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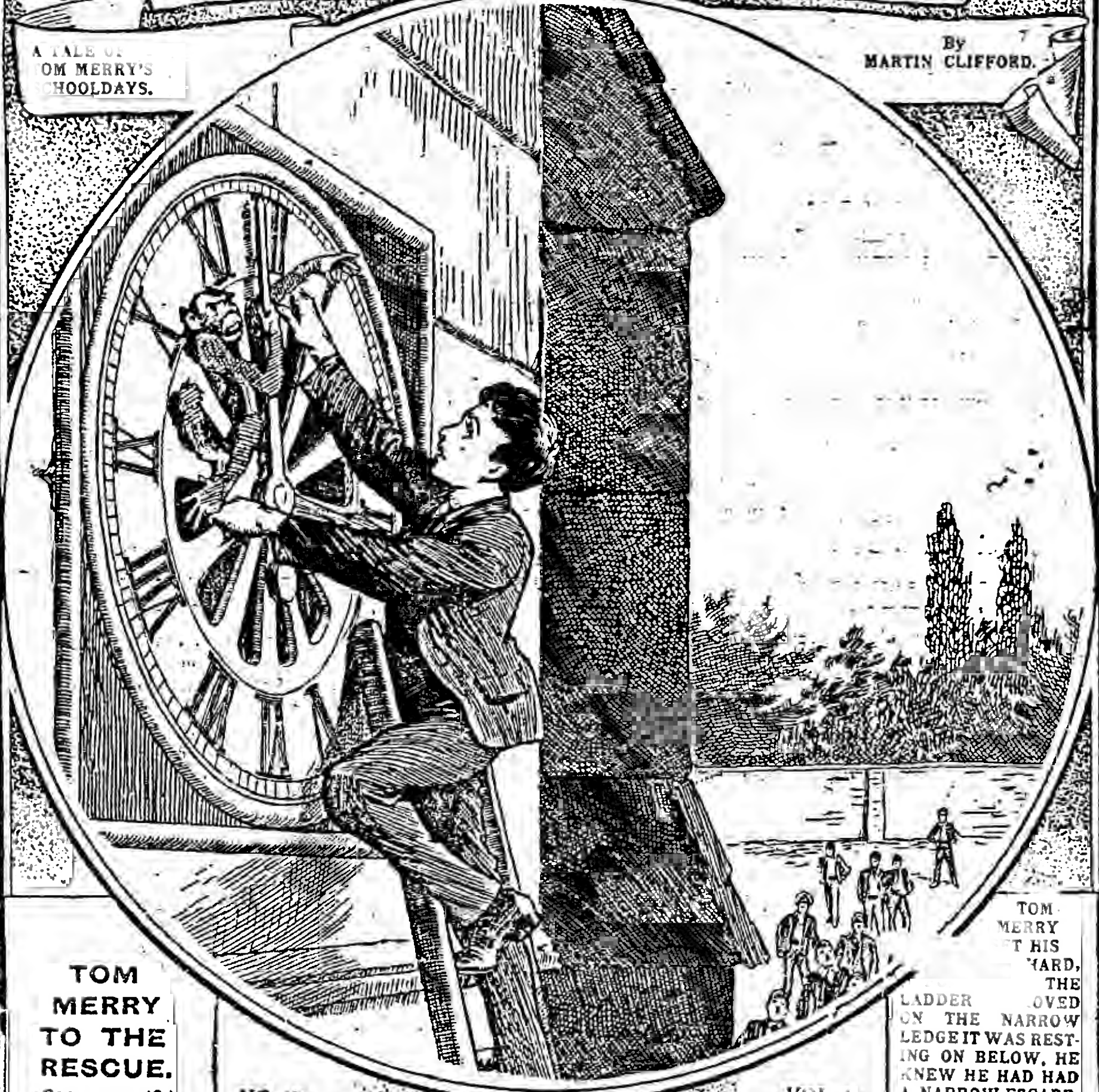
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A TALE OF
TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

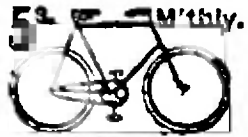


TOM MERRY TO THE RESCUE.
(See page 12.)

NO. 17.

VOL. I.

TOM MERRY
AT HIS
WARD,
THE
LADDER
MOVED
ON THE NARROW
LEDGE IT WAS REST-
ING ON BELOW. HE
KNEW HE HAD HAD
A NARROW ESCAPE.

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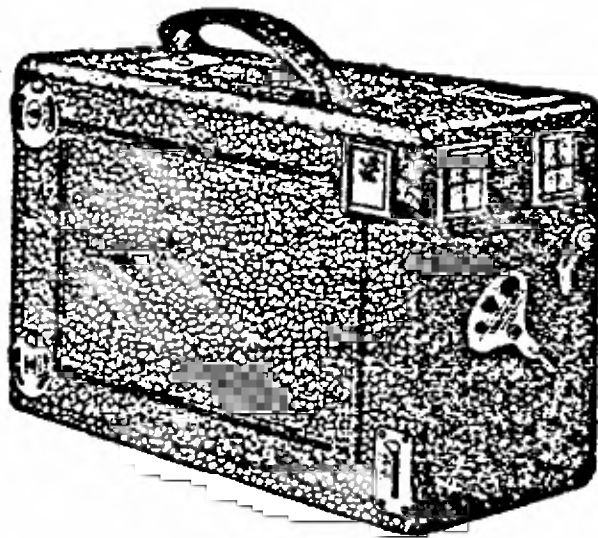
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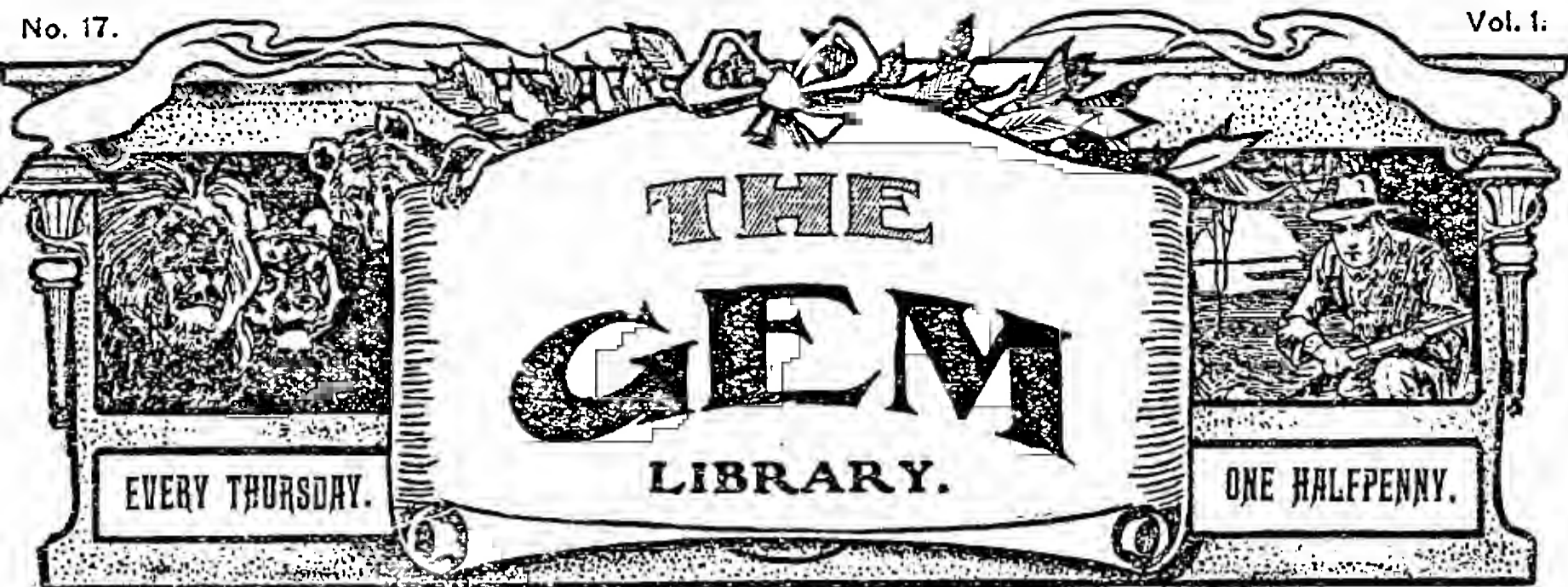
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A Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays. By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

The Adventure of the White Mouse.

"H, my hat!" muttered Tom Merry. The boys of St. Jim's were assembled in hall, and the Head had given that little preparatory cough which the boys knew so well.

"Silence!" Tom Merry stood with his Form, the Shell, and the rest of the Shell were all attention; but Tom Merry seemed distressed in some unaccountable way. He gave an uncomfortable wriggle, and tried to insert his hand between his collar and his neck, and then, as he found his Form-master's eye on him, he looked very red.

"Oh, crumbs," murmured Tom, "where's that little beggar got to?"

"Silence there!" Manners looked at his chum in surprise. "What's the matter with you, Tom?" he whispered. "Why don't you keep still? Old Linton's got his eye on you. You'll catch it soon." "It's that giddy white mouse I swapped my penknife for with Herries." "What's the matter with it?" "It's slithered down the back of my neck." Manners gave a suppressed giggle. "Silence there, if you please," said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. "I shall not speak again, Merry."

"I'm sure I don't want you to," murmured Tom Merry, sotto voce.

"Ahem!" came from Dr. Holmes. Silence reigned in the hall, and all eyes were turned towards the doctor. The boys wondered what he had to say.

"Hem!" said the Head. "Boys, I wish to speak to you upon a subject I have referred to before. I have only a few words to say, but I trust they will be listened to with attention."

The boys all looked politely attentive. "You are aware," resumed the Head, "that a building has lately been erected within the walls of St. Jim's, where the boys are now allowed to keep any pets they choose—a permission which has been taken advantage of to a very wide extent."

"Hear, hear!" said a voice from the back of the hall, which sounded a good deal like Jack Blake's; but it would have been difficult to identify the culprit, and the Head went on hastily.

"I am glad to see this," continued Dr. Holmes. "I am glad to see a boy fond of animals, and by keeping pets, and taking proper care of them, a lad naturally learns to be kind and considerate towards dumb creatures. This is good; but there is one point that is not so satisfactory."

Here the Head paused for effect; and in the dead silence that followed his words, came a very distinct gasp from Tom Merry.

Dr. Holmes's eye singled him out like a rapier. "It is very peculiar, Merry, that you cannot keep quiet."

for a few minutes," the doctor remarked. "This is the third time, I think, that you have made yourself audible. Will you kindly be silent until I have finished?"

The doctor's irony made poor Tom turn quite crimson.

"Yes, sir!" he stammered.

"Thank you, Merry. Now, as I was saying, boys, there is one point which is far from satisfactory, and that is, that many of you especially among the juniors—have been careless enough to bring pets into the school itself, in spite of positive orders to the contrary. This is very bad."

"Shocking," murmured Jack Blake to his chums, Herries and D'Arcy. "Awful! How dared we?"

"This must not continue," resumed Dr. Holmes. "I have had a complaint from Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame of the School House, who found a frog in her bonnet last evening, and was greatly startled when she put the bonnet on."

There was a faint ripple of laughter through the hall.

"This creature had evidently escaped from its owner, who had brought it into the School House, and it had taken refuge in Mrs. Mimms's bonnet-box," said the doctor.

"This kind of thing must cease. I may say that a severe punishment will be visited upon any boy who in future disregards the rule upon this subject, and such culprits will be prohibited from keeping pets in the future."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

The Head's freezing glare was turned upon him.

"Merry!"

"Sir!"

"You were pleased to make a remark just now, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

"What did you say?"

"I said 'Oh, my hat!' sir," said Tom demurely.

"Indeed! And for what did you make that absurd, and, indeed, meaningless remark?"

"I—I— Something startled me, sir."

"Stand out here, Merry."

Tom obediently left the ranks of the Shell.

The doctor fixed his eyes sternly upon him.

"Now, Merry, kindly explain yourself. Was it your intention to be deliberately impertinent by interrupting me?"

Tom looked shocked.

"Oh, sir! No, sir! Oh, sir!"

"Then why— But what are you wriggling in that absurd manner for?"

Tom had given an uncomfortable twist.

"I—I— Did I wriggle, sir?"

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed the doctor, raising his voice a little. "You did wriggle, and I have asked you why you wriggled."

"I—I—I—"

"That is no explanation. I am waiting to be enlightened, Merry."

"I—I— Something tickled me, sir."

"Oh!" said the Head, with withering sarcasm. "Something tickled you, did it? And what was it, Merry, that tickled you?"

"I think it—it must have been a mouse, sir."

The Head stared.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir."

The whole hall was giggling.

"Merry, how dare you make such a reply to me?"

"You asked me, sir. I feel sure it was a mouse. Oh, crumbs!" Tom wriggled again. "There he goes again, the little beast!"

"Do you mean to say that you have a mouse about your person, Merry?" demanded the amazed doctor.

"I'm afraid so, sir. It feels just like it."

"How could the mouse possibly have got into your clothes?"

"I think it must have got out of my pocket, sir."

"Your pocket! How could it be in your pocket in the first place?"

"I must have put it there, sir."

"You—you—you put it there?"

"Yes, sir. It's a white mouse."

"Oh, I perceive!" The Head smiled grimly. "It is, in fact, one of the pets which you have been forbidden to bring into the school, Merry."

"I suppose so, sir."

"Then give it to me at once."

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry made a dive with his hand down the back of his neck, then another inside his jacket. Then up his sleeve, then into his shirt. The whole hall burst into a yell of laughter at the sight of his contortions as he searched for the elusive white mouse, and even the doctor's stern visage relaxed.

"Never mind, Merry, you need not—"

"I've nearly got him, sir!" gasped Tom.

