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TOM MERRY IN TROUBLE.

LONG, COMPLETE
SCHOOL
TALE

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



MERRY'S
MEDICINE!

NO. 29.

VOL. 2.

TOM MERRY
THREW UP HIS
HAND AS IF TO
WARD OFF THE IN-
SISTENT HOUSE-
DAME, AND THE
MEDICINE "I CAN'T!
TAKE IT AWAY!
GR-R-R-R!"

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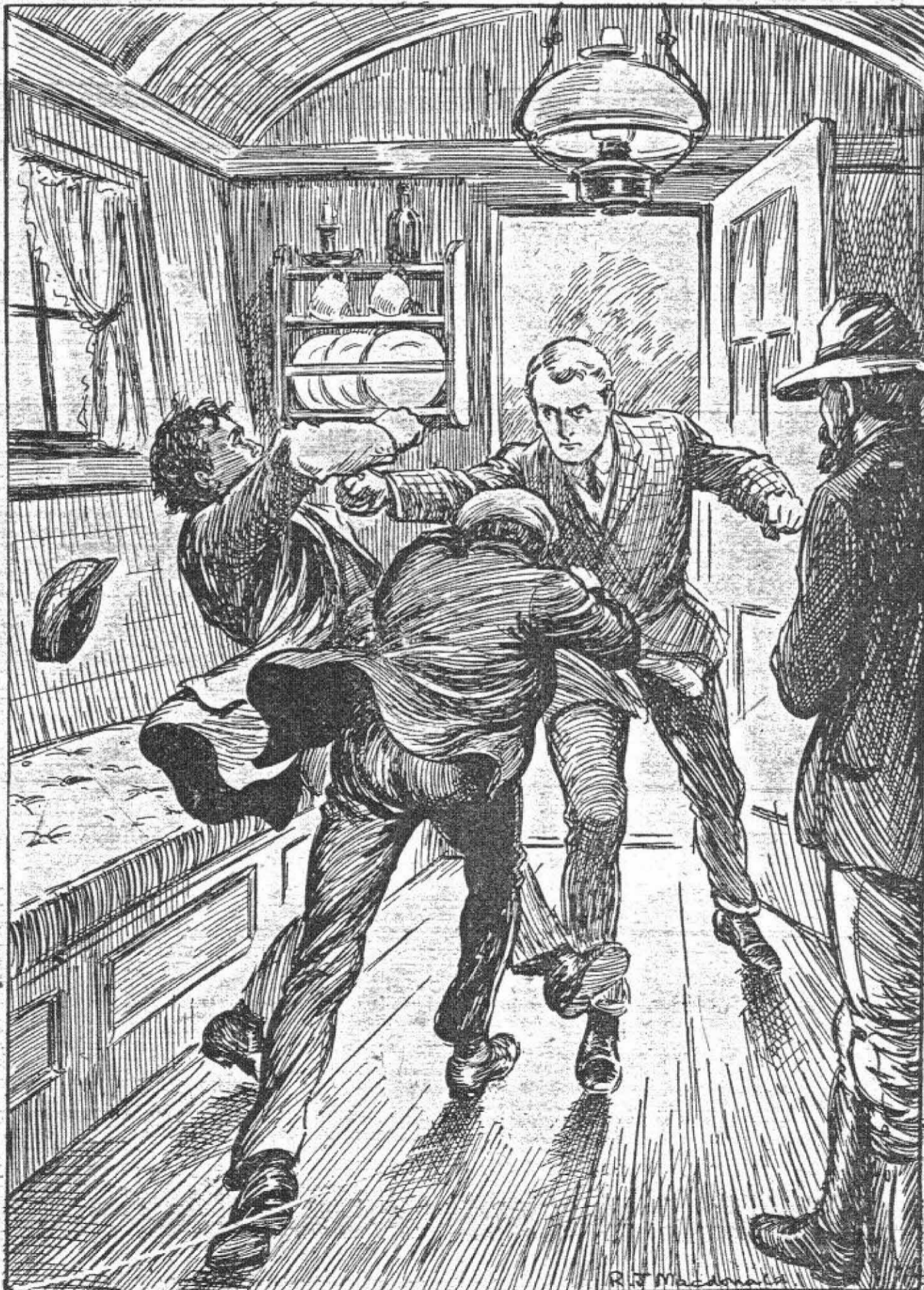
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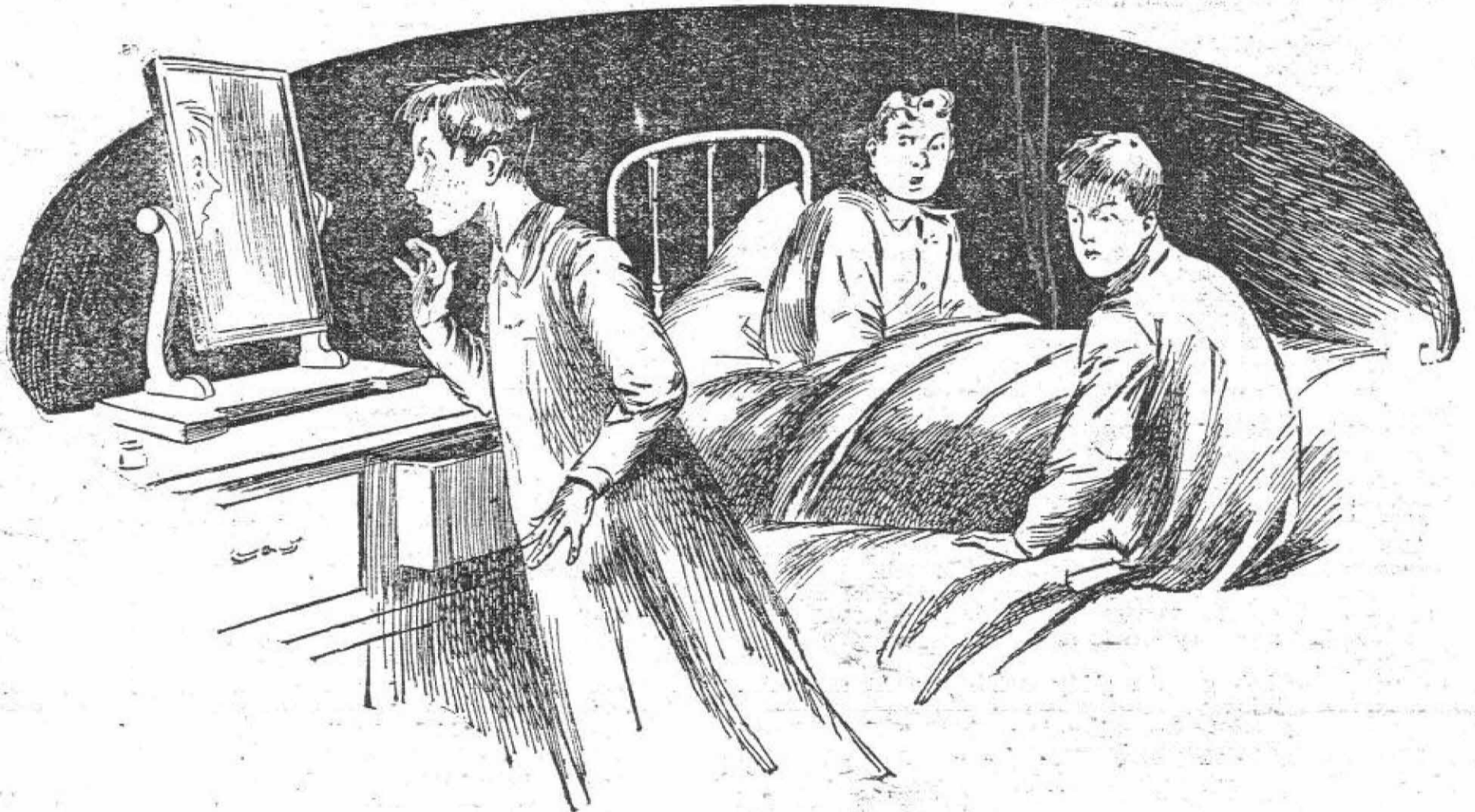
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A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

