seemed to be only too probable.

However, this peril did not prevent their having an excellent tea, and as Bob pointed out, they would be able to remain up there for a longer period than the bullies would be able to remain below, because they had plenty to eat and drink.

"There's nothing to prevent us stopping here for, say, a day," observed Bob. "We should certainly be missed, but I don't see that we could get into much of a row. However, we shall soon see whether Jardon is in earnest."

And when a couple of hours had passed by, and the bullies showed no signs of going, the chums came to the conclusion that they were very much in earnest.

Now, Jardon and Symes, in the barn beneath the loft, were just about as savage as they could be; but each time they raised the trapdoor they were either assailed with showers of dust, or else they received severe cracks on the head from one of the chums. And, after one attempt to gain an entry to the loft, Jardon came down yelling and coughing, for he had

STORMPOINT (continued).

received about half a peck of dust, and a fearful crack on the head as an extra.

"Oh, I say," cried Perkins, who, although he wanted to have revenge on the chums, felt delighted that the bully had got more than he required, "I wouldn't stand that, Jardon! I'd punch their heads. Have they hurt you?"

It was a ridiculous question, for Perkins must have heard the crack. Jardon was so furious that he turned his rage on the young sneak.

"Hurt me!" he snarled. "Of course not. Do you think it would hurt you if I were to give you a blow over the head like that?"

"Wooohoo!" yelled Perkins, as the bully gave him a blow with his fist and knocked him head-over-heels. "Oh, I say, Jardon, that's beastly mean, after I found out for you where they were! Oh, I'm injured, and all for nothing! I do call that beastly mean—in fact, it's sinful, after the kind manner in which I have treated you. I believe my neck is broken."

"It will be directly, if you make that row, you little idiot!" snarled Jardon. "What do you want to ask me those foolish questions for?"

"It was only out of kindness."

"Well, that crack on the head was only out of kindness. It was intended to teach you not to ask stupid questions."

"Well, another time I would rather be taught sort of viva voce, or whatever you call it. I was quite sorry when you got that clump on the head; but my head is not thick enough to receive blows like you gave me. But I'll tell you how we can make 'em come down. Let's smoke 'em out. If you can only force that trapdoor open, I can jab 'em with this pitchfork if they try to shut it down again. Look here, we can shove the flap up with this pole. You shove it up, and I will be ready to jab."

"I say," exclaimed Symes, who saw danger if Perkins got "jabbing" at the chums with that pitchfork—he was an excitable lad, and might not be very particular where he jabbed—"you had better be careful what you are up to, because if you get prodding them with that thing you might hurt them."

"Well, that's exactly what I want to do," said Perkins. "I sha'n't prod at their faces, you know; only their hands, or somewhere it won't hurt them to speak of. But let's make up the fire first."

There was plenty of material for the purpose, and as the floor was of brick there was no particular danger of setting the barn on fire.

They got the fire alight all right, and clouds of smoke ascended through the open trapdoor. Rex, who tried to see what was happening, got an awful prod in the arm with the pitchfork, and after that none of the chums made any attempt to close the trapdoor.

"He, he, he!" grinned Perkins. "They will be smoked as dry as kippered herrings. Just look at those clouds going up. Don't let it burn too bright. Smoke is what we want."

"And it's what we will get," said Jardon. "Here's a tin of paint. I'll slop that on. It will make a fearful stench, and if it doesn't smoke them out I shall be surprised."

"He was surprised the next moment; for, although he had got a large paint-tin, there was more turpentine than paint in it now, and as he turned it upside-down on the bonfire a huge sheet of flame burst round him. It caused him to drop the tin on the fire, and rush away for safety."

"He, he, he!" Oh, I say, that's right; it's smoking a treat now! Never mind if you are a bit burnt, Jardon. You will have your revenge when those chaps come down."

"Fury! The place will be on fire," gasped Symes. "I say, you youngsters, come down!"

"He, he, he! They will find it hot work, too," grinned Perkins.

He did not quite realise the peril, but Jardon and Symes did. They made frantic efforts to extinguish the flames; but the side of the barn had already caught, and the flames were spreading with alarming rapidity.

"Come down, you young vagabonds!" roared Jardon, when he had convinced himself that they would never be able to extinguish the fire."

"They will get burnt if they do!" gasped Perkins.

"Fury! They will get burnt if they don't!" exclaimed Symes. "I believe the fumes have stifled them. I say, Jardon, whatever is to be done?"

"I—I don't know," gasped the bully. "It was a mad thing of Perkins to have lighted the fire. Look here, the whole place is in flames! It is impossible to rescue them now. The only thing for us to do is to get away. Look here Perkins, you had better know nothing about this affair. It is not at all unlikely that they set fire to the barn themselves. You know they had a fire up there."

"Oh, I say, I'm sure it was us—"

"You mad young villain, do you want to be hanged?"

"No. Oh, rather not! I believe hanging hurts frightfully, and—"

"I believe you are not in your sane senses. Let's get away at once. You can all come into my study, and we ought to be able to get there without anyone seeing us. I feel sure they set the barn alight."

"I feel quite positive they didn't," groaned Perkins, who did not see Jardon's point.

"Oh, come this way!" groaned the bully. "You make me feel sick!"

"I'll bet you don't feel as sick as I do," groaned Perkins. "I feel as though I should start blubbing. The doctor is sure to find it out."