"Never mind—"

"Here he is, sir."

Tom had caught the delinquent at last. He held the pretty little creature in his hand, and extended it to the Head.

Dr. Holmes took the mouse from him. Now that he had it, he was rather puzzled what to do with it; but he held it in his hand.

"You may go to your place, Merry. You will write fifty lines of Virgil for bringing the mouse into the school. The mouse will be confiscated."

"Oh, sir! If you wouldn't mind—"

"You may go, Merry."

Tom went back to his place looking rather dismayed. He didn't want to part with his late acquisition, but the Head's will was law.

"Now, my boys," said the doctor, turning to the assembled school again, "I think I have said all. Whoever brings a pet into the school will be severely punished, and the creature will be confiscated, and sold to the dealer in Rylcombe, and the proceeds of such sale will be sent to the Youths' Association for Supplying Tracts and Trousers to the South Sea Islanders. You will bear that in mind."

And the Head raised his arm as a signal to dismiss, and to give additional weight to his remarks—and then he gave a gasp.

He had for the moment forgotten the white mouse.

The boys were about to dismiss, when they were amazed to see their sedate and revered Head suddenly give a spasmodic wriggle.

"Dear me!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "Dear, dear me!"

Tom Merry gave a suppressed shout.

"My only Panama hat! He's got the little beggar up his sleeve!"

The Head was making a dive up his right sleeve with his left hand. His face was very red. Then he wriggled and twisted quite fantastically.

The whole hall giggled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Tom Merry. "He's got it himself now! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" shouted the masters trying to look stern; but with the dignified Head performing such peculiar gymnastics in the sight of all, that was a difficult thing to do.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The doctor quickly realised that he couldn't catch that elusive mouse, and that he was cutting a comical figure.

He made a dart for the nearest door, and strode from the hall—or, rather, bolted from it, with his gown trailing and rustling behind him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The doctor's ears burned as he heard the shout of irresistible laughter that followed him from the hall. It was some minutes before the masters could restore order—indeed, some of them were on the broad grin themselves. And Tom Merry, in spite of the imposition he had earned, was chuckling as he marched off with the rest of the Shell to the class-room.

CHAPTER 2.

The Giddy Goat.

THE Head's permission to keep pets had certainly been taken advantage of to the full by the boys of St. Jim's.

Trouble had often been caused by the keeping of pets in the studies, but now that a separate building—called the "menagerie" by the boys—was devoted to the purpose, there was really no reason why the youngsters should not keep them to their hearts' content.

But boys will be boys! The good old doctor had allowed that important fact to escape his memory when he made his rules upon the subject.

The Saints had kept a good many pets without permission, and in forbidden places. Now that permission was given, they went in for it wholesale. But as for confining the pets to the menagerie, that was another matter.

For, as Figgins remarked, when a chap had a giddy monkey, he wanted to have it, not to keep it at a distance, and go and look at it sometimes. Kerr agreed with him, though Kerr didn't specially like monkeys, his own favourite being a billy-goat. And Fatty Wynn concurred, though neither monkey nor billy-goat appealed to him, his pets being white rabbits.

Figgins & Co. were indignant.

And on this point, for once, they found agreement with their views expressed by the juniors of the School House.

New House and School House as a rule agreed upon nothing, except upon ragging each other, but they heartily concurred in this matter.

"It's rot," said Jack Blake, laying down the law in Study No. 6 in the School House. "Simply absolute rot and piffle!"

"What is?" asked Herries.

"This keeping of pets out of the house. There's my jolly old parrot has been sent away, and I shall have to get him back again somehow."

"Yes," agreed Herries. "Your parrot don't matter much; but my bulldog—"

"Oh, blow your old bulldog! I should draw a line at that."

"Would you, though! We don't want a beastly parrot hopping about and squeaking and cackling. Now, my bulldog—"

"You couldn't keep a bulldog in a study," said Blake. "You couldn't expect us to stand it. My parrot would be all right."

"Oh, rats to your parrot!" said Herries.

"Same to your bulldog!" replied Blake. "The Head's quite right there. You couldn't expect to keep such a brute in a civilised study. My parrot—"

"Weally," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "we don't want eithah of them in here, dear boys. I stwongly object to them. If you'd only keep something nice and quiet, like my white rabbits—"

"Bust your white rabbits!" said Herries crossly. "I think we could stand the rotten things in here! Not half!"

"I should think not!" exclaimed Blake. "No beastly white rabbits or rotten bulldogs in this show. A parrot makes things so home-like."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Herries.

"Yaas; watah!" chimed in D'Arcy.

In Study No. 10 there was a discussion on the same lines. Tom Merry thought it sheer nonsense that he couldn't keep his white mice, and a lizard in the study. Manners, whose taste ran in the direction of canaries, wanted his cage put up there.

"It's rot!" said Tom Merry. "The Head does not understand. It's such a long time since he was a kid. I say, Manners, old man, Kerr wants to sell his goat. He says it's too much trouble to keep it if it's got to be stuck in the menagerie."

"You don't want to buy it, do you?"

"I was thinking of it. There's a lot of fun to be got out of a billy-goat," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We could teach it to butt every New House boy it came across, you know, and lots of nice things like that."

Manners grinned.

"But what about keeping it in the menagerie?"

Tom shook his head decidedly.

"Couldn't be did. It would have to live there, but we should want it in the School House to teach it tricks, shouldn't we?"

"I suppose so."

"Let's go and see Kerr about it," suggested Tom Merry.

"As it's a half-holiday this afternoon, most of the masters are away, and we should have a chance of getting it in here without some of them spotting us."

"Right-oh!" said Manners.

And the Terrible Two—for since Monty Lowther had gone they were no longer the Terrible Three—quitted the School House, and walked over into the enemy's country. Most of the juniors of St. Jim's were on the cricket-field, hard at practice in the sunny July weather, for the house-match of the juniors was close at hand, and the rival elevens were eager to keep themselves fit.

But Tom saw Figgins in the window of his study, so he guessed that the chief of the New House juniors, and the "Co." were at home.

They met Monteith, the new prefect of New House, in the hall, and the prefect looked at them in his sour, suspicious way.

"Hallo; what do you School House kids want here?" he exclaimed.

"Come to speak to Kerr," said Tom Merry meekly.

"Better keep over on your own side," growled the prefect.

However, he did not interfere with them as they went upstairs. The door of Figgins's study was open, and Tom Merry and Manners walked in.

"Hallo!" said Tom, with a pleasant nod. "We've come to see about that giddy goat, Kerr. I hear you want to—oh! My hat! Crumbs! Scissors!"

Tom gave a jump as he felt a sudden clawing at his hair. He looked up and saw a black-faced monkey perched on the top of the door. The little creature had quickly retreated out of reach again.

Figgins & Co. burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! We've taught him to do that!" exclaimed Figgins.

Tom rubbed his head ruefully.

"Well, that's a nice trick to teach a monkey, I must say, Figgy! What about the rule not to have pets in the houses, eh?"

"Well, it's a half-holiday, anyway," said Figgins.

"What's that about the goat?" asked Kerr. "I don't want him. It's a bit too risky to bring him into the house and I don't want a pet I can't ever see."

"Well, I'll give you what you gave Mildon for him," said Tom. "He's a quiet chap, ain't he? I've only seen him fastened up in the menagerie."

Kerr winked at Figgins.

"Quiet!" he exclaimed. "My dear chap, butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He could be trusted with your youngest baby. He simply doesn't know what temper is."

"Not likely to start butting people—people he wasn't wanted to butt, I mean."

"Bless your life; he couldn't if he tried."

"Well, I'll have him," said Tom Merry.

"All right; I'll come and hand him over to you."

"I'm going down to the cricket," said Figgins. "We're going to lick you on Saturday, Merry."

"We'll take all the lickings you can give us," said Tom, "and a few more thrown in."

"That one will be enough, when you get it," said Figgins darkly. "We're going to make you sit up. By the way, who's your captain, Blake?"

"Do you think we'd let a Fourth-Form kid captain us?" demanded Tom Merry, who was a few months older than Blake, and always referred to the latter, in consequence as a "kid."

"Tom Merry's captain," said Manners. "If Blake and Study No. 6 don't like it, they can lump it, that's all. But let's go and see that goat."

Kerr, Manners, and Tom Merry at once proceeded to the little building behind the principal's house, where all sorts and conditions of pets were kept. The sweet voice of Billy, the goat, could be heard as they approached. Billy was fastened up, and Billy, like everybody else, wanted to be at liberty that sunny afternoon.

"Here he is," said Kerr. "Did you ever see a nicer looking goat, now?"

Tom Merry cocked his eye thoughtfully at Billy. The goat was rather a skinny and shaggy specimen, and his eyes were sharp, and decidedly wicked-looking. He didn't look at all as if he deserved the gentle character Kerr had given him.

"Sure he's gentle?" said Tom doubtfully. "I don't want a beastly wild animal running amuck in the School House, you know."

Kerr grinned.

"My dear chap, if you are afraid of Billy—"

"Afraid!" said Tom indignantly. "Give me the key." He released Billy and took hold of the slender chain attached to his collar. Kerr chuckled as Tom led the goat out. Tom caught that chuckle, and looked back suspiciously, but Kerr's face had become grave as a judge's.

"Good old Billy!" said Tom. "Come along, Billy!"

Billy looked round him, scenting the fresh air, and freedom. Then he made a sudden bolt, and the chain was dragged from Tom's hand by the jerk, and he dashed off with it trailing behind him. Tom dashed after him.

"Billy, Billy! Good old Billy! Stop, you horrid beast! Dear old billy-goat! Stop, you mongrel!"

Billy did not stop. He evidently enjoyed his freedom, and he whisked away at a pace Tom could not equal.

"Stop him, somebody!" gasped Tom. "Head him off, Manners."

Manners tried to head the goat off. Billy did the head-thing off, however. His head came in contact with Manners' legs, which were swept from under him. Manners sat down on the ground, looking rather dazed, and Billy continued his wild career.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr, from the doorway. "How do you like goats?"

Tom Merry wasted a moment in shaking his fist at Kerr. The latter, like the canny Scot that he was, had secured the purchase-money before handing over the goat, and now he was watching Billy's progress with keen enjoyment.

"Ha, ha, ha! You'll get a lot of fun out of that goat."

"Jump up, Manners!" exclaimed Tom. "We must catch the brute before he gets out into the open. Come on!"

"I'm c-c-coming!" gasped Manners.

They dashed after the goat. Billy had stopped, and he had allowed them to come very near. Then, just as Tom was stooping to make a grab at the chain, he darted off like a shot. Tom made his grab, and in his sudden haste tumbled forward on his hands and knees.

Billy whisked away past the elms, and the two juniors pursued him furiously. The elusive goat was out in the wide green quadrangle now, and his course was taking

him towards the junior cricket-ground, where the New House cricketers were at play.

Tom Merry gave a gasp.

"I say, hold on, Manners!" he exclaimed. "We can't catch him; and I don't know that I want to, now. Kerr planted the brute on us. Let's see how Figgins & Co. like him."

The New House eleven were playing a scratch-team of their house-fellows, and the latter were in. Figgins was bowling to Pratt, the scratch-team's captain, and Fatty Wynn was keeping wicket.

Fatty was stooping behind the wicket, watchful for chances, and doubtless his attitude offered a temptation to Billy, which the goat could not possibly resist. At any rate, whether it was from sudden temptation, or malice aforethought, Billy the goat made a bee-line for the unsuspecting wicket-keeper.

There was a buzz from the fieldsmen, but Fatty Wynn did not notice it. Like a good cricketer, he had eyes and ears only for the game, and Figgins was just bowling. Figgins sometimes sent down wides, and the wicket-keeper had to be on the look-out.

Tom Merry stopped, holding his sides, as he saw what was about to happen. Right at the stooping Fatty went Billy the goat.

Biff!

Figgins bowled, and Pratt cut away the ball. There was a roar; but it was not to greet the batsman's hit. It greeted the hit of Billy the goat. For Billy's head had butted Fatty Wynn in the most convenient place, as he stooped behind the wicket, and Fatty let out a yell that would have done credit to a Red Indian on the war-path.

Right forward he went, plunging headlong into the stumps, and Billy, as if satisfied with what he had done, trotted quietly off.

Pratt looked down at the wrecked wicket in amazement. Never was a wicket more completely "down," for Fatty's impact had knocked all three stumps out of the ground, and he was sprawling on top of them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "How's that, umpire?"

"Out!" giggled Manners.

The fieldsmen were holding their sides and shrieking. The funniest thing was the expression of Fatty Wynn's face, as he sat up and stared around him in complete bewilderment. Fatty hadn't the faintest idea what had hit him.

"Wh-wh-who did that?" yelled Fatty.

He jumped up in a fury. Short-slip was the nearest fieldsmen, and short-slip was doubled up with laughter. Fatty jumped to the natural, though erroneous impression, that short-slip had played that little trick on him. And Fatty, who was hurt, and indignant, went for short-slip in a twinkling, before there was any chance of an explanation.

The fieldsmen's merriment suddenly changed to surprise as he felt Fatty clutch him, and roll him over on the sward. Fatty hadn't much idea of fighting, but he knew that it would damage anybody to sit on him, and he sat on that unhappy fieldsmen.

"Help!" yelled short-slip. "I'm suffocating! He's squashing me!"

The other fieldsmen came running to his aid, and Fatty was dragged off. Short-slip staggered to his feet quite breathless. Fatty Wynn looked inclined to go for him again, but Figgins grasped him, and held him back.

"Hold on!" gasped Figgins. "Hold on, Fatty!"

"I'll teach him to shove me over!" roared Fatty.

"Hold on! It wasn't him! It was that giddy goat!"

"What goat? Oh, that! Well, why couldn't he say so, then?"

"You didn't give him much time!"