TOM MERRY IN TROUBLE.



A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S SCHOOL DAYS. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry on the Sick List.

GLOOM reigned in the School House at St. Jim's! The house was unusually quiet. Fellows, not usually subdued, went about on tiptoe, silent, or speaking in hushed voices.

There was none of the usual chatting and larking in the passages. When a class was dismissed, the boys went quietly out, with serious faces. They collected in groups of three or four, discussing some all-absorbing topic in subdued tones.

This unaccustomed gloom was more pronounced in the Shell than in any other Form, and among the boys of the Shell, the faces of Monty Lowther and Manners were the gloomiest.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were known at St. Jim's as the Terrible Three, and they generally made things lively in the School House, and sometimes "over the way" in the New House. But now Tom Merry's place was vacant, and the looks of his chums were gloomy in the extreme.

When the Shell were dismissed after morning school, Manners and Lowther walked out as if they were going to a funeral. They strolled into the quadrangle, and stopped in a spot under an old elm, whence they could see the windows of the school infirmary. They stared up at those windows as if the sight had a peculiar fascination for them. Manners heaved a sigh.

"Poor old Tom!"

Monty Lowther gave a nod.

"Poor old Tom!"

Then they were silent. That was the secret. Tom Merry that morning had not taken his usual place in the class, had not appeared in his study. Tom Merry was ill in the school hospital!

When he was up and about, Tom Merry was the life of the School House. His merry face was like a gleam of sunshine in the ancient building. Sometimes the masters and the seniors thought him a little too lively.

But now that he was laid up everybody missed him. The same concern could be seen in every face, from that of Mr.

Every Thursday.

ONE LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.

One Halfpenny.

Railton, the house-master, to the smallest and inkiest countenance among the fags of the Third Form.

That Tom Merry was really ill seemed to admit of no doubt. He had been put to bed in the school infirmary, and his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, had been wired for. Miss Fawcett was an estimable lady in very many respects, but it was certain that the Head would not lightly have asked her to come to St. Jim's.

Then the village doctor had driven up to the school, and he had seen Tom Merry, and many lads had watched him come out with a preternaturally grave face. Dr. Short certainly thought that there was something decidedly wrong.

"I wish they'd let us see him," said Manners restlessly. "I don't see why we shouldn't see him. Suppose we go and ask Railton?"

"Well, it wouldn't do any harm," said Monty Lowther. "But I don't suppose——"

"Hallo, you kids!"

It was the voice of Figgins, of the New House. He came towards the School House lads with an unusual gravity in his face—a face that was not exactly handsome, but was the most good-humoured at St. Jim's.

Manners and Lowther looked at him glumly.

"Hallo, Figgy! Don't make a row."

"Rows are off," said Figgins. "I came to ask you about Tom Merry. They say he's ill, and in the infirmary. French told me so."

"It's true."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Figgins. "He was all right yesterday. Why, it was only last night he was sprinting round the quad to keep up his form."

"Yes. And he was all right when he had that row in the study," said Lowther. "We had a tussle with Gore and Mellish and some more of them, and Tom was as fit as he could be. But he woke up with a fearful rash all over his face in the morning."

"Somebody said it was small-pox," said Manners. "I don't believe it for a moment."

Figgins whistled.

"I say, that's jolly serious."

"And somebody else said it was measles," went on Manners. "It can't be both, that's certain. I don't know much about them; but it stands to reason they don't both come at once, doesn't it?"

"I should think so. What does Tom Merry think himself?"

"Blessed if I know! We haven't seen him since he was yanked off this morning, as soon as the house-dame saw his face. But I know he didn't want to go."

"Poor old Tom!" said Figgins. "They'll be feeding him on slops and medicines and pink pills and things; and when Miss Fawcett comes she'll start shoving that marvellous mixture of hers down his throat. We ought to do something for him, kids."