There was no doubt about this, for the barn was now blazing away merrily. Jardon led the way to his study, then locked the door.

"Look here, Perkins," he exclaimed, in a whisper, "you quite understand that what has happened, although a pure accident, was entirely the fault of those youngsters, and if— if anything has happened to them, we have nothing to do with it. It will be found that they have a stove in the barn. It is absolutely certain that it set the place on fire. We have never left this study. You came here to clean it up. I'm going to give you sixpence for the work. Start tidying it—quick! It was silly of him to have poured that stuff on the fire, wasn't it, Symes?"

"Stupid thing," assented Symes. "I told him so at the time, but was not quick enough to stop him."

"Oh, I say, Jardon, it was you who did it!"

"Did you ever hear such an abominable falsehood?" exclaimed Jardon. "However, it does not matter. Symes knows perfectly well that you set the place on fire."

"Of course I do! He will say next that he didn't light the fire. Still, I have you as a witness; and, as a matter of fact, it is quite immaterial, because there is not a doubt that the young idiots set fire to the place themselves. We three know nothing about it; in fact, we shall never be asked the question. Hush!"

There was a knock at the door, and Jardon's face paled; but he quickly regained his composure, and opened the door, to find Porker there.

"Have you seen anything of them young varmint's?"

"What, Rex and his gang? No, I haven't seen them, for the simple reason that we have been here all the afternoon and evening."

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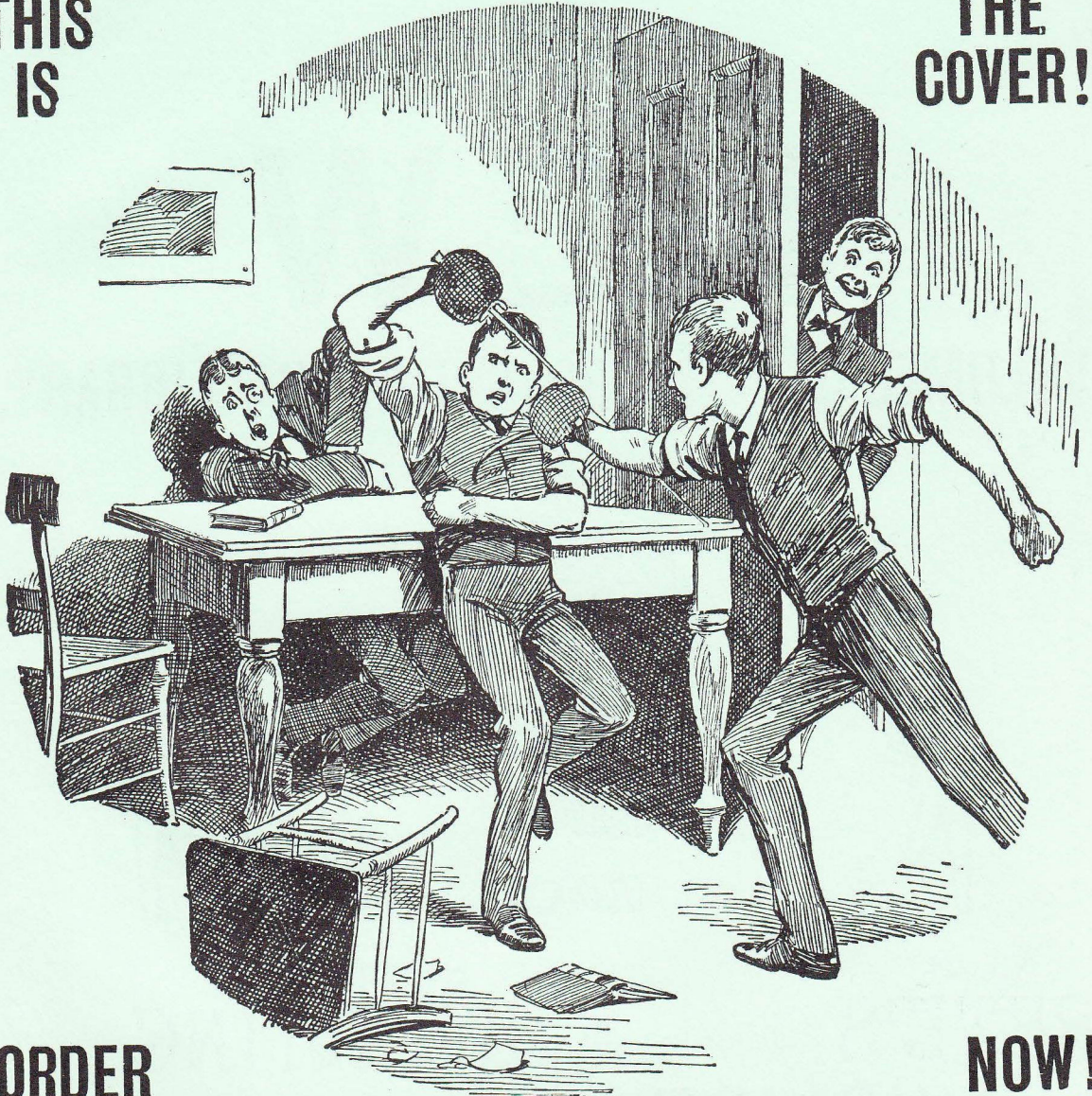
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