"Bosh!" said Fatty.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Tom Merry, as he set off in pursuit of Billy again. "That was a wicket to Billy, anyway. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Manners. "But where's that beastly goat getting to?"

Billy had started browsing on the grass; but as Tom and Manners drew near him, he started off again. He was evidently in no mood to lose his new-found freedom.

Tom and Manners attempted to coax him and to catch him in vain. They got him off the grass, and chased him round the gymnasium, and then Billy made a sudden bolt, and disappeared into the School House.

"My hat!" panted Tom, down whose face the perspiration was running in streams. "My hat! Manners, I'm getting about fed up with that goat!"

"We'll soon corner him inside the house," said Manners.

"More likely he'll corner some blessed master in one of the corridors."

"Ha, ha! Come on!"

They followed the goat into the School House. Billy was stalking along a passage, looking round him as if interested in his exploration. At the sight of the two juniors he whisked off, and Tom and Manners ran after him. There was a sudden yell.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, were coming down the passage in a row, and they had unsuspectingly met Billy in the midst of his wild career. D'Arcy, who was in the middle, was bowled over like a ninepin by Billy butting against his legs, and in his surprise and alarm he caught hold of Herries and Blake, and dragged them over in his fall.

Three juniors went down in a heap, and Tom and Manners, coming on at full speed, went sprawling over them before they could stop themselves.

"Hallo!" roared Blake. "Where are you coming to? What's the matter? Is it an earthquake?"

"No," gasped Tom Merry, "it's a goat!"

"Eh? What?"

Tom gained his feet, and dragged Manners up. Blake extricated himself from the heap, and helped up Herries. Arthur Augustus sat up moaning.

"Oh, you wuff, wuff bwutes!"

"Not hurt, old fellow?" said Tom Merry.

"Hurt! Look at my twousers!"

Tom Merry looked at them.

"Well, what's the matter with them, Gussy?"

"Mattah!" howled D'Arcy. "They're ruined! You have completely spoiled the nice cwease in them, and—"

"Oh, rats to your twousers!" said Tom Merry. "I say, Blake, that giddy goat's escaped, and there will be the dickens to pay if we don't catch it. Come and lend a hand, like a good chap."

"Right-ho!" said Blake, always willing to oblige.

"Which way did the brute go?"

"I'm afraid it'll be in the Head's house."

Blake whistled.

"Let's get after it quick, then."

They hurried to the corridor which gave access to the principal's house. Billy the goat had turned the corner, and was evidently bent on continuing his explorations in this new and strange territory.

The juniors hurried along the corridor. At the further end they halted, and looked out cautiously into the passage beyond. In this passage the Head's study was situated, and it was not a place for the youngsters to lightly venture into.

The Head's door was shut, fortunately. Billy the goat stopped close to it, and looked back at the juniors who were making coaxing signs to it from the corner.

"Good old Billy!" whispered Tom Merry. "Come on, Billy! Come on, old dear! Oh, you obstinate brute. I'll wring your beastly neck for this! Come on, old chap!"

The old chap firmly refused to come on.

"Wait here," said Tom. "I'll go and shift him, and if he comes back this way, collar him. Mind the beast don't butt you!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

Tom advanced on tiptoe towards the goat. He was equally afraid of scaring Billy away, and of making a noise to attract the Head's attention if he should be in his study.

Billy the goat retreated till he came close to the Head's door and could go no further. He backed against the door, watching Tom warily, ready to bolt at an instant's warning. Naturally, his rubbing against the door did not pass unnoticed by the doctor, who was in the study.

"Come in," came a deep voice from within.

Tom Merry whisked back to rejoin his companions.

"Come in," repeated the doctor's voice.

He evidently thought there was someone at the door who wanted to come in, and doubtless wondered why the person did not knock. Billy, the goat, seemed to be startled by the voice from within, for he turned round and looked at the closed door, and finally butted his head against it. The door trembled and shook.

"Come in!" called out the Head a third time, in a sharp voice.

"Oh, my Aunt Matilda Jane Jackson!" murmured Tom Merry. "There's going to be a row now!"

He was right. The Head, who had been disturbed in the midst of an exciting excursion among Greek roots, threw open the door of his study angrily.

The sudden opening of the door startled Billy. When Billy was startled, he always did one thing—he booted straight at the startling object with his horns. The startling object was the Head in this case.

Billy paused for a moment, while the doctor stared at him in amazement, and then he shot forward like an arrow from a bow. The dignified Head of St. Jim's skipped out of the way with an activity astonishing in one of his years, and shouted for help.

Billy the goat might have been stopped by a determined

resistance, but the sight of a foeman in flight naturally roused all his courage, and filled him with the intoxication of victory. He dashed after the doctor, and chased him round the study.

"Help! Help!" shouted the Head, dodging the goat, and springing upon his desk for safety.

"I say, we're on in this scene," muttered Tom Merry.

He dashed into the study. Billy eluded him, and sought to escape, and over went a chair and a screen, and then another chair, as Tom rushed in pursuit.

"It's all right, sir!" gasped Tom. "We'll catch him, sir! We'll have him!"

"Dear me!" said the Head, from the top of his desk.

"Dear me!"

"Got him!" exclaimed Tom.

He grasped the trailing chain at last.

Billy made a bolt for the door, but Tom hung on. Billy was determined, and he dragged the junior all over the study, upsetting furniture in all directions, till Manners and Blake managed to rush on him and get a grip on his horns.

Then Billy was dragged ignominiously out of the room.

The juniors, holding him fast between them, marched him off. The Head descended from his perch and surveyed his wrecked study in dismay.

"Dear me!" he said. "Dear me!"

Billy the goat was marched out of the School House. Now that he was overpowered, Billy was looking as meek and quiet as a goat could look, and seemed hurt and surprised by the care the juniors took not to let him get loose again.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "I—I think we'll give up the idea of keeping Billy in the study, after all. He's a bit too lively, I think."

They half-dragged, half-persuaded Billy back to the menagerie. There they fastened up his chain, and heaved sighs of relief when they had done it. The music still remained to be faced, and they wondered what the Head would say; but it was certain to be something very much to the point.

CHAPTER 3.

Towser Causes Trouble.

BUT Dr. Holmes took a lenient view of the matter. The doctor could be severe, but he was just. When he learned that the goat had got into the house of his own accord, and had not been brought in by the juniors, he let the matter pass, only giving instructions that on no account was Billy to be let loose within the precincts of St. Jun's.

"We're well out of that," said Tom Merry to Manners. "That's the best of the Head—he always stops to think before he goes for a chap. But all the same, we owe Kerr one for planting that fiend of a goat upon us, don't we?"

"We do," said Manners. "We do."

"He's offered us the purchase-money back, now that he's had all the fun," continued Tom. "But that's not the point. We've got to avenge the wheeze."

"We have, we has," said Manners.

"Figgins & Co. have been cackling about it ever since," said Tom. "They will go on cackling about it till we give 'em something else to cackle about."

"They will."

"And so," said Tom, "the sooner we give 'em something else to cackle about, the quicker."

"Right-ho! I can see you've got a wheeze in your noddle," said Manners, who knew that gleam in Tom Merry's eyes of old. "What's the jape this time?"

Tom ran his fingers thoughtfully through his curly hair. "You see," he explained, "it's a stroke of luck that the workmen are still putting on those new slates at the back of the New House."

Manners stared.

"What on earth—" he began.

"Because, you see, it makes it perfectly easy for anybody who wants to get on the roof of that building," Tom explained.

"Off your rocker?" queried Manners pleasantly. "What do you want to get on a rotten old roof of a rotten old New House for, ass?"

"My dear kid," said Tom, with a superior smile, "listen to your uncle, and don't interrupt. Don't you remember that Figgins's chimney was smoking the other day?"

"What about it?"

"Nothing, only I noticed which was his chimney at the time, you see, and when I found that the workmen were there, a wheeze sort of came into my head. I've been waiting."

"Waiting for what?" said Manners, still mystified.

"For to-night," said Tom. "Do you remember a while

back Blake and his kids raided our study, and gave Figgins & Co. a feast here, on our tommy?"

Manners grinned at the recollection.

"Rather! We settled that little account, though."

"Never mind; an account like that will stand settling twice," said Tom Merry serenely. "Figgy has asked Study No. 6 to a feed to-night, in return for that little entertainment at our expense. I happen to know that Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy are going."

"Wish we were, too," said Manners. "Figgy gives ripping feeds."

"He does," said Tom. "and this one will be more ripping than ever, for we're going to make things rip. It's time we made the New House bounders sit up, and it won't do any harm to give Blake's lot a turn at the same time. I saw Figgy in the school shop laying in a supply of provisions. He was doing it on a liberal scale. The number of sausages he bought would be enough to feed an army—or Fatty Wynn."

"Jolly nice," said Manners. "Fatty Wynn cooks their sausages in a frying-pan on the study fire, and he does 'em to a turn. But what are you driving at? There's no chance of raiding a feed in a New House study, with all that lot against us two."

"No; but we shall be there, all the same," said Tom calmly.

"Where shall we be?"

"On the roof."

Manners looked at his chum in amazement.

"And what shall we be doing on the roof?"

"Figgins & Co. will guess, when their chimney begins to smoke," said Tom sedately. "Figgins may smell a rat—he'll certainly smell smoke."

The idea dawned on Manners, and he went off into a roar.

"Not a word," said Tom Merry. "Not a giddy syllable. We shall have to keep this awfully dark. But I think it will work."

Manners giggled.

"It's pretty certain to work, Tom."

"Yes! Figgins has asked Blake for half-past seven. That's to give 'em time to get the sausages cooked, and the tea ready. The workmen will be gone long before that, leaving their ladders. It will be a walk-over for us. What Figgins and Blake think of it we shall find out afterwards. Hallo, what's that row?"

It was a sound of thunderous knocking in the School House. The chums of the Shell hurried out of their study, to ascertain the cause of the uproar. Percy Mellish was kicking at the door of Study No. 6, which was closed.

"Blake!" shouted Mellish through the key-hole. "Open this beastly door!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake from within. "I've got my prep. to do. I'm going out on a visit, and I've no time to talk to you."

"I tell you that beastly bulldog has eaten one of my white mice."

"Well, you can't expect me to get it back for you, can you?"

"I'm going to break that beastly dog's beastly neck."

"Rats!"

The door was evidently locked. Percy Mellish kicked at it savagely. He was in a towering rage.

"Open this door!" he shouted. "or I'll go and tell Railton you've got that bulldog in the study against the rules."

"Oh, don't be a cad!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You can't sneak like that, Mellish."

"Mind your own business, Tom Merry."

"But—"

"I tell you Herries' rotten bulldog has eaten one of my white mice. He came into my study and gobbled it!" shouted Percy. "I was just going to sell it to Walsh for a tanner more than I gave for it."

"Horrid!" said Tom. "That must have given you pain, Shylock."

"Oh, shut up! I'm going to jump on that dog."

He crashed his boot against the door again. It flew suddenly open, and Blake stood in the doorway.

"Look here; I'm sorry the bulldog has bolted your mouse, on the mouse's account—poor little beggar! But it's done now, and you can't expect me to resuscitate it. Besides, it's Herries' bulldog, not mine."

"I don't care whose it is!" howled Percy. "I'm going to break its beastly neck!"

"You're disturbing us! We're going out to tea with Figgins, and we've got to get our prep. done. Clear off!"

"Yes; clear off!" exclaimed Herries. "You're too noisy. There's too much of you! Bunk!"

"That rotten bulldog came into my study and scooped up my mouse!" shouted Percy wrathfully. "Jones saw him do it. I'm going to jump on him."

"You're not!"
 "I am! Keep your rotten bulldog out of my study."
 "Well, you keep your rotten mice out of my bulldog," said Herries.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry.
 "Where's that beastly dog?" demanded Percy. "I'm going to jump on him. Produce the beast, or I'll go and tell Railton he's here, and we'll soon have him out!"
 "Oh, all right," said Herries. "If you must see Towser, here he is! Towser, Towser!"

A hideous-looking bulldog crawled from under the table.
 "Seize him, Towser! Seize him, boy!"
 Towser made a rush at Percy. The latter forgot all about his revengeful intentions as he caught sight of the bulldog's jaws. He turned pale, and bolted down the corridor like lightning.
 Towser bolted after him like a flash. Fortunately for Percy Mellish, Herries had a cord attached to Towser's collar, so the bulldog was unable to go more than a few yards in pursuit. Then he stopped, and jumped about, and barked and growled, and Percy fled madly, and did not stop till he was in his own study, with the door locked and bolted.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Blake. "Exit the giddy avenger. But my hat, here's Schneider!"
 The barking of Towser had brought Herr Schneider on the scene. Herr Schneider, the German master, who boarded in the School House, came along the corridor with a frown upon his face and a cane in his hand.

Herries, at the warning from Blake, dragged Towser into the study. The bulldog was shoved under the table, and the cloth with which it was covered partly concealed him. The juniors stood around the table close together, on the side towards the doorway, so as to hide Towser from view. Tom Merry and Manners, of course, loyally joined in to help. As Herr Schneider put his bald head and fat face in at the door, the five juniors were deeply engaged in discussing cricket.

"Then you think we shall beat Figgins's lot in the house-match, Merry?" said Blake, solemn as an owl.
 "Oh, yes!" said Tom Merry. "You see, the New House bowlers are pretty strong in bowling; but at the wicket—"

"Poys—"
 "We shall beat them there," said Tom, apparently unaware of the approach of Herr Schneider, as he discussed the all-absorbing topic. "I fancy that we shall—"

"Poys!" roared the German master.
 He strode into the study, so that it was impossible to further ignore his presence.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom cheerfully. "Do you want anything, sir?"

"Vat vas you Shell poys doing in Fourth Form study?" said the Herr suspiciously.