The three juniors looked dubiously at the window of the infirmary. Within that curtained window lay Tom Merry on the bed of sickness, condemned, in all probability to a diet of broth and beef-tea and soothing powders.

"Hallo, kids! what's this about Tom Merry?"

The juniors looked round. Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6 in the School House, were coming towards them. Study No. 6 were generally at loggerheads with the Terrible Three, as well as with Figgins & Co; but just now they looked as concerned and sympathetic as anybody.

"Gore says he's got the giddy measles," went on Blake. "It isn't true, is it?"

"Yaas, they say he has a beastly wash all ovah his face," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally twust that it is not twue."

"It's true about the rash," said Manners dispiritedly. "I don't believe it's as bad as they think, though. Mrs. Mimms is always imagin'g that some of us are ill, and as for Dr. Short, you know what an old donkey he is."

"Yaas, wathah! I wemembah he wanted to make an invalid of me once, because Goah had spilt some indelible ink ovah my face," said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "He wouldn't listen to weason for a long time. He said it was—was—I weally forget the word; but it was somethin' howwible that ended in 'itis.' He was quite angry when he found that the feahful symptoms were only caused by indelible ink, don't you know. Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins grinned.

"Yes, I remember that too. And if he's making as big an ass of himself on this occasion, we ought to do something for poor old Tom. I've been in the infirmary under Dr. Short in my time, and I know what it means. Talk about getting hungry! Why, I could have eaten the hind leg of a horse!"

"That's it," said Manners seriously. "As a matter of fact, I don't like trusting a serious matter like this into the hands of the masters. I think we have a right to see Tom Merry. Suppose we go to Railton and demand——"

"I say, that's coming it rather strong."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, request, then, to be allowed to see Tom. Of course, he's bound to talk a lot of stuff about infection, and so on; but we're not afraid."

"Afraid! I should say not."

"Especially as we don't believe there's anything infectious about it."

"Righto!"

"Then let us go to Railton," said Manners, looking round. "Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors walked towards the School House, looking very determined. Mr. Railton's study window was open, and they saw the master of the School House within. He glanced at them from the window, probably surprised by the amity reigning among the three parties, who were usually at deadly warfare with one another.

They entered the house, and halted outside the house-master's study.

"Pewwaps it would be bettah for me to be spokesman," said D'Arcy. "I think I could put it more politely and effectively than Mannahs. I think——"

"Do you?" said Manners unpleasantly. "When did you start?"

"When did I start what, deah boy?"

"Thinking."

"At such a time as the pwesent," said Arthur Augustus loftily, "I can afford to pass ovah your wudeness without wesentment, Mannahs. Still, I must say that I think——"

"Oh rats! Dry up, and get out of the way!"

"I wefuse eithah to dwy up or to get out of the way. I am not accustomed to submittin' to anythin' of this kind," said D'Arcy frigidly. "At such a time I don't desire to quawwel with any gentleman pwesent, but I cannot wholly neglect to considah my dig. It would go against my conch——"

Blake gently inserted his fingers in D'Arcy's collar, and jerked him away from the door to make room for Manners.

"Gussy," he said impressively, "this is where you dry up."

"I wefuse——"

"If you say another word I'll ruffle your hair and rumple your collar."

At this direful threat, D'Arcy subsided. Manners knocked at the door, and the deep voice of the house-master bade him enter. Manners opened the door and walked in, with the rest of the juniors at his heels.

Mr. Railton glanced at them in some surprise.

"Well, my boys, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"If you please, sir——" began Manners.

"If you please, sir," said Arthur Augustus, who was still imbued with the idea that he would make the better spokesman of the two.

Blake gave him a dig in the ribs.

"Dry up, you image," he whispered.

"If you please, sir," went on Manners, "we've come to—to—to——"

"To speak to you, sir," said Blake, helping him out.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"To demand—I mean, request—that is to say, to ask if we could be allowed to see Tom Merry, sir," said Manners.

"Yes, that's it, sir," said Figgins. "We want to see him, sir."

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I am afraid it is impossible, my lads," he said, kindly enough. "Tom Merry shall be informed of your solicitude on his behalf. But it is quite impossible for you to be admitted to his presence."

"But why, sir?"

"There is danger of infection."

"But what is it he's got, sir?"

Mr. Railton's brow wrinkled for a moment.

"Dr. Short has not definitely made up his mind yet," he said, "but for the present every precaution is to be taken. Tom Merry is to be isolated in the infirmary, and——"

"But weally, sir," said Arthur Augustus, "Dr. Short is such an extweme old donkey——"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! Don't you wemembah the time I was stained in the face with that indelible ink, sir, and he wanted to make out that I was suffahin' fwom some feahful thing he called—I forget the word, but it ended with 'itis.'"

Mr. Railton tried not to smile.

"You must not speak so disrespectfully of Dr. Short," he said, "I wespect him vewy much, sir, but——"

"Ahem! I am afraid you cannot be allowed to see Merry at present," said the house-master. "I will speak to Dr. Short, however, and see what he says. He will be here again soon."

"Thank you, sir," said Manners dismally.

The juniors moved to the door. But Arthur Augustus was not beaten yet.

"But weally, Mr. Waiton——"

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, certainly, but——"

The house-master's hand slid towards a cane. Arthur Augustus followed the rest of the juniors from the study and closed the door.

"It's no go," said Manners, growling. "Might have known it wasn't any good talking sense to a house-master! But look here, we're not going to desert Tom Merry in a fix like this. We've got to do something for the poor chap!"

The juniors wandered disconsolately into the quadrangle again.

They turned the matter over and over in their minds. They were all agreed that something must be done for Tom Merry, but exactly what they could do was not apparent. The question was still undecided when they were called in to afternoon lessons.

CHAPTER 2.

A Touching Appeal.