"We were talking about the house-match, sir. You see; we're going to meet Figgins and his little lot on Saturday, and—"

"Mein Gott! De poy talks like vun talking-machine. Silence!"

"Yes, sir. You asked me."
 "Vere is tat tog?"

"What tog, sir?" asked Tom innocently.

"Tat tog which you have here mit yourselves!" roared Herr Schneider, getting angry.

Tom Merry looked questioningly at Blake.
 "Have you any of Herr Schneider's togs here, Blake?" he asked.

"Ha, ha! No! We have only our own togs, sir," said Blake. "These evening-dress togs you see on the chair are D'Arcy's. He's going to wear 'em to tea in the New House, at Figgins's. We haven't any other togs here, sir, besides, those we are wearing."

"You not misunderstand me mit yourselves!" shouted the Herr. "I speak not of te clothes, but of te tog—te tog vich park mit himself in te passage."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.
 "Have you seen any tog parking with himself, Blake?" he demanded.

"He, he, he! I haven't. Have you, Herries?"

"No!" said Herries. "I should know a tog if I saw one, and I don't know how they park. Do you, Adolphus?"

"Weally—"
 The German master strode towards the juniors, and brought down his cane upon the table with a resounding thwack.

"Poys—"
 There came a deep growl from under the table, and Herr Schneider gave a jump. That thwack above had startled Towser.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Herr Schneider stepped back hastily from the table.
 "Te tog is dere!" he cried triumphantly. "I hear te peast! Pring him out at once before."

"Oh, you were speaking of the dog, sir?" said Tom Merry, with an air of surprise.

"You know I vas speaking of te tog, Merry!" exclaimed Herr Schneider. "Pring him out!"

"He's very fierce, sir," said Herries.
 "Pring him out!"

"Come on, Towser! Towser!"
 Towser came out. Herries stooped to pat his head, and whispered:

"Seize him, Towser!"
 Towser gave a growl, and rushed at the fat German.

The way Herr Schneider got out of the study was a revelation. None of the juniors had ever dreamed that the fat gentleman could have moved so quickly.

"Keep him off!" roared Herr Schneider. "Mein Gott! He vill pite me! Mein Himmel!"

He bolted down the passage. Towser bolted after him, to the length of the cord, and then stopped, barking furiously. Tom Merry was nearly weeping with laughter.

"My hat!" he gasped. "I never thought Schneider could shift like that."

Herries, grinning, ran Towser out of the School House. Herr Schneider had locked himself in his study, as Percy had done, and he remained there. The sight of Towser's jaws had thrown him into a palpitation he did not soon recover from.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The juniors knew there would be an hour of reckoning, but that did not prevent them from enjoying the joke. Blake, weary with laughing, turned to his neglected prep again.

"Hallo, we sha'n't have time to finish if we don't buck up!" he exclaimed. "We're due at Figgy's study in twenty minutes. You'll excuse us, Merry?"

"Certainly," said Tom. "I hope you'll have a jolly good time with Figgy."

Blake looked at him suspiciously.
 "Have you got any little game on?" he demanded.

Tom looked astonished at the suggestion.
 "My dear chap, how awfully suspicious you are."

"Well, I know you, you see," growled Blake. "Still, you can't bother us this time that I can see. Figgy is giving us a prime feed in return for the one we gave him—you remember, in your study, with your grub. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" said Tom Merry. "Funny, wasn't it? Come on, Manners!"

They nodded to the Fourth-Formers, and walked out of Study No 6. Blake grinned after them.

"That was a jolly good wheeze, that time," he remarked.

"Poor old Merry would like to give us the kybosh now we're going to the return feed: but, bless you, he can't think of a scheme. He'll have to give it up."

Blake did not yet know Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins's Tea-Party.

"**H**OW are you getting on with the cooking, Fatty?"

"All right," said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins & Co. were busy in their study over in the New House. When Figgins gave a feed it was generally all right, and fellows knew what to expect when they were asked to a feast in the study shared by Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn.

Figgins was especially particular about living up to his reputation on this occasion, because he was giving the feed to School House chaps, and he didn't want to leave any room for criticism. When Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus came to the New House, Figgy naturally wanted to make a good impression upon them.

The weather was rather warm, and so the fire in the study was a little superfluous, if it had not been required by the chef. But it was required. Fatty Wynn, who was as fond of cooking as he was of eating, was working away with a right good will.

Fatty was frying sausages and eggs, and he had two frying-pans, and a kettle, and a saucepan, all going at the same time; and as the grate was limited in size, it required some manipulation, and indeed, as Figgins said, it was a wonder how Fatty did it.

But he did it, and he usually did it right well; and fellows would come from near and far to taste the result of Fatty Wynn's efforts.

Kerr had laid the cloth, and put on the tea-things. A cool breeze came in from the quad through the open

window, somewhat cooling the atmosphere. It needed it, for the fire was built up high, and the room was getting very warm.

Figgins had begged or borrowed chairs from neighbouring studies, having to exercise a great deal of diplomacy to get the chairs without inviting the owners to the feed. As Figgins said he'd like to have in everybody, from the Head down to the Boots; but space was limited, and so was grub, so what was a fellow to do?

The chairs were nicely ranged round the table, which shone resplendent with a new white cloth, which Figgins had begged of the house-dame, and promised to return intact—or as nearly intact as possible.

Besides the cups and saucers and plates, of which there was actually sufficient, the table groaned, as the novelists say, under the weight of the viands.

Jam and marmalade and cake was there, with biscuits and bread-and-butter, both brown and white, and an enormous teapot.

Figgins surveyed the table with a pardonable pride. There was a keen satisfaction in the breast of Figgins.

The study looked very neat and cosy, and though there wasn't much room for the guests, still there was room with a squeeze, and, as Figgins said, Blake wouldn't expect Buckingham Palace.

Blake certainly wasn't likely to expect to find Buckingham Palace inside the New House at St. Jim's. So he would not be disappointed.

"Nearly done, Fatty?" said Figgins, with solicitude.

"Getting on," said Fatty.

Fatty, in his rolled-up shirt-sleeves, looked quite professional. His fat face was glowing with heat and exertion.

"When the sausages are done," said Figgins, "shove 'em into this dish. I collared it out of Monteith's study. It's a giddy pie-dish, but it might have been made for sausages, and one can't be particular. I've got a soap-dish out of the dormitory for the butter, and it looks A1. I don't suppose Blake will notice that."

"We'll have to use the same paper-knife for the jam and marmalade," said Kerr.

"That's all right. When I was at a feed over in No. 6 once, we had to use a shoe-horn to serve the treacle," said Figgins.

Kerr looked round the study and sniffed.

"I say, Fatty, you're spilling the gravy!"

"I'm not!" said Fatty.

"There seems to be a smother."

It was only too true.

During the last minute or two the atmosphere of the study had become quite hazy.

Fatty stepped back from the grate and sniffed.

"It's this rotten chimney again!" he exclaimed. "It was smoking the other day."

"But Mr. Ratcliff sent for the sweep then, and it was cleaned," said Figgy.

"Oh, when a chimney starts smoking, it doesn't leave off till it thinks it will," said Fatty crossly. "You can see it's at it again."

"Yes, by Jove it is," said Figgins, in disgust, as a burst of dark smoke came from the chimney, and eddied through the room. "Thunder! What will Blake—"

"Oh, blow Blake!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn. "I'm thinking of my cooking!"

"Open the window a bit more, Kerr, old chap."

Kerr jammed up the window.

Figgins tore open the door.

That, unfortunately, only made matters worse. The breeze came in freely enough, and the smoke came more thickly down the chimney. The wind blew it about in clouds, and sent a great volume of it rolling out into the corridor.

"Here, this won't do!" exclaimed Figgins, slamming the door. "They'll think the house is on fire, and we shall have a crowd on the scene."

There came a scattering of soot from the chimney.

Fatty Wynn gave a howl of anguish as the blacks settled on his sausages, which were done to a turn.

He made a dive at the fireplace to remove the frying-pan, and dragged it off, but, unfortunately, he was a little too hasty, and a wave of liquid fat went over the side of the pan into the fire.

It flared up instantly, of course, and there was a rush of flame and smoke which sent the three juniors rushing back from the fireplace.

The pan went with a crash from Fatty's hand, and some of the sausages fell into the grate, and some into the fire, where they frizzled up at once, and added a new odour to those which already filled the apartment with perfume.

"Oh, my sausages!" cried Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, my eyes!" gasped Figgins, rubbing them.

"Oh, my hat!" mumbled Kerr.

Thicker and thicker poured the smoke from the chimney.

A volume of it was sailing out of the open window, and floating away among the elms in the quadrangle.

Figgins & Co. were stricken with dismay.

"What ever can be the matter with the beastly thing?" exclaimed Figgins. "What on earth is it smoking like that for?"

"Just as if somebody had laid a board or something on top of the chimney-pot," said Kerr, rubbing his smarting eyes. "What on earth are we to do?"

"Oh, my sausages! Ruined!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

The kettle was boiling over now, and it began to spit spitefully, but none of the juniors ventured near through the thickening smoke to touch it.

"Let it boil over," said Figgins hopefully. "Perhaps it'll put the fire out."

It was a hopeful view to take. The kettle soon boiled right over, but the fire was only damped for a moment, and still another smell spread itself through the air.

Thicker and thicker came the smoke!

"I can't stand this," sneezed Figgins. "I——"

Tap, tap!

Figgins uttered an exclamation of dismay.

In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten all about the guests expected from the School House.

The tap at the door showed that Blake and his chums had arrived.

"My Aunt Matilda Jenkins!" groaned Figgy.

Tap, tap!

"Come in!" said Figgins desperately.

The door opened.

Jack Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy presented themselves

They were really looking very nice. Blake and Herries were in Etons and silk hats, having donned the latter for the purpose of showing due respect to the New House juniors upon such an important and auspicious occasion. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in evening attire. He looked as neat

as a new pin, and nothing could have been more gorgeous than the fancy waistcoat he was wearing, nothing more brilliant than the shine of his patent leather shoes, nothing more aggressively white and snowy than his shirt-front and his cuffs, nothing more sparkling than his diamond studs.

Such was the dazzling vision that presented itself at the door of the study, and was overwhelmed by a rush of smoke the moment the door opened.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "Why, what the—how the—what the—— Gr-r-r-r!"

"Ugh! Grgrgrgr!" said Herries.

"Weally," gasped Arthur Augustus—"weally, don't-cher know!"

"Awfully sorry," said Figgins helplessly. "You see, the chimney's smoking."

"Yes," said Blake, coughing, "we see it. I don't think we could fail to see it without being as blind as you are silly, Figgy, old chap!"

"Awfully sorry," said Figgy. "It's only started less'n ten minutes ago. It's horrid. The grub's spoilt——"

"And so are my clothes," wailed D'Arcy. "Look at my shirt-front! Look at my silk waistcoat! Oh, how could you? Weally, twuly, how could you?"

"Tisn't our fault," said the hapless Figgins. "I can't understand it. The beastly chimney was swept only the other day."

Blake sneezed violently.

"Well, we can't stick this!" he exclaimed. "Figgy, old chap, we thank you for your kindness, and we've enjoyed ourselves rippingly. Good-bye!"

"Had an awfully good time," said Herries, trying to rub the smoke out of his eyes. "Shall be delighted to come again. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said D'Arcy. "It has been weally wipping!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 marched off.

Figgins & Co. had not been able to say a word.

"My only aunt!" said poor Figgy, when the disgusted guests had disappeared. "This is a nice, pleasant end to a jolly evening, and no mistake!"

The smoke was dying away somewhat now. Figgins poured a jug of water on the fire, and the last coals sputtered out.

Kerr was looking savagely reflective.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "I don't believe the giddy chimney smoked like that of its own accord. Somebody has been playing a game on us."

Figgins gave a jump.

"I say, Blake! Come back, will you?" he called after the departing School House boys.

The three turned back.

"What do you want?" asked Blake.

"Is Tom Merry in the School House now?"

"No; he went out with Manners a quarter of an hour ago."

"Ah! Do you know where they went?"

"No."

"They've been playing this on us," said Figgins, with conviction. "I'm going to see, anyway. I'll bet those two horrid rotters are on the roof of the New House at this very moment."

"My hat!" said Blake. "Let's go and see."

"I'm going to change my clothes," said D'Arcy. "I do not feel equal to anythin' while I am in this howwid dirty condition, deah boys!"

"You can go and eat cocoanuts, if you like," said Blake politely. "Come on, kids. If Tom Merry's been up to this little game, we'll soon catch the boulder on the bound."

Arthur Augustus went back to the School House, and Blake and Herries, who were less particular, hurried off with Figgins & Co. in quest of vengeance. Suspicion once awakened, both Blake and Figgins were certain that Tom Merry was at the bottom of the catastrophe.

"It's Tom Merry," said Figgins, with decision. "Of course, he's got on the roof with one of the ladders the workmen have left there. Come on, and we'll soon see, anyway, and give the horrid rotter the kybosh."

Figgy and his companions were not long in getting to the scene of the recent operations of the workmen, who were executing some repairs at the back of the New House.

The workmen, departing for the evening, had left their properties behind them, and there were ladders and poles, and a huge tank of mortar, as well as bricks and slates in profusion. Among other things they had left a long ladder, which the juniors now found erected against the New House, in a spot where the elms growing close to the house concealed it from the view of any of the windows.

"Look!" said Figgins. "That shows they've been at it."

Blake nodded.

"Yes," he remarked, "and it shows they're still up there, Figgy. They'd have put the ladder down with the others if they were off the roof."

"That's so."

Kerr burst into a sudden chuckle.

"Let's take the giddy ladder away!" he exclaimed. "Don't say a word; just let's take the ladder away, and leave 'em to get down if they can."

The five juniors grinned at the idea.

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "Lend us a hand."

The five of them seized the ladder, and it was soon lowered and placed with the others. Then, chuckling, the young rascals went their way rejoicing.