THE gloom that had been brought upon the School House by the illness of Tom Merry showed no signs of dissipating. In class that afternoon, most of the juniors looked decidedly glum.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, found Manners and Lowther somewhat trying. They were thinking of their chum in the school infirmary, and sometimes answered absently.

Manners, for instance, when he was asked what was the chief product of Lancashire, answered "measles," an answer which was certainly not correct, and which astonished the inquiring master.

Monty Lowther was even worse.

The Shell were progressing through the *Æneid*, and it came to Monty's turn to castrate, but Monty was thinking of Tom Merry in the school hospital, not of *Æneas* and his comrades storm-tossed in the Mediterranean.

"*Æneas scopulum interea conscendit—Æneas ascended to the school infirmary!*"

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

Monty Lowther blushed.

"I mean, *Æneas* ascends a high rock, and—*omnem prospectum late pelago petit, Anthea si quem jactatum vento videat—and takes a wide survey, if he can see anybody like Tom Merry—*"

"Eh?"

"I mean if he can see anyone like *Antheus*, tossed by the wind," corrected Lowther, "or the *Phrygian* measles——"

"That will do, Lowther."

"Thank you, sir."

And Monty Lowther sat down with a great deal of relief, both to himself and to the master.

"I can't stick *Virgil* at a time like this," he confided to Manners, when they left the class-room. "I can't help thinking of poor old Tom, stuck up there in the infirmary, with nobody but old Mrs. Minns to keep him company."

"Same with me," said Manners. "If we could only get a word to him, so as to know whether he wanted anything, it would be better."

They went into the quad and looked up at the window. Some practice was starting on the football ground, but the boys were very quiet. Tom Merry's illness was like a cloud upon the place.

"Hallo," said Manners. "The curtain's moved! Somebody's looking out!"

"By Jove!" said Monty Lowther excitedly. "I believe it's Tom!"

They stared hard up at the window.

Tap! Tap!

"Do you hear that, Manners?"

"Rather!"

"It's Tom tapping the glass inside."

"It must be."

"He wants to draw our attention."

A face could be dimly seen inside the glass. It was certainly Tom Merry tapping there, having for the moment eluded the vigilance of his nurse.

Manners and Lowther frantically waved their hands to show that they understood. Manners tossed his cap up to the window, and it plumped on the glass and dropped into the quadrangle again.

A forefinger could be seen tracing over the pane from within.

The chums of the Shell watched it excitedly.

"What on earth is he doing?" muttered Lowther, in perplexity.

Manners clutched him by the arm.

"He's writing something."

"By Jove, so he is!"

"He's stuck some soot or something on his finger, and he's writing something on the glass for us to read," said Manners excitedly. "Look, I can make out a G."

"And an R."

Yes, and now look—that's an O—no, a U."

"GRU——" said Monty Lowther, puzzled. "What can he possibly mean by GRU?"

The finger had left off tracing on the glass.

The juniors looked at the mysterious message, and then at each other, in amazement.

There, traced on the glass with a sooty finger, were the letters G R U, in big capitals that could have been read at almost any distance.

What did Tom Merry mean to convey by them?

"He can't mean that he's got the grumps," said Monty, at a venture.

"There's Figgins; let's see if he can make it out."

"I say, Figgy, come here, will you?"

Figgins came quickly enough. The Co. were with him, Kerr and Fatty Wynn. They stared up at the window, as Manners pointed out the mysterious message.

"Gru!" said Figgins, perplexed. "It's not an English word. Is it Latin, Kerr?"

"Blessed if I know," said the Scottish partner in the Co. "I've never come across it. I can't make it out at all."

"I say, he can't be off his rocker, can he?" said Fatty Wynn anxiously.

The juniors looked startled at the idea.

"Hullo, there he is again," said Monty Lowther. "Look!"

The forefinger was tracing over the glass again. Another letter was formed.

"That's a B," said Figgins.

"G-r-u-b!" read out Monty Lowther. "GRUB! My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Grub!"

They could not help laughing. Tom Merry had had to stop before the word was finished to get a fresh supply of soot.

Now that the word was complete, the meaning of the invalid's message could not be mistaken. GRUB!

It was an appeal that went straight to the hearts of the juniors.

Shut up in the infirmary, condemned to invalid's diet, the unfortunate chief of the School House juniors had thus made known his chief want with Spartan brevity.

"Poor old Tom," said Manners. "They're starving him. I dare say he's had nothing but beef-tea all day. It's shocking!"

"We can't pass over an appeal like that," said Monty Lowther. "Tom must have got out of bed to write that message. He can't be very ill."

"It's enough to make him ill, to go short of grub," said Fatty Wynn feelingly. "I remember the day I came to St. Jim's, and they forgot to put my lunch in the train. I was nearly two hours without anything to eat. I sh'a'n't forget that in a hurry."

"Awful," said Figgins. "I say, kids, we're going to do something for Tom Merry. Can we let a fellow-creature perish of famine under our giddy eyes? Never! We're going to get him a jolly good feed somehow."

"That's the idea."

"We'll have a whip round, and get some grub in," said Figgins. "Then we'll find some way of getting it to him. I don't believe he's too ill to eat."

"Rather not," said Fatty Wynn. "I've never been too ill to eat."

"Come along, kids. How much tin can you raise?"

Unfortunately, there was a considerable shortage of cash.

"It's always so at a time like this," said Manners. "Come along to Study No. 6. They're always in funds, and they'll want to be in this, anyway."

"Good idea."

Jack Blake and his chums were at home. They received the visitors with great sympathy, and at once joined in the plot.

"As for cash," said D'Arcy, "that's all wight, deah boys. I've just had a fivah from my governah, and I would weally blue it to the last shillin' with a great deal of pleasuah for the sake of Tom Mewwy. I would weally."

"You're a good little ass," said Manners. "Hand it over."

"What did you say, Manners? I——"

"I mean you are an estimable young gentleman whom I respect highly," said Manners. "Hand it over, kid. Wynn can go and get the grub; that's in his line."

D'Arcy produced the fiver, and Fatty went off to change it at the tuck-shop. While he was gone, the juniors discussed the plans for getting the required "grub" to Tom Merry.

"There'll be plenty of supplies," said Figgins. "Thanks to Gussy." Arthur Augustus bowed. "Now, the question is, how to get them to Tom Merry. That's not so easy."

"They won't admit us to his room," growled Blake. "That's the difficulty. Still, his writing on the window shows that he's left alone at times."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Suppose one of us just walked along to the infirmary in an innocent sort of way," Herries suggested. "If the coast was clear, he could pop in, and if it wasn't, he needn't."

"That looks like a good idea," agreed Monty Lowther. "What do you chaps say?"

The chaps agreed that it was the only thing to be done.

"Then which of us shall go?" said Manners.

"No good either of you two going," said Blake. "If Lowther or Manners were seen near the infirmary, the wheeze would be spotted at once."

The chums of the Shell rather reluctantly agreed that this was too probable. Tom Merry's two chums would excite suspicion at once.

"Then," said Blake thoughtfully. "I don't see how a delicate matter of this kind could be trusted in the hands of a New House chap—"

Figgins and Co. looked wrathful.

"It stands to reason," said Figgins, "that any of us could manage it better than any of you School House wasters. Don't be absurd, Blake!"

"I'm simply stating facts," said Blake. "I respect you very much, Figgins, but in a matter of this kind, one can't be too careful, and—"

"Yaas, wathah! I think the most sensible and tactful chap should be picked out from the lot of us," said D'Arcy. "That's my idea, deah boys."

"Jolly good idea, too," said Figgins. "And, as I was saying—"

"As I was saying—" said Blake.

"Yaas, it's a good idea; it's mine," said D'Arcy. "Undah the circumstances, I weally consider that I am the pwopah person."

"You!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, go and eat coke," said Figgins crossly. "Nice muck you would make of it, or any of you School House kids, for that matter."

"Toss up for it," suggested Monty Lowther. "You can't all go, and we don't want to sit talking about it all night."

"I weally think—"

"No, you don't! Dry up. Here's a tanner, Figgy."

"School House or New House," said Figgy, tossing the coin.

"Guess, Blake."

"Heads," said Blake.

Figgins disclosed the sixpence; heads it was.

"You win," said Figgins, as cheerfully as he could. "School House has it! But I implore you not to let that champion ass go!"

"If you are alludin' to me, Figgins, I weally—"

"Oh, I shall go!" said Blake.

"I pwotest," said D'Arcy. "I am not the person to put myself forward in any way, but I weally think that I could manage this mattah bettah than any of you. It is a mattah that wequires tact and—"

"Now, look here, Gussy, you're dead in this act," said Blake persuasively.

"I am nothin' of the kind. For the sake of Tom Mewwy, who is greatly in need of gwub, I think I ought to be entwusted with the job."

"Oh, we'll toss up for it if you like!"

"I am agweeable."

Blake tossed up the sixpence.

"Tails!" said D'Arcy.

Tails it was. The swell of the School House smiled with satisfaction.

"Here, where do I come in?" exclaimed Herries.

"Oh, you'll have to toss with D'Arcy now!" said Blake.

"I pwotest. That is not cowwect. I have—"

"Oh, toss up, and ring off!" said Blake.

D'Arcy obeyed, and Herries failed to name the coin. Arthur Augustus purred with triumph.

"That settles it, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "This mattah will be in my hands, and I weally think that I shall cawwy the thing out successfully. Here comes the gwub!"

Fatty Wynn re-entered the study heavily laden.

He had expended a sovereign out of D'Arcy's "fivah," and, if Tom Merry was not jil already, the supplies brought in by Fatty were enough to make him ill ten times over.

"That looks all right," said Manners. "Now, let's select something for D'Arcy to take."

"Is D'Arcy going?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I expect it will be a beastly frost, then."

"I weally do not see why you should expect it to be a fwost. I—"

"Here you are!" said Manners. "Shove this cake under your jacket, Gussy! Can you carry a pie?"

"He could put on a silk hat," said Blake, "and shove the pie in that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Then you can stuff some oranges in your pockets, and some of these apples," said Figgins; "and as for the currant-wine—"

"Put the bottle down his back," suggested Herries.

"That's right. Mind you don't let it slip down and break, D'Arcy."

"I will be extwemely careful."

"About the biscuits—"

"Roll 'em up in a paper bag, and put 'em up his sleeve," said Manners.

"Good wheeze."

A considerable quantity of provisions were disposed about the person of Arthur Augustus. He showed a slight increase of stoutness, and moved rather awkwardly, but he was assured that he could pass muster.

"Now you're ready," said Blake, rather dubiously. "Mind, if the coast's not clear you're not to go in!"

"I quite compwehend."

"If you can't work the wheeze, it can be left over for another chance. You mustn't get spotted, that's the important thing."

"I understand quite well."

"Off you go, then!"

Arthur Augustus donned his silk hat with the pie in it, and went to the door. As he stepped into the corridor a prefect came along. He stared at D'Arcy.

"Hallo, what are you wearing that thing for?" he asked; and he gave the unfortunate silk topper a clout in passing, which sent it flying.

There was a crash.

"You howwid bwute!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

The prefect stared in amazement at the silk hat, from which gravy was thickly oozing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "Do you usually carry a pie around in your hat? What's the game?"

"You howwid, wuff person! I—"

Blake dragged Arthur Augustus back into the study. The senior passed on, still chuckling.

"That's a good pie gone," said Blake.

"Pie!" said D'Arcy. "I am thinkin' of the toppah!"

"Oh, blow the topper!"

"It is completely wuined—"

"You'll have to leave the pie out," said Manners. "Get along, Gussy!"

"But my toppah—"

"I'll take care of your toppah. Travel!"

D'Arcy left the study again. Manners kicked the silk hat into the room, which was his way of taking care of it. Then the juniors followed Arthur Augustus at a cautious distance to see how he fared in his expedition.