CHAPTER 5.

Out of the Frying-pan into the Fire.

THINK they've had enough, Manners, old chap?"

Tom Merry asked the question.

He was sitting astride of a ridge on the high roof of the New House, sedately watching the chimney of Figgins's study.

On top of the chimney-pot a board was carefully laid, covering up the entire orifice, and only a few little curls of smoke escaped from underneath it.

By that simple device Tom and his chum had succeeded in preventing the escape of the smoke from Figgins's study.

Manners looked at his watch.

"Well, it's nearly ten minutes since Blake and his lot were due at Figgy's," he said. "I suppose the fun's over by this time."

Tom chuckled.

"I hope they've enjoyed the feed," he remarked. "It will be a wrinkle to them not to run up against the Terrible Two again. I fancy they've had enough, chappy. It will be getting dark presently, so I vote that we hop it."

"Right you are, Tom."

"We'll go and call on Study No. 6 as soon as we get in," said Tom Merry, "and ask them how they liked the feed, and whether it was smoky. Come on."

The juniors made their way over the roof, taking the board with them.

The New House had not all been built at the same period, and the roofs and chimney-stacks were very irregular. In some places there were flat leads, and in others sloping slates. It was at the edge of a flat portion of the roof, with a low parapet, that the ladder was set—or, rather, had been set.

Tom Merry reached the parapet, and glanced over. Then he gave a whistle of dismay.

"I say, Manners!"

"What's the matter?" asked Manners, who was behind him.

"The ladder's gone."

"Phew! Gone! Are you sure?"

"See for yourself."

Manners looked, and he had to admit that the ladder was gone. The spreading elms prevented them from seeing much, except the ground at the foot of the sheer wall.

The two juniors looked at each other in dismay.

"Somebody's taken the ladder away," said Manners, at last.

Tom slapped him on the back.

"Manners, old man, that's a brilliant guess of yours, and it shows what education will do for the intellect," he said gravely.

"Oh, don't rot!" said Manners. "This is serious. How on earth are we to get down?"

"That's what we've got to find out."

"Some silly ass came along, and thought the workmen had left the ladder standing!" groaned Manners. "What silly asses there are in the world!"

"Yes, and I fancy we are two of 'em," observed Tom Merry. "As likely as not, Figgins & Co. tumbled to the wheeze, and came and took the ladder down. We ought to have fastened it somehow at the top."

"Yes, it's a lot of good to think of that now," said Manners. "Look here, you're the blessed leader in this firm. Lead me off this roof."

"I'll chuck you off if you're not more respectful," said Tom severely. "Sit down and hold your face shut while I think."

"If you can think us off this beastly roof," said Manners, "the sooner the quicker. It's going to rain."

"Oh, dry up!"

"The weather won't, if I do," said Manners.

Manners was right there. The sunny afternoon was turning into a cloudy evening, and rain had been threatening for some time. Now the first drops began to fall, and, as the poet says, thus bad began but worse remained behind.

Tom sat on the parapet and meditated.

As Manners had stated, it was his business as leader to lead the way off that roof; but without taking a jump of fifty feet, he didn't see how he was going to do it. He thought of the elm-trees, but they were too far away to make a jump into their branches anything like practicable.

"Better have a look round," said Tom Merry at last.

"Lot of good that will do," said Manners.

"Oh, don't growl!"

The heroes of the Shell made an exploration of the roof, or, rather, roofs of the New House of St. Jim's. It was soon pretty certain that there was only one way of escaping from it. That was by the trap-door in the centre of the flat leads, built there in order to provide egress in case of fire.

Tom halted there, and reflected. Manners shivered. The rain was coming down now, and their jackets were too thin to be much protection against it.

"Well?" said Manners.

"We shall have to go through here," said Tom desperately.

"Right into the enemy's camp!"

"Is there any other way?" demanded Tom.

"Not that I can see. You see, I'm not a giddy chief," said Manners.

"No, you're a giddy ass! Let's get this beastly thing open."

"It's fastened, I expect."

The trap was certainly fastened. Tom Merry tried to open it in vain. Manners put his jacket up about his ears, and shivered in the rain.

"Well, have you got it open?" said Manners.

"The rotten thing won't open."

"Let's bust in the beastly roof, then. We've got to get out of this rain! Ugh! I shall catch my death of cold!" said Manners. "Wish I had that chest-protector your old governess sent you the other day!"

Tom knocked on the trap-door. There was nothing else to be done, and he could only hope that a boy and not a master would hear the knocking, and come to see what it was about.

The trap creaked, and he heard the sound of a moving bolt.

"They're coming, Manners."

"They're jolly quick, coming at the first knock," said Manners suspiciously. "I shouldn't be surprised if it was Figgins & Co. waiting there for us."

Tom Merry made a long face.

It would be a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire if the Terrible Two escaped from the rain, only to fall into the clutches of Figgins & Co. But there was no help for it. Darkness was coming on with the rain, and it was impossible to spend the rainy night on the roof of the New House. Anything was better than that.

The trap moved, and Tom Merry helped it up, and pushed



"Oh, my sausages!" cried Fatty Wynn.
 "Oh, my eyes!" gasped Figgins, rubbing them.
 "Oh, my hat!" mumbled Kerr. (See page 7.)

it back. A black orifice was disclosed, and from the darkness below came the voice of Figgins.

"Hallo! Who's there?"

"Is that you, Figgy?"

"Yes, it's me," said Figgins immediately and ungrammatically. "Who are you?"

"I'm Tom Merry. I want to come down."

"How did you get on our roof?"

"I expect you know pretty well," said Tom. "Don't rot, Figgy. We make it pax."

"It's all very well to make it pax when you're in a fix," said Figgins, from the darkness. "It's no go! We're not going to make it pax."

"Well, let us in, anyway. It's raining."

"Go hon! What about our tea all spoiled? What about our beastly study smoked out?" said Figgins. "We've had to send Blake and Herries and D'Arcy home without anything to eat, after inviting them to tea. Why, the horrid boulder's giggling!" exclaimed Figgins, as a chuckle came from the roof.

"Well, you must admit it's funny, Figgins," said Tom Merry. "Can we come down?"

"Yes, if you like; but mind, we don't make it pax."

"Does that mean you are going for us?"

"My dear kid, you can interpret it how you like; but we don't make it pax," said Figgins.

"We shall have to risk it," said Manners. "I'm soaked to the beastly skin. Are you going in first, Tom, or shall I?"

"I will," said Tom. "Are the steps there, Figgy?"

"No," said Figgy. "They're moved."

"It's only a drop of seven feet," said Kerr, "and we'll stand clear for you."

Tom Merry didn't like the idea of dropping down to the mercy of his enemies, but there was nothing else to be done. He swung himself into the opening, and let go. His feet touched the floor within, and at the same moment he was pinioned by half a dozen pairs of hands.

"Got him!" said Figgins.

A looped cord was passed round Tom Merry, and his arms were fastened down to his sides. Then he was pushed aside,

and Figgins & Co., and the rest of the New House juniors who were with them, waited for the next victim.

"It's all up, Manners!" called out Tom. "I'm a prisoner of war!"

"Come on, Manners old dear!" called out Figgins invitingly.

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly," trilled Fatty Wynn.

There was a giggle in the darkness.

Manners hesitated. But darkness and rain on the roof gave him no alternative. He swung himself into the trap, and was clutched and secured as quickly and neatly as Tom Merry had been.

"A nice bagful," said Figgins. "Close the trap, young Pratt. Bring the brutes along to the study, kids. Get a move on."

In the midst of a crowd of the New House juniors, Tom Merry and Manners were hurried down the stairs and into Figgins's study.

In spite of his own situation, Tom Merry could not help grinning as he looked into the once clean and cosy quarters of Figgins & Co.

Blackness was everywhere. The furniture, the floor, the books and papers were covered with blacks, and a strong odour of smoke still hung about the apartment, and the air was very hazy.

In the grate were the ruins of Fatty Wynn's cookery, most of the sausages burnt to cinders, in the midst of masses of soot and ashes and dust.

"Nice to look at, ain't it?" said Figgins, noticing Tom Merry's grin. "Sort of funny, hey? Nice sort of game to play on us, wasn't it?"

"Rather!" said Tom. "Almost as good as the time when you came to feed in my study without asking leave, and kept me out of it."

Figgins grinned.

"They say that after the feast comes the reckoning," he remarked. "In this instance there hasn't been any feast, but there's going to be a reckoning."

"Oh, get it over!" said Tom. "We want to get in to tea."

"Right-ho! We sha'n't be long. Has it occurred to you,

kids, that your complexions stand in need of a little improvement?"

"Can't say that it has."

"Well, I've thought of it. Get the soot ready. Kerr. Now, how do you like 'em done?"

Tom did not reply to that question.

Kerr was raking the soot out over the hearth, and as soon as a little heap of it was ready, Figgins & Co. seized Tom, and laid him face downwards in it.

His features disappeared into the heap of soot, and his struggles and contortions in the grip of the New House juniors only made matters worse.

Not till his face had been well ground into the soot did Figgins allow him to rise, and when he rose, there was a howl of laughter in the study.

Tom Merry's good-looking face and curly hair were thick with blackness, and he had been transformed into a very good imitation of a nigger minstrel.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Figgins. "Hear me smile! Like that, Tommy?"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Tom Merry. Some of the soot had found its way into his mouth and nose, and he didn't like the flavour of it.

Even Manners was grinning at his ridiculous aspect. But he left off grinning when Figgins & Co. seized upon him.

"Follow your leader!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Here, chuck it! Leave off! I— Gr-r-r-r!"

Manners's face was in the heap. When he was dragged up again, he was as black as Tom Merry. The New House juniors howled with laughter.

"Now," said Figgins, "you've had a little lesson, and I don't think you'll get on our roof again in a hurry. Have you had enough?"

"G-r—yes!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Then off you go!"

The chums of the Shell were released. They were marched out into the passage to the stairs, and Figgins and Kerr gave them a start with their boots, and they departed. They lost no time in getting out of the New House, passing no one but Monteith en route. The prefect stared at them and laughed. Tom Merry and Manners scooted across the quadrangle as fast as they could in the pelting rain.

"My hat, it's coming down!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the wind dashed the rain into his face. "Buck up, Manners, old chap!"

They dashed up the steps of the School House and into the house. The gas had not yet been lighted in the hall, and it was very dim. From the dinness came a startled gasp.

"Mein Gott!"

Tom groaned.

"Old Schneider, of course!"

The fat German master stared in amazement at the two black-faced objects that flitted by him. He made a clutch at Tom Merry, and seized him by the collar.

"Who—rat—ry—"

Tom struggled to escape before he could be recognised. The German master held him fast.

"Who was you? I vill know—"

He dragged Tom towards him. The junior, in desperation, slammed his head against the white waistcoat which covered the most prominent part of the fat German, the region vulgarly known as the bread-basket. Herr Schneider gasped and staggered back, and Tom tore himself loose and bolted. He overtook Manners on the stairs.

"Get into the bath-room, quick!" gasped Tom.

They ran into the nearest and bolted themselves in. They were soon cleaning off the soot with hot water in desperate haste, and when it was done they bolted away to change their jackets and collars.

Meanwhile, Herr Schneider was raising the house. The impact of Tom Merry's head upon his white waistcoat had deprived him of most of his breath, and he held on to the banisters and gurgled. Someone lighted the gas. Mr. Railton, the new housemaster of the School House, came quickly out of his study.

"What is the matter, Herr Schneider?"

"I—I—I—mein Gott!"

The housemaster stared at the fat German in amazement. There was a big black smudge on the German's white waistcoat, which was usually spotless. Tom Merry had left his mark there.

"My dear Herr Schneider, what has happened?"

It was some time before the German found breath enough to explain.

"Zwei poys come rushing in, mit faces black as ink vas after," he explained; "I stop tem mit myself, and vun he butt me in te waistcoat like vun pilly-coat!"

"Like a pilly-coat?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, puzzled.

"I don't quite understand you, Herr Schneider. What is a pilly-coat?"

"He means billy-goat, sir!" exclaimed Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, laughing.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Oh, I see! This must be inquired into. Which way of the young rascals go, Herr Schneider?"

"Up de stairs," said the German.

"I will call all the juniors together, and we will see whose faces are blackened," said the housemaster. "Such a foolish trick shall be severely punished."

The juniors of the School House were soon called together. They came in twos and threes, most of them surprised at the summons. Mr. Railton and Herr Schneider looked over them, but could find none with blackened faces. Clean-

of all were Tom Merry and Manners, resplendent in clean collars, with nicely-brushed hair. Tom Merry had a Euclid in his hand, his finger in it to mark a place, and he apparently been interrupted in the midst of engraving his study. Manners had a pen, newly dipped in ink, between his thumb and forefinger. The chums of the Shell looked more surprised and inquiring than any of the others.

"I do not see any blackened faces here," said Mr. Railton.

"Tey have been quick und cleaned tem mit tonselv before," said Herr Schneider. "I expect it vas tat Mer after."

"I cannot condemn anybody on suspicion, so I'm afraid it will be impossible to discover the culprits. You must go, boys!"

Tom Merry and Manners did not laugh till they were safely in Study No. 10. Then they roared.

"Well, that was a narrow shave!" exclaimed Tom. "We're well out of that. Poor old Schneider's waistcoat spoiled! I must buy him another!"

CHAPTER 6.

Let Loose!

MELLISH came out of his study with fury in his face. Morning school was over on the day following the adventure of Tom Merry in the New House. The culprits had not been discovered, and the Terrible Tom rejoiced. Tom and Manners came out of the Shell classroom, and met Mellish in the passage.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom. "What's wrong, kid?"

"It's Herries's bulldog that's wrong!" howled Mellish. "He wolfed another of my white mice. I saw him come out of my study."