CHAPTER 3.

Not Quite a Success.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS made his way to the long passage which gave access to the school hospital, which was isolated from the rest of the school buildings. The manner of the juniors' emissary was cautious in the extreme; so cautious that any master who had happened to notice him would infallibly have had his suspicions raised thereby.

Fortunately no masters seemed to be about. Arthur Augustus met only one person en route, and that person was Gore, of the Shell.

Gore stopped and stared at him.

"Hallo, Gussy!" he said. "Where are you going?"

"Hush!" said D'Arcy, laying his finger mysteriously on his lips. "Hush! Goah! I am going to see Tom Mewwy."

"But it ain't allowed."

"Yaas, that is unfortunate; but it can't be helped. I am going."

"What's that sticking out of your pockets?"

"Gwub for Tom Mewwy."

"Ha, ha! He's not allowed to eat. I really think it is my duty to report this to the house-master."

Arthur Augustus looked alarmed.

"Look here, Goah! Don't be a cad, you know. We are going to stand by Tom Mewwy in this extwemity like twue fwriends. He is ill, you know—"

"Rot! He's no more ill than I am."

Gore spoke hastily, and checked himself the next moment. D'Arcy looked at him curiously.

"What do you know about that, Goah?"

"Never mind what I know," said Gore. "Mind you don't get nabbed, that's all."

And Gore walked away, leaving Arthur Augustus to continue on his way. The swell of the School House marched on, taking great care to keep the provisions in their places, which was not easy, considering how every available space on his person was crammed with good things. There were two big doors in the long passage leading to the infirmary, which were kept closed, but fortunately they were not locked.

D'Arcy passed the second one, and then the door of Tom Merry's quarters was in sight. He had met no one but Gore en route, and was already feeling successful. It remained to be seen whether Tom Merry was alone at this moment. If he was the delivery of the provisions would be a simple matter.

D'Arcy stopped outside the door and pondered. If he opened it, and the nurse was there, he would be given away. The best plan was to tap, and if the nurse was there, to pretend that he had come on a message.

D'Arcy had just come to this decision, when a sudden tap on the shoulder electrified him. He swung round with a jump to find himself face to face with Mr. Railton.

The house-master eyed him sternly.
"What are you doing here, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus was completely taken aback.

Worst of all, the sudden start he had given on feeling a hand on his shoulder had shifted the bottle of currant-wine concealed under the back of his jacket, and he feared every second to hear it slip from its hiding-place and crash on the stone-flagged floor.

"Doin', sir?" stammered D'Arcy. "Yaas, I—I was—don't you know—"

"You were going to see Tom Merry?"

"Yaas, wathah! I mean—no—yes—that is to say—"

"Go back at once to the School House!"

"I—I—"

"If you come here again you will be severely caned. Go at once!"

D'Arcy did not stir.

He was standing in a most awkward attitude to keep the bottle of wine in its place, and he knew that if he moved it would slip away.

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Mr. Wailton!"

"Then why do you not go?"

"I—don't you know—you see, sir—yaas—"

"I am afraid I do not comprehend you, D'Arcy. Kindly go at once, and wait for me in my study."

"Yaas, but—I—"

Mr. Railton, losing patience, caught him by the shoulder again, and jerked him along. Then came the catastrophe. The bottle of currant-wine slipped out, and went with a crash to the floor. The bottle smashed to pieces, sending spurts of red wine in all directions. The house-master was wearing a pair of light-trousers, as it happened, and they came in for a considerable share of the red-currant wine.

"D'Arcy! What do you mean by this?"

He shook the swell of the School House violently.

That shaking had an unexpected effect. It was a good deal like shaking a bough laden with ripe fruit.

From every part of Arthur Augustus, provisions of all kinds rained down in a shower. Apples and oranges, cakes and biscuits, toffee and chocolate, sandwiches and bananas, were scattered at the feet of the astounded house-master.

"Oh, goodness gwacious!" gasped D'Arcy. "How annoyin'!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir."

"What does this mean?" The house-master had continued shaking the junior until he seemed to have shed all his burdens.

"Were you taking these things to Tom Merry?"

"You see, sir, he's hungwy, and—"

"His diet is regulated by Dr. Short, and—"

"Yaas, but Doctah Short is an old donkey, sir, and—"

Mr. Railton shook him again.

"D'Arcy, I really do not know how to deal with you—"

"I weally wish you would not be so wuff, sir. You are cwumplin' my collah."

Mr. Railton breathed hard.

"D'Arcy go away at once! If any further attempt of this kind is made you will be severely caned. I shall warn the nurse to be on the look-out. Now go!"

"Yaas, sir, certainly."

D'Arcy stooped to collect up his property. Mr. Railton helped him along the passage with a gentle application of his foot.

"You need not trouble about that, D'Arcy. I will send the housemaid to remove all that, and it will be useful in the kitchen."

"But weally, sir—"

"You may go!"

"This is pwivate pwoperty—"

Mr. Railton took Arthur Augustus by the ear and walked him along the corridor. At the end of it, in the School House, he turned a corner suddenly, and ran into seven juniors. There was a general gasp of dismay.

The house-master surveyed the discomfited youngsters grimly.

"Ah, I suppose you are all in this!" he said. "Is that so?"

"Well, you see, sir," said Figgins, "we—that is—"

"Yes, I see. You will take fifty lines each. You may go!"

Disconsolately enough the plotters made their way back to Study No. 6.

"This is a ghastly fwost, and no mistake!" said D'Arcy. "It wasn't my fault, deah boys. That howwid Wailton had no right to pop up like that all of a sudden."

"Well, no, that couldn't be foreseen," agreed Blake.

"Oh, I don't know," said Figgins. "It was easy enough to foresee that it would be a frost if you School House kids had the handling of it."

Blake's eyes gleamed.

"You would have done better, of course!"

"Well, we couldn't have done worse," said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Oh, don't you talk, Gussy! You've mucked up the whole thing and wasted a lot of the grub. I really think the matter ought to be left to the New House now."

"Oh, very well!" said Blake resignedly. "I had an idea; but if you chaps prefer to waste time making another muck of it, I don't mind."

"What's your idea?" said Figgins. "If you've got a good one that alters the case. We'll hear it, anyway."

"Well, I was thinking that it's no good trying to get in at the door, but we might manage at the window," said Blake.

"It's getting dark, and you know that long ladder of Taggles's—he'd let us have it if he didn't know what it was for—you kids could go and get it, and he'd think it was one of the usual house rows and would hold his tongue."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Figgins. "It might work. We'll burgle the giddy infirmary after dark. Jolly good wheeze!"

"I think I had bettah go up the laddah," said D'Arcy.

"Undah the circs—as a person with a stwong nerve will be needed, I weally think I am the pwopah—"

"Better fasten him up in the coal-locker, I think," said Figgins, looking at Arthur Augustus in a reflective way.

"I wefuse to be fastened up in the coal-lockah. I wefuse—"

"Back-pedal," said Blake. "Figgy, we'll work that idea. You go and get the ladder, and as soon as it's quite dark we'll try it."

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER 4.

After Dark.

"NOW, Master Merry, you must lie quiet."

"I can't!"

"You must lie—"

"I won't!"

"You—"

"Rats!"

Mrs. Mimms gave it up in despair. The good house-dame had taken charge of the invalid—no light task, as it necessitated her handing the keys of authority in the School House to a subordinate and isolating herself until it was known for certain what was the matter with Tom Merry, and whether it was infectious.

"I don't mean to be rude, Mrs. Mimms," said Tom Merry the next moment penitently. "I beg your pardon; but, you see, I'm not ill."

"My dear Master Merry—"

"I was all right yesterday. Why, only last night we had a fight with Gore and Mellish in the study, and I was as right as rain. You should have seen me with Gore's head in chancery! They very nearly wrecked the study, but we gave them beans. We—"

"You must not talk, Master Merry."

"I tell you, I'm not ill."

"My dear child, there is a terrible rash broken out all over the left side of your face."

"I don't care. I'm not ill."

"Dr. Short is very concerned about you."

"Dr. Short is a donkey!"

"My dear Master Merry!"

"So he is. He shakes his head and looks wise because he doesn't know what is the matter," said Tom Merry with an intuition beyond his years. "If it wasn't for that giddy rash he couldn't find anything the matter with me. I'm blessed if I know how it came there, or why, but I'm not ill."

"You are feverish."

"I'm not feverish," howled Tom; "I'm all right!"

"My dear Master Merry, you must be quiet," said the house-dame. "You distress me very much, my dear boy."

Tom quieted down at once. He did really look feverish and his colour was very high, but it was probably with excitement and exasperation.

"I don't want to worry you, Mrs. Mimms, but I'm not ill, you see."

The house-dame smiled patiently.

She had the greatest faith in Dr. Short. He had attended her for twenty years or so for rheumatism, so her experience of him was really a long one. The rheumatism was still flourishing, it is true, after the labours of twenty years; but then, as the doctor explained to the stout, healthy house-dame, she was of a peculiarly delicate constitution. She did not look it, but surely a medical man ought to know.

ANSWERS

"Now, Master Merry, compose yourself. The doctor will be here soon, and he will think I have been careless if you are excited."

"Give me something to eat, then."

"Yes. Would you like the broth?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Would you fancy the beef-tea?"

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

"Ah, here is Dr. Short!"

The door opened and the little fat medico came in. Dr. Short was not much over five feet high, but he made up for it in width. He wore a white waistcoat under his black frockcoat and his silk hat was the shiniest in Rylcombe. He had a "bedside manner" which was famous for miles, but which was completely wasted upon a patient like Tom Merry.

"Ah, good-evening, Mrs. Mimms!" said the physician. "And how is our little patient?"

"Getting pretty sick of being stuck in here!" said Tom Merry. "Here I've been lying a whole day, with the other fellows on the football field. I could hear 'em."

"Ah, the noise of the football annoys the patient!" said Dr. Short, shaking his head. "I must speak to Dr. Holmes about it."

"It doesn't!" howled Tom. "It's the only comfort I've got to hear 'em shout 'goal!' I wish I could be with them."

"You will soon be well, my little man," said the doctor, rubbing his fat little hands. "We shall soon have you well again."

"I'm well now."

"H'm, h'm! Let us see his poor little face, then."

"Blow my poor little face!"

"Patience, my dear boy, patience. I can see an improvement already."

"There's nothing wrong with me."

"Now your wrist, my dear child."

"Who are you calling a child?"

Dr. Short felt Tom's pulse, and shook his head solemnly. It was certainly going very fast, but then, Tom was exasperated and excited.

The doctor withdrew and held a whispered consultation with Mrs. Mimms, Tom Merry watching them with gleaming eyes. Then he spoke a few more consoling words to Tom—received with a very ill grace—and took his leave.

He spoke to Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, before he left. He was looking very grave, and he did not commit himself. As a matter of fact, he was puzzled, but he did not like to say so.

The Head was quite keen enough to see his state of mind on the subject, and after Dr. Short was gone he had a little talk with Mr. Railton.

"If it were not for the appearance of the rash," said the Head, "I should not think Merry was ill; and I cannot say that I have great reliance upon the Rylcombe doctor. Yet that symptom is certainly a serious one."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Yes, and I don't see how it is to be accounted for, sir. Otherwise, certainly, Merry appears to be in good health, and he certainly does not take to the invalid's diet. Dr. Short intends to still keep him on a low diet. I suppose he knows best."

"I—er—suppose so. I have been thinking of wiring for a London physician," said the Head. "We will wait, however, until Miss Fawcett arrives."