"Why didn't you go for the brute?"

"He's got such a thundering lot of teeth," said Mellish. "I'm not going for him. I'm going to tell the housemaster."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom. "You can't be a sneak! Herr told you to keep your white mice out of his bulldog. What don't you do as you're told?"

"He shouldn't bring that savage, wild beast into the house," said Mellish. "It's against the rules."

"Well, it's against the rules, too, to keep white mice in the studies," said Tom. "I don't see how you're going to peach on Herries without giving yourself away, too."

"Hum!" said Mellish. "I suppose that would come too. Well, I don't care; I'll make those rotters in Study No. 6 sit up somehow. If I can't keep white mice without having 'em wolfed by that beastly Towser, there'll be row!"

With that Mellish started off with determination in his face.

"What are you going to do?" asked Tom.

The Fourth-Former did not reply. He went out of the School House and the chums lost sight of him. It was not till dinner-time that they saw him again, and he came in the hall with a grin upon his face, which showed he had been perpetrating some mischief.

"Hallo, Mellish!" said Herries affably. "I'm sorry about that white mouse of yours."

"Are you?" said Mellish grimly. "Your sorrow is a little too late!"

Herries looked at him.

"What have you been doing, Mellish?"

"I? Oh, nothing! I've just been round to the menagerie and I noticed that the doors of all the cages and huts were open."

"What?"

"Somebody has been awfully careless. All the pets were loose."

"Loose?"

"Yes. Your bulldog was fighting with Walsh's terrier when I left them, and that giddy goat was chasing Figgins's monkey all over the shop."

"My hat!"

"I dare say there'll be a row," said Mellish. "It's awfully careless of somebody."

"You did it, you rotter!"

"Did I? You'll have to prove that, Herries, old man!"

And Mellish settled down to his dinner with evident relish.

"Silence, there, boys!" said Mr. Lathom.

But the whole Fourth-Form table was muttering over the information Mellish had imparted. The news soon spread through the hall, and all the juniors were equally dismayed. If all the sorts and conditions of pets kept by the youngsters were let loose, it was certain that there would be a "row," as Mellish predicted.

The boys got out as soon as possible. There was a terrific uproar proceeding in the quad. Herries's bulldog had got the best of a tussle with Walsh's terrier, and, like Alexander, he sighed for fresh worlds to conquer. He found the fresh worlds he wanted in the person of Billy the goat. A fight between the two was proceeding when the juniors arrived on the scene.

"I say, separate 'em!" exclaimed Herries.

But he did not offer to do it himself. It looked rather a dangerous thing to do. Mr. Railton looked out of the door of the School House

"What is this fearful noise? Dear me, what a number of animals appear to be loose! Has anything happened to the cages?"

"Somebody left all the doors in the menagerie open, sir," said Mellish. "The pets have all got loose."

"Bless me, how very careless!"

Tom Merry rushed forward and seized Towser's collar, and Figgins, who had come out of the New House, gripped Billy the goat, and the combatants were dragged apart. Towser was snarling dangerously, but Tom held him fast, and he was marched off to the menagerie, and Figgins followed with the goat.

These two were secured, but with the rest of the pets it was not so easy. White rabbits and mice were all over the place, tortoises and lizards crawling everywhere, parrots and magpies hopping and cackling. It had not taken long to set the pets free, but it would certainly take a long time to gather them together again. Very few of the fugitives had been recaptured when the boys went in to after-noon lessons, and most of them were extremely anxious about the fate of their pets.

"Herries's bulldog's all right," growled Fatty Wynn, "and so is Walsh's terrier. But what about my white rabbits? That beastly Towser would think nothing of bolting 'em!"

"And my white mice!" exclaimed Kerr. "That rotten Towser wouldn't make more'n two mouthfuls of 'em!"

"And my hedgehog," said Blake. "I haven't seen my hedgehog since it was let loose."

"And my canawy," said D'Arcy. "Where's my poor old canawy?"

In the Shell there was as much disquietude as in the Fourth Form.

"I was getting such a lovely collection of frogs and newts in my tank," said French, almost tearfully. "Where are they now, I wonder?"

"Oh, where and oh where can they be?" said Tom Merry.

"What about my mice?"

"And my squirrel?" said Manners. "Last I saw of him he was slithering up to the roof of the principal's house."

"You'll never see him again," said French comfortingly.

"It was one of your rotten School House brutes let them loose, wasn't it? Serve you right!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Linton.

"And Figgy's monkey," said Jimson, with a grin. "I saw it going up the clock-tower like—like one o'clock. I wonder who's going to fetch it down?"

"Well, we shall have a lively time getting the pets together again," remarked Tom Merry. "The worst of it is that the Head may lose his temper and stop us keeping 'em. If he does we'll slay Mellish!"

Mellish was not having a pleasant time of it in the Fourth Form. Although he did not admit it, the Form all knew that he had done the mischief at the "menagerie," and all sorts of vengeance were promised him after lessons. But the first lesson that afternoon was a little longer than usual. Mr. Lathom was taking the Fourth in English history in a class-room where there was no clock, and when Mr. Lathom glanced at his watch, he found that it was stopped. The master of the Fourth was a fussy little man in spectacles, extremely short-sighted and extremely absent-minded. He as often as not forgot to wind his watch overnight, as he had done upon this occasion.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom.

He stepped out of the class-room to glance up at the clock on the school-tower. The clock indicated the hour of three. Mr. Lathom noticed a dark object against the face of the clock, but it was high up, and he was too short-sighted to distinguish what it was.

"Dear me!" he said, winding his watch. "Three o'clock! I really thought it was later."

He stepped back into the class-room. The lesson continued, but the boys were growing restive. It was a fine, sunny afternoon, and there was to be a short recess before the next lesson. Mr. Lathom noticed that the class were growing impatient.

"If you please, sir," said Blake, at last, "it's half-past three, sir."

Mr. Lathom stared at him.

"It is only ten minutes past, Blake."

"My watch is half-past, sir."

"Yours must be fast."

"Mine is half-past, sir," said Herries.

"Weally, and so is mine, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Lathom looked puzzled.

"Indeed!" he said. "Perhaps I have made an error."

He stepped out of the class-room again, and went out to look at the clock. To his amazement it still indicated the hour of three.

"Dear me!" said the master of the Fourth. "The clock has stopped." He glanced back into the room. "I am sorry, my boys. The clock in the tower has stopped. You may go."

The Fourth Form trooped out joyfully. Their eyes all went to the clock in the tower. It was the first time it had stopped within their recollection. It was Taggles's business to look after it, and Taggles had never failed before.

But as they looked up at the high clock-face a general exclamation went up. Mr. Lathom was shortsighted, but the boys of the Fourth were not afflicted that way, and they saw at once why the clock had stopped.

The dark object clinging to the face of it was perfectly visible to them. It was a little black-faced monkey.

"My monkey!" gasped Figgins. "Poor old Darwin! How did he get up there?"

Figgins had named his monkey Darwin, from a somewhat hazy notion of a connection between the great scientist and the simian race.

Figgy turned pale as he saw where his monkey was. The little animal, assisted by the ivy growing on the tower, had climbed up to the top, and the well-meant efforts of the juniors below, who saw it climbing up, to coax it to return had undoubtedly frightened it into going as far as it could. The little creature had swung itself to the clock-face, and was clinging to the big minute hand, which was exactly perpendicular.

There it hung, with a convulsive grasp, unable to go further, unable to return the way it had come, and apparently too frightened to make an effort either way. It had evidently been there some time now, and the wonder was that it had not already fallen—a dizzy distance that would have meant instant death.

"My monkey!" said Figgins. "Poor old chap! I say, he's got to be saved somehow."

The juniors looked at each other. There was no way of getting up the tower that they could see. The longest ladder to be obtained was only half the required length. On either side of the tower the masonry jutted out in a flat ledge, and to reach this—about half-way to the top—would be easy. But to go higher was a different matter.

Figgins looked up at the tower, and groaned. He was very fond of his monkey, but it was not only that. It was the agony of the little creature he thought of—clinging at that dizzy height, afraid to move.

The fact that something unusual was going on in the quad soon became known in the various class-rooms. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came out to look; and then the Shell were not long in getting up to the windows to look out.

Tom Merry was the first, and from the window he had a full view of the clock-tower, and the monkey clinging to the minute-hand of the great clock.

"My hat!" gasped Tom. "Look there, Manners!"

"Where?" said Manners.

"Look! The clock! Oh, poor little chap! It's Figgy's monkey!"

Manners gave a whistle.

"Poor little beggar! It's done in this time!"

"Perhaps not," said Tom Merry, a determined expression coming over his face.

Manners shook his head.

"My dear chap, there's no chance of getting it down alive. Can't you see it's too scared to move?"

"Yes; it looks like it."

"Besides; it jumped to that clock-hand, and caught hold of it. It can't jump back. There's nothing for it to catch."

"True!"

"And there ain't a ladder that will reach more than half-way to the clock," said Manners, shaking his head.

"Why, what are you up to, Tom?"

Tom Merry was opening the window.

"I'm going out."

"What for?"

"To save the little chap, if I can."

Tom was half through the window. Manners caught him by the shoulder.

"Don't be an ass, Tom! You can't do it."

"I can try."

"There isn't a ladder that will reach——"

"Taggles's long ladder will reach half-way—as far as the flat ledge at the side of the tower," said Tom.

"What will be the good of that? You'll still be thirty feet from the clock."

"Not if I pull the ladder up to the ledge, and set it against the tower."

"Tom Merry!"

"Let me go, Manners."

"Don't be a fool," said Manners, almost hoarsely. "You can't—you sha'n't do it. The ladder will slip off the ledge. It's only a couple of feet wide—and you—Tom—you sha'n't go!"

"I shall, old chap," said Tom quietly. "I'm not going to see that poor little chap come down on the stones and break himself into bits. I'm going! I'll tell you what—you can come with me, and hold the ladder on the ledge for me."

"It's madness——"

"Well, I'm going. You can come if you like."

Tom jerked himself free, swung out of the window, and dropped. Manners was after him like a shot.

"You're coming, Manners?"

"Did you think I shouldn't?" growled Manners crossly.

"I think you're a mad ass, and that's the plain truth. But you're not doing it alone."

"Come on, then. Let's get Taggles's ladder before anybody else thinks of it."

"Nobody else is likely to think of breaking his neck for nothing."

"Oh, dry up," said Tom, "and come on."

"Right you are," said Manners resignedly.

They dashed off across the quadrangle. The crowd was thickening in front of the clock-tower, and nobody noticed the movements of the heroes of the Shell. Mr. Linton had gone to speak to the Head, to consult him as to what had better be done. It seemed too cruel to leave the animal unaided, to fall to a terrible death. Yet it seemed impossible to save it.

Tom and Manners were not long in obtaining possession of the ladder. They ran it towards the tower between them, and then there was a shout. Figgins & Co. and Study No. 6 came running towards them in a moment.

"What are you going to do with that ladder?" demanded Blake.

"You'll soon see," said Tom Merry laconically.

"Up with it!" said Manners.

The ladder was reared against the side of the clock-tower. Tom Merry ran lightly up, and Manners followed.

"Here, stop!" exclaimed Figgins. "It's my monkey, and if anybody's going, I ought to go."

To which Tom Merry cheerfully replied:

"Rats!"

He gained the flat ledge, half-way up the side of the tower. Above that the tower was narrower. Tom and Manners dragged the ladder up, till the foot of it rested on the ledge, and the head against the clock-face.

"Come back!" shouted Figgins and Blake, as Tom Merry ascended the ladder again, Manners holding it at the foot—"come back!"

Tom took no notice. The ledge was only a couple of feet in width, and flat and smooth. It was quite possible that with Tom moving on the ladder it might slip off the ledge. But the thought of that did not deter the gallant lad.

Manners had his foot against the ladder, and was holding it, his face white and set. But if it began to go it was not likely that Manners could stop it.

"Come back!"

It was a deeper voice from below now. Mr. Linton had returned, and with him were the Head and Mr. Railton.

"Come back!"

But Tom Merry hardly heard them. All his thoughts were bent upon the task he had in hand—a task that required all his nerve, all his courage, all his resource.

It was plain that he was not to be called back, and the crowd below watched him with a sickening anxiety as he mounted higher.

CHAPTER 7.

At the Risk of His Life.

TOM MERRY went up the ladder slowly and steadily. Although his peril did not shake his nerve, he was fully aware of its extent, and if he came to grief it would not be for want of care.

The ladder, reared on the narrow ledge, looked almost perpendicular viewed from below; but it was safe enough for Tom Merry so long as he was careful, and so long as it did not slip off the ledge.

Up he went—higher and higher! Now he was on a level with the clock-face.

His position was now one of terrible peril. The slightest movement too far would send him spinning from the ladder, to crash upon the ground, sixty feet below.

"Take care, take care!" groaned Mr. Railton. But his voice did not reach Tom Merry.

The crowd of boys and masters held their breath. Kildare and Darrel had rushed off for a blanket, to have it ready in case Tom should fall; but the matter was pretty certain to be decided before they returned.

Tom made a coaxing gesture to the monkey. The creature was evidently terrified out of its wits by the position in which it found itself. It was clinging to the upright minute hand of the clock; and as Tom Merry reached towards it it squirmed to the further side of the clock-face, out of his reach.

Tom drew a quick, deep breath. The monkey was scared—too scared to listen to his coaxing.

"Come on, Darwin! Good old monk! Come here, chappy!" said Tom in his most persuasive tones.

But Darwin was not to be persuaded.

He regarded Tom with little, twinkling black eyes, and refused to come nearer.

Tom reached further, and made a catch at him.

The monkey whisked out of his way.

And Tom's heart went throbbing painfully, for beneath him he had felt a tremble of the ladder following his movement.

"For Heaven's sake, careful!" muttered Manners.

Manners was white as death.

Tom set his teeth.

He knew that he had had a narrow escape, and his heart was beating faster, but his courage and determination were undiminished.

He waited a minute, till his heart's throbbing calmed down.

The monkey still refused to budge.

Tom set to work to coax him.

"Come on, chappy. Come here, Darwin," he murmured. "I'm not going to hurt you. Come to your uncle, you little brute! Come on, kid!"

Perhaps Tom's persuasive accents somewhat calmed the fears of the monkey.

Still clinging to the upright minute hand, he allowed his head to come closer to Tom, and perhaps it dawned on his scared little brain that the boy was there to help him.

Tom extended his hand again cautiously.

If he frightened the monkey, all his trouble would be wasted; and now his head was beginning to get a little dizzy. He had determined not to look down, but he had caught a glimpse of the quadrangle far, far below, and the heads there looking like black dots. And its effect upon his brain was not steady.

He leaned against the clock-face again carefully. Then, with a snap, his fingers closed on the little silver creature Darwin wore, and he held the monkey fast.

"Good old monk! Quiet, chappy!" he whispered softly and calmly.

Darwin was wriggling.

Tom drew him gently but firmly across the clock-face, and he heaved a sigh of relief as he was able to draw back to the next rung of the ladder.

The monkey clung to his hold for a moment, but then he jerked him loose.

The little animal, startled and scared, began to wriggle and claw, and Tom had to hold him at arm's length as he slowly descended the ladder.

"My heavens!" murmured the Head, far below. "Will it never be down? Will this ordeal never be over?"

Tom was coming down slowly.

But at last, to the immense relief of the watching crowd, he stepped from the ladder upon the ledge beside Manners. Manners gave a gasp.

"Tom! Thank goodness!"

Tom was rather white.

"Yes, thank goodness, Manners, old chap!" he gasped. "I thought I was going once. Hold this little beast for me, monkey. I'm about played out."

Manners took the monkey and tried to soothe it.

Tom sat down on the ledge, to recover himself. The strain upon his nerves had been terrible, and he felt exhausted, as if he had been running for miles.

But it did not take the hero of the Shell long to recover himself.

He was soon breathing calmly and regularly, and he rose to his feet again, the colour once more flushing in his cheeks.

"Down with the ladder, Manners."

"Feel better, Tom?"

"I'm all right," said Tom cheerily. "I felt a bit rotten for a minute. That's all. I'm all serene now. Let's get down."

They slid the ladder from the ledge to the ground below.

A dozen hands seized it to steady it as Tom Merry began to descend with the monkey on his shoulders.

He was surrounded in a moment.

Blake and Herries seized his hands and started shaking them, while Figgins took away the clinging monkey.

The long pent-up feelings of the boys found vent in a ringing cheer.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

Blake was working away at Tom's arm as if he mistook it for a pump-handle.

"Bravo!" he yelled excitedly. "Hurrah! Give him one more, chaps!"

They gave him one more heartily.

"Hurrah!"

The Head laid his hand upon Tom Merry's shoulder.

"My brave lad!" Dr. Holmes's voice was trembling with emotion. "My brave lad! If I had been on the spot I should have forbidden you to make that terribly dangerous ascent. Now that it is over, I am glad to see that we have at St. Jim's a junior who has displayed a courage and nerve worthy of the bravest man!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Blake.

"I am more especially pleased," added the Head, "to see such courage and devotion displayed on behalf of a dumb animal."

"Hear, hear!"

"Boys, after this strain you will not feel inclined to immediately resume your lessons—"

This time it was not only Blake who shouted "Hear, hear!"

Every lad in the quadrangle cordially endorsed the Head's sentiments.

"Hear, hear!"

That "Hear, hear!" would have made Dr. Holmes frown at any other time, but now he did not feel inclined to frown at anything.

"Therefore, there will be an extra recess this afternoon," he said. "You will not return to your lessons until four o'clock."

"Hurrah!"

The doctor walked away. Mr. Railton went with him.

"Thank Heaven," said the Head, "that the matter ended so well. Mr. Railton. I am proud of that lad. Such courage and resource is rare."

Mr. Railton nodded cordially.

"And I am proud of Tom Merry," he said. "When he first came to me at Clavering School, I little dreamed that he would turn out so splendidly. Tom Merry is a boy who will make his mark in the world when he grows up."

"I am sure of that," said the doctor. "But whatever is that noise?"

He glanced back with a smile.

The juniors had seized Tom Merry, and were shouldering him round the quadrangle. School House boys and New House had united to do honour to British pluck as personified by Tom Merry.

Tom was supported upon the shoulders of Jack Blake and Figgins, and upon his own shoulder he carried the monkey, rescued at so much risk.

Round them and behind them the juniors fell into procession, waving their caps and shouting, and so they marched round the old quad.

Masters and seniors looked at the demonstration with good-humoured smiles.

The juniors certainly were making a deafening noise, but it was all in honour of pluck and daring, and it was a healthy kind of hero-worship.

"Oh, I say, chuck it!" said Tom, at last. "I'm getting giddy."

They set him down at last on the steps of the School House.

"Thanks!" gasped Tom. "That's better!"

Blake clapped him on the shoulder.

"I say, Merry, you're a cocky kid sometimes, and you've got the cheek to think that the Shell ought to come before the Fourth Form—"

"So it ought!"

"Rats! As I was saying, you've got your faults. But we're proud of you."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do. We're proud of you, kid, and—and you're going to be captain of the School House juniors in the house match."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Tom. "That's got nothing to do with this. I—"

Blake waved his hand.

"Not a word. You're captain!"

"But—"

"Three cheers for Tom Merry, cricket captain of the School House juniors!" shouted Blake.

The cheers were given with a will, Figgins & Co. joining in as heartily as any. And Tom Merry took his cap off his curly head and bowed profoundly.

CHAPTER 8.

A Nocturnal Alarm:

"G R-R-R-R-R-R-R!"

Herr Schneider gave quite a jump as this ferocious growl fell upon his ears.

He was coming along the upper passage in the School House with a candle-stick in his hand. The single gas-jet in the corridor cast a very dim light through its great length, and the German master had lighted his candle before coming up to bed.

The sudden growl from the gloom was startling in the stillness of the night.

Herr Schneider's candle flickered in his trembling hand as he stopped.

"Vat is tat?" he gasped.

He stared before him in the direction of the alarming sound.

To reach his bed-room door he had to pass a dark alcove in the passage, near the door of the apartment where the boys of the Shell who boarded in the School House were slumbering—or supposed to be slumbering.

And now, half within the alcove and half without, he discerned the form of a huge bulldog, with bright eyes that seemed to be watching him, and jaws open displaying a terrific set of teeth.

It was not Towser, for Herr Schneider knew Towser by sight. Herries's bulldog was an ugly brute, but he might have taken a prize for beauty beside this animal.

Never was there a more hideous face seen than that of this fiendish-looking brute, in whose expression savage ferocity and horrible cruelty seemed equally mingled.

It was no wonder that Herr Schneider stopped, and that the candle trembled in his hand.

"Mein Gott," gasped the German—"mein Gott! It is another of those bets, after!"

The pets had made their presence felt at St. Jim's since Mellish had turned them loose.

They were all over the place, and the hunt for them had, so far, met with but very partial success.

Sometimes they were found, certainly, but in the most unlooked-for places, and Mrs. Mimms had wrathfully complained to the Head of discovering white mice in her tea-caddy, and rabbits gorging themselves upon the vegetables in the kitchen. The house-dame had been startled out of her wits by finding a hedgehog curled up in her bonnet-box, and the cook had nearly gone into hysterics when a lively terrier suddenly jumped out at her when she opened the door of the larder.

The pets were everywhere, the houses were over-run with them, and though it was great fun for the juniors, their elders were getting rather "fed up" with those pets.

And even some of the juniors ceased to see the humorous side of the matter, when Figgins, for instance, found newts and frogs comfortably ensconced in his best Sunday topper, and Blake discovered that a monkey had been in his dark-room and made a wreck of his films and bottles.

Herr Schneider had not been left unmolested. The Herr was in the habit of taking an afternoon nap, and that afternoon he had been awakened by Figgins's monkey clawing at his scanty locks. But that was nothing to his present experience. He stood now in the passage with his blood running nearly cold as he gazed at that horrible-looking bulldog.

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

DAILY MAIL

NEXT

"TOM MERRY'S WASHING-DAY."

A Splendid and Amusing School Tale.

Herr Schneider backed away a step.

"Mein Gott!" muttered Herr Schneider. "He was going to pite! I was sure tat if I go on after he vill pite me paddy! Te peast! Oh, tose poys!"

What was to be done? He had to pass the bulldog to get to his room, and he could not stay out in the passage all night.

The ferocious brute made no movement, and, finding that he was not attacked, the Herr's courage rose, and he cautiously advanced. Perhaps the bulldog would allow him to pass in safety, after all.

"Gr-r-r-r!"
The bulldog did not move, but that fearful growl was sufficient to make the Herr jump away as if he had been electrified.

"Goot tog!" murmured Herr Schneider soothingly.

"Goot tog! Nice old fellow! Goot tog!"

He advanced again in a deprecating way.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

The "goot tog" was evidently not to be overcome by his blandishments.

Herr Schneider retreated again. He wouldn't have passed that brute for worlds. He already felt as if a lump were missing out of his calf at the thought.

"Te prute! Does betts vill be te deat of me," mumbled Herr Schneider. And he turned away to go downstairs again. He could reach the other end of the passage by the back stairs from below, and though it was a long way round, anything was better than trying to pass that horrible-looking bulldog.

As the Herr's steps died away down the stairs, another sound issued from the alcove. It was not a growl, but a very distinct chuckle.

Two boyish heads projected from the recess, and had Herr Schneider been still there, even in the dim light, he would have recognised the Terrible Two.

"He's gone," whispered Tom Merry.

Manners chuckled.

"Yes. He's gone down, to come up by the other stairs."

"He'll find the bulldog ready for him," grinned Tom.

"Come on. The brute's heavy; lend me a hand."

The way the juniors moved that bulldog was really peculiar. Tom Merry seized him round the neck, and Manners gripped his hind legs, and they lifted him as if he were an image made of stone, and carried him along the passage. And, strange to say, the bulldog did not make a single movement of his own, nor did he emit anything like a growl.

The juniors carried him past Herr Schneider's bed-room door, and set him down again, facing the way the German master would come next. Then they darted into the doorway of the Shell dormitory, and, keeping it an inch or two ajar, watched for the coming of Herr Schneider.

There was a sound of footsteps from the back stairs.

"He's coming," whispered Manners.

"Yes, I can hear his fairy tootsies."

"Get that growl ready."

"Rather."

They watched through the crack. Herr Schneider's candle glimmered along the passage. The German master was coming along cautiously, treading as lightly as he could.

"Mein Gott und himmel!"

Herr Schneider stopped with that exclamation of dismay as he saw that the bulldog had changed his position. He was still between the German master and his bed-room door. He was still in the same attitude, crouching low, his horrible-looking jaws partly opened, and his greenish eyes glimmering in the light of the candle carried by Herr Schneider.

"Mein Gott! Te prute! But I vill not go round again!" muttered the German.

He advanced cautiously.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Herr Schneider jumped back as suddenly as if he had trodden on a tack. The growl was simply vibrating with savage ferocity, and the Herr was far too startled and alarmed to notice that it came rather from the door of the Shell dormitory than from the crouching bulldog.

"Blitzen!" gasped Herr Schneider. "Vat vas I to do after? I gannot stay mit meinself out in to passage all te night after. I must go round again! Himmel!"

The German master turned back the way he had come. As soon as he was gone the Terrible Two emerged from the dormitory.

"Lend us a hand," said Tom Merry.

The bulldog was quickly lifted and carried back to his former position.

There was a solid-sounding clump as the chums set it down. It was really very heavy and solid for a bulldog.

Then, with a quiet chuckle, the chums disappeared into the alcove.

It was some minutes before the German master made his reappearance. He grunted as he came up the stairs. Herr Schneider was stout, and, as Tom Merry put it, must have found it a fag to carry himself about in warm weather.

"Der teufel!" howled Herr Schneider, as he showed him the bulldog in its old position, still keeping guard over the approach to the bed-room. "I vill go round again before after. Te prute! If he pite, keeck him mit te poot."

And he marched on.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Back jumped the German. All his brave resolution vanished into thin air as soon as he heard that ferocious growl. But Herr Schneider wasn't going round. Besides, it would have been useless. He just stood where he was, and shouted for help.

If he roused the house, that was the Head's fault, allowing the juniors to keep such fiendish pets, the German said to himself. And as he wasn't able to get to bed himself there was a certain satisfaction in waking up everybody else in the School House.

And he certainly did some waking up. Doors opened on all sides, and voices called to know what was the matter. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came out of his room, and half the Fourth Form were soon on the scene.

"What is the matter, Herr Schneider?" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "What are you calling out for at such an hour of the night?"

"Look at tat tog!"

Mr. Linton looked, and started.

"Dear me! What a ferocious-looking brute!"

"He have keep me out of my room after. I go to bed, and he go to te oder side of te door. I gome pack come pack too after. Vat is to pe done?"

"By Jove!" murmured Jack Blake, who was, of course, the earliest on the scene. "He does look a savage, doesn't he?"

"Rather!"

"And he looks like that ornamental stone dog that I bought in Rylcombe, don't he?" murmured Blake.

Herries started.

"Only a bit more highly coloured," he said.

"Yes, he's had some artistic touches of paint since he came," said Blake, "and some phosphorus on his eyes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Herries," said Mr. Linton severely, "there is nothing to laugh at. It is not surprising that Herr Schneider should not care to pass that savage-looking brute. It looks as if the juniors were crouching ready for a spring."

"It does look like it, sir, doesn't it?" said Herries.

Mr. Linton advanced towards the dog.

"Shoo! Shoo!" he said, waving his hand.

A blood-curdling growl came from the alcove.

Mr. Linton hurriedly retreated.

"Dear me," he said, "I don't know what is to be done. The animal is certainly of the most ferocious nature and refuses to be persuaded."

"He's too stony-hearted," murmured Blake.

"Silence, Blake. I really——"

It was here that Mellish came to the fore. Mellish was always on the look-out for a chance to distinguish himself, and to put Jack Blake and Tom Merry into the shade.

Here was a chance, and Mellish jumped at it. He stopped to dress and put his boots on before he left the Fourth Form dormitory, so he was late on the scene. He came forward like a bold volunteer.

"I'll drive him away, sir!" he exclaimed.

"No, no!" said Mr. Linton. "The risk——"

"I'm not afraid, sir," said the valiant Mellish. "I don't seem to care for the job," he added, with a winking glance at Blake. "I'll do it like a shot."

"Go it, Mellish," said Blake heartily. "This is your chance. Go it!"

"You chaps back me up."

"Rather! Go for him and give him a fearful kick, then we'll rush him. Stand ready, you kids! Mellish lead the way!"

Mellish led the way. He screwed his courage to the sticking-point, and took a rush at the bulldog, and delivered a terrific kick.

The next moment he gave a frightful yell, and started dancing in the corridor on one leg, holding the other foot with both hands.

The bulldog had not shifted an inch. That terrific kick had not disturbed him in the least. But Mellish felt as if he had kicked his hardest at a brick wall, and he howled with anguish as he hopped on one foot, and nursed the other.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!"

"Mein Gott!" ejaculated Herr Schneider. "Tat tog must have a head like to stone, ain't it?"

Mr. Linton uttered an exclamation.

"It is not a live dog at all! It is a stone image! This is some ridiculous trick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

There was a forward rush following Mr. Linton's words. Half a dozen candles shed their light at once upon the bulldog. It was quickly seen that the master of the Shell was correct. The bulldog was certainly graven in stone, but he looked extremely lifelike, owing to some artistic touches of paint, and to the phosphorus rubbed on his eyeballs.

"Ow, ow, ow!" howled Mellish.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake.

He was close to the alcove, and he started as he felt his shoulder tapped from behind. He turned his head and saw Tom Merry and Manners.

"Mum's the word," whispered Tom.

Blake grinned.

"Rather!"

Tom Merry linked arms with Blake. No one noticed that he had been in the alcove all the time. The boys were shouting with laughter at the discovery of the joke—all except Mellish. That hero was shouting, too, but it was with the pain in his toe.

"Mein Gott!" ejaculated Herr Schneider, whose face was a study. "It is ein stone tog, after all pefore! Mein Gott! Dis is ein drick!"

"It is certainly a trick," said the master of the Shell. "The dog was placed here purposely, and someone was imitating its growl in a very lifelike manner. This shall be inquired into to-morrow. Boys, go back to bed."

"Ow, ow, ow!" said Mellish.

The Terrible Two sauntered into their dormitory. The stone bulldog had been left in the alcove for the night. Tom and Manners laid down on their beds and roared.

"They can inquire if they like," Tom Merry remarked, when he had finished laughing. "But I don't think they'll discover anything; and the bulldog will have disappeared by morning. Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was right. The stone bulldog had disappeared in the morning. Probably Tom could have told what had become of it; but he did not, and the inquiry elicited nothing. The matter remained a mystery. Mellish remembered it longest; he had a pain in his toe for a week to remind him of it. And although Herr Schneider never knew for certain who had played that little joke upon him, he had a strong suspicion of the Terrible Two.

THE END.

(Another Splendid Long, Complete Tale dealing with Tom Merry next Thursday. Now turn to page iii. of cover, and see what picture you must look out for on the front of our next issue.)



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, who play many spiteful tricks upon them. 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. All goes well until Jardon, Symes, and Perkins, a friend of the bullies, enter the barn and light a fire, and through their carelessness the whole building catches alight. They then grow nervous as to the safety of Rex and his chums, and make their way to Jardon's study. Meanwhile, Rex and his comrades escape from the barn and return to the college. The Head then questions the bullies, and demands the truth.

(Now go on with the story.)

"WHEN BULLIES FALL OUT."

"You see, Jardon, I am bound to tell," said Perkins. "It's no good your looking fiercely at me like that. The doctor has made up his mind to find out all about it, and I believe he knows you lighted the fire so that the smoke might drive those fellows out."

"I assure you, sir, that there is not a word of truth in what that young rascal is saying," declared Jardon. "He is simply trying to screen himself by pretending that I lighted the fire, and suggested the matter to him. No such thing occurred; and Symes will bear me out in that."

"Why should Perkins try to smoke them out?" demanded the doctor.

"I suppose he wanted to have revenge, sir."

"It would be an extraordinary way to take it, seeing that any one of these three lads could certainly have overcome Perkins. If there is any truth in what you are saying, it only proves to me that you were there all the time, otherwise they would have come down and turned Perkins out of the place."

"You see how sharp he is, Jardon!" exclaimed Perkins. "I knew he would discover the truth; in fact, I told you so. I should be very sorry, sir, to let you think that Jardon and Symes are untruthful; at the same time, since you order me to tell you exactly what happened, why, I could not possibly let you think me guilty in any way. There are certain things that a boy is forced to do. Mind, I am not sneaking, Jardon, and letting the doctor know that you forced me to go there, so as to bear the blame; but he is so sharp that he has seen this is the truth, and you had better confess straight away that you did light the fire."

"It is impossible to know who is speaking the truth," exclaimed the doctor.

"Hear, hear!" growled Bob. "The British fleet thou canst not see, because it is not yet in sight."

"Stay, sir!" exclaimed Jardon. "I call on Rex Allingham to tell you who lighted the fire, and who thought of such a thing."

"Look here, you can't sneak like that, Rex," cried Perkins.

"Then you are the one," cried the doctor.

"Oh, I say, sir! Certainly not."

"Why do you not want Allingham to tell what happened?"

"I want to screen Jardon all I can."

"Absurd! Tell me, Rex, who lighted the fire. Come, I insist!"

"I'd rather you left us out of it, sir. I hope you will. After all, there was not much in it, except that the barn caught fire."

"And I'm going to build that up, you know, sir," declared Bob. "I don't care if it costs anything under a hundred pounds, 'cos I've got that; and I can get as much more as I want."

"I really do not understand how, seeing that your step-father has stopped all your pocket-money. It will be my duty to write and tell him what you say."

"The dear old gummage will be down to borrow some of it if you do, sir."

"Silence! That is not the way to speak. Now, Jardon, Symes, and Perkins, I have come to the conclusion that you are all three equally guilty. You have all spoken falsely to me. I am ready to believe that you did not intend to injure these lads; at the same time, your action was

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S WASHING-DAY."

A Splendid
and Amusing School Tale.

STORMPOINT (continued).

abominably cowardly, and if you are not ashamed of yourselves, I am ashamed of you. You will each take a book from the library and commence translating it into Latin. You will show your work up to me each day, and unless I am satisfied with it, you will not leave the college grounds. You can go."

"Oh, I say, sir," exclaimed Perkins. "I would rather stay! Think of the licking they will give me when I get outside. Of course, it was Jardon's fault; and if he hadn't shoved the turpentine on the fire I lighted, why, it would never have set light to the barn. My idea was only to send up a little smoke, but when he swamped that stuff on the fire, why, it blazed up like winking."

"Leave the room, you two elder boys!" ordered the doctor. "I forbid you to touch Perkins, and shall severely punish you if you disobey me. This bullying must be stopped."

Then the doctor dressed Perkins down until he dissolved into tears.

"It's all rot!" growled Bob. "That stepfather of mine will be down to-morrow, if the doctor writes, and he is sure to do so as he has threatened. You fellows will have to help me out of this. I've got a hundred pounds in the bank, and he will have every penny of it."

"We will talk it over, Bob," exclaimed Rex, "and decide on what is the best thing to do. I'll be shot if I know how you got all that money; all the same, I know you got it honestly, so it has nothing to do with me. Now, clear out, Perkins, you little rat! We don't want anything more to do with you."

"And that's the way you treat me, after the manner in which I screened you!" growled Perkins, slinking off.

Perkins came off very badly after that fire, for, beyond his punishment from the doctor, he received a fearful thrashing from the bullies for having sneaked, as they called it, and the unlucky Perkins vowed he would have a tremendous vengeance on the chums. When he learnt in the dormitory that night that Bob Bouncer's stepfather was coming down, a brilliant idea occurred to Perkins. He fully planned it out that night before he fell asleep.

Bob also had his plans to make, and the first one was to draw all the money he had out of the bank; then he went in search of his chums.

"It's all right, Rex and Jim!" he exclaimed. "I've got permission for you two to come down to the station with me to meet my beast of a stepfather! He's coming this afternoon, and he fondly imagines that he is going to get hold of my money. Now, I'm determined that he sha'n't. It's a bit over a hundred pounds, and he would like to have the handling of it, but I know his playful ways. Let's make a start now, then we can have a bit of a feed in the town while we are waiting for the train. You will be a sort of protection to me, because my dear stepfather won't dare to lay into me while you are there."

"Right you are!" answered Rex. "We will sneak past Porker's lodge, to make him think we are breaking bounds. Watch me!"

They did, and so did Porker.

"Now, what are you doing there?" he demanded. "I've got my heye on you!"

"Quite right, too, Porker!" exclaimed Rex. "You could not have it on nicer and better behaved boys. It's a nice bright afternoon for a morning stroll; don't you think so? Which heye have you got on us, Porker?"

"Now, I don't want none of your nonsense; and, what's more, I won't have it!" cried Porker. "You are the worst-behaved boys as ever I came

across! You ought to be hung, drawn, and quartered—that's what you deserve, and so I tell you!"

"I wonder if the cook ever kisses him?" mused Rex.

"Scissors! I wouldn't care for her job if she does!" Jim. "But look here, old bag ob bones, we want you us go out! Turn your heye the other way, and don't us. I will give you a halfpenny one of these days if you try to behave yourself like a decent human being!"

"You young varmint!" roared Porker. "I'll teach to call me old bag of bones!"

"I must say I don't consider the name very appropriate," observed Rex. "You see, Jim, Porker is not so remarkable thin. If you were to melt him down there would be a tremendous lot of blubber—enough to grease the boots of all the soldiers in the German Army, I should say! If the man won't let us go—why, let's make a bolt for it, don't know whether he's a fast runner."

"He will be a sort of scarlet-runner before he's gone a hundred yards! His face is pretty red already."

"It's not so red as his nose!" growled Bob, bolting his chums, who were already out of the gates.

"Come back, you yarmints!" roared Porker, waddling after them at top speed, which was something about ten miles an hour.

The chums were apparently making desperate efforts to escape him, but they merely kept a few yards ahead of him, by the way Bob panted Porker fondly imagined that he would catch at least one of the party. This was all he cared for, and the way he went pounding along the lane was furious.

"Don't go so fast, old chaps!" panted Bob, dropping till Porker could almost touch him.

"But he will catch us if we don't!" cried Jim. "Up!"

"You had better go back, Porker!" panted Bob. "You must see that you will never be able to catch me."

"Won't I, you varmint!" hooted Porker. "If I run as fast as the town I'll have you!"

Now, the nearest way to the station from Stormpoint was by a footpath across the fields, and as the chums neared the stile they put on a grand spurt. They were over the stile in a moment, and all three hid in the ditch on the side of the hedge. The field was a small one, and by the time Porker reached that stile it would have been possible for the chums to have gained the next one, though it would have required some fast running.

Porker evidently took it for granted that this was the way they had done, for he went waddling across the field in the same manner that nearly convulsed the chums. At the next stile he was compelled to take a rest, and now the three were calmly approaching him. His back was towards them, making a sign for silence, Jim crept up to it, and gave a shove that sent him sprawling face downwards on the exceedingly muddy ground.

"Bust!" hooted Porker, wiping his mouth with his sleeve, for he had taken a bite at the ground as he fell.

"Oh, is that you, Porker?" exclaimed Jim. "Who would have thought you'd be here?"


"You young villain!" howled the infuriated Jim, struggling to his feet.

"Won't I make you pay for this? Now, I'm serious, no nonsense. Just come straight to the door with me!"

"But look here, Porker," exclaimed Jim. "The doctor told me to go to the station to meet my dear stepfather, and he said these two young gentlemen could come with me. No doubt he was aware that they were very nicely-behaved young gentlemen, who would never think of playing a practical joke on a gentleman verging on his century, who has a face like a cheese-cutter, and red whiskers on his cheeks, and whose family motto is 'Never pay your tradesmen till they make you'."

(Another long instalment of this splendid school story next Thursday. Order THE GEM in advance.)

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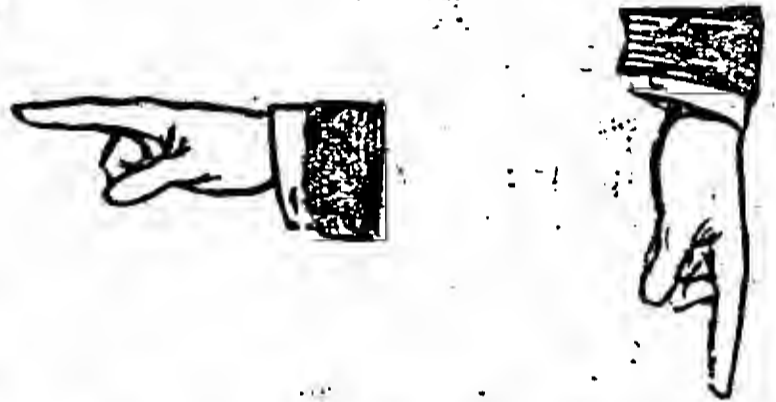
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