Tom Merry's old governess was certain to lose no time in coming to St. Jim's to see her darling Tommy. Tom Merry, fond as he was of Miss Priscilla, looked forward to her coming with dread. He knew that she would bring a thousand remedies, and his only hope was that Dr. Short would put his foot down and refuse to allow any of them to be taken.

After the doctor was gone, Tom Merry lay restless. Nothing had come of his signal to the chums in the quadrangle that afternoon. That they had understood, he felt pretty certain, but if they had attempted to convey provisions to him they had been intercepted.

Tap! The invalid gave a sudden start.

Night had fallen some time ago, and a subdued lamp was burning in the sick-room: Mrs. Mimms had offered to read to the patient, but Tom, on finding out that the promised treat consisted of the history of a naughty little boy who refused to share an apple with his little sister, had declined with thanks. The good dame was reading to herself now, with one eye on her patient.

Tap!

It was unmistakably a tap at the window, and meant as a signal to him by someone without. Tom Merry was quick-witted. He knew at once that it was his chums who were at work, and he was in an agony of dread lest Mrs. Mimms should hear the tap.

The curtain was drawn, but the blind was not down, so anyone outside could see into the room now that the lamp was lighted.

Tom Merry, keeping one eye on the dame, raised his arm from

the pillow and made a sign towards the window to show that he was aware of the tap. Then he gave a portentous yawn.

Mrs. Mimms looked up.

Tom Merry yawned again.

"Would you like to sleep, Master Merry?"

"Er—ya—aw!" said Tom drowsily. "The light."

"You mean you would like the light put out?"

"Yaw—aw—yes, please."

"That's right! Go to sleep like a good boy," said Mrs. Mimms. "I will take the lamp away. Mind, I shall be in the next room if you want anything, with the door ajar."

The latter piece of information was not very gratifying to Tom Merry, but he could raise no objection without exciting immediate suspicion.

He yawned again, and turned his head on the pillow; and the house-dame carried the reading lamp into the adjoining room.

Only a faint streak of light showed where the door was ajar. Tom Merry waited two minutes—that was the longest time he could possibly force himself to wait. Then he stole quietly out of bed.

He looked out of the window. A head showed faintly there beyond the glass. He recognised the good-humoured countenance of Figgins.

Slowly—silently, with marvellous care, he raised the sash of the window.

"Hallo, Figgy," he whispered.

"Hallo," whispered back Figgins. "Are you alone?"

"Yes, but mind; Mrs. Mimms is in the next room, and the door is ajar. If she suspected I was out of bed, she'd be back in a jiffy."

"Righto!" Figgins glanced down into the darkness. "Keep that ladder steady, kids. Who was that bumping against it?"

"It was that ass D'Arcy," muttered Manners from below.

"I dwopped my eye-glass," said Arthur Augustus. "The stwing is bwoken, and I was afraid that some of you clumsy persons would twead on it."

"Shut up!"

"I did not mean to bump on the laddah, and I should have been weally sowwy if Figgins had fallen down and bwoken any of his bones."

"You image——"

"I distinctly refuse to be chawactewised as an image. I——" There was a faint yelp in the gloom. Someone had stuck a pin into D'Arcy, and for a time he was quiet.

"We saw your writing on the window, Merry," Figgins whispered. "We tried to get some grub to you a while back, but that ass D'Arcy made a bungle of it——"

"I did nothin' of the kind, Figgins. I—— Oh!"

The pin had come into use again.

"This looks more promising though," went on Figgins. "We've got a splendid lot of things here, Merry."

Tom's eyes glistened.

"I'm as hungry as a giddy hunter," he said. "They're feeding me on slops because I'm feverish, and I'm nothing of the kind. I'm not ill, you know."

"You don't look ill."

"Of course I don't! I don't quite understand about that rash, but it's all rot to say I'm ill. I'm not. Dr. Short is an ass."

"Yass, wathah. Do you wemembah when I had that indelible ink on my—— Ow!"

"Well, here's the grub," said Figgins. "Here——"

"Half a mo! Quiet."

Tom Merry pulled the curtains in front of the window and darted back into bed. The door was opening. The light streamed in.

"Are you asleep, Master Tom?"

Tom Merry snored.

"I thought I heard you speaking?"

Snore!

Mrs. Mimms advanced into the room, and looked at him in the light of the lamp. His face was calm and composed, the eyes tightly closed, the breathing regular. He certainly looked as if he were soundly asleep.

Mrs. Mimms, satisfied, retired to the adjoining room again, and Tom Merry thrilled with relief as he saw that she had not observed the open window.

But the communicating door was now left open a good two inches. It was some minutes before Tom Merry ventured to move.

Then he crept out of bed again. Figgins had ducked down below the window-sill. He came up again as Tom Merry whispered to him.

"It's all right. It was a narrow shave, though. If she had caught me out of bed, all the fat would have been in the fire."

"I say, Merry, get back into bed," whispered Figgins. "You can lie there and keep on snoring, and I'll get the things into the room. If she looks in, I'll be behind the curtain and she'll never spot me."

"That's a good idea, Figgy."

And Tom Merry returned to the bed. There he commenced

to snore regularly, and the sound penetrated to the next room and comforted the soul of Mrs. Mimms.

Figgins cautiously pulled himself in at the window and stepped into the room. Below him the ladder was swarming with juniors, laden with provisions. Figgins looked round the dim room. It would not do to leave any of the provisions in evidence, to be spotted by the house-dame when she returned.

The snoring ceased for a moment.

"Shove 'em into that box, Figgy," came a whisper from the bed.

Tom Merry pointed to a clothes-box near the window.

"Righto, kid!"

The snoring recommenced.

Figgins leaned from the window.

"Hand 'em up!"

Manners was just below. He handed up what he held, and turned for fresh supplies to Blake, who was next on the ladder, who in turn was newly supplied by Herries, and so on. A stream of refreshments flowed up the ladder and into the window of Tom Merry's room.

As fast as Figgins received them he stowed them into the box.

Tom Merry's mouth watered as he saw them. But he could not attack them yet, for it was necessary to keep the snoring going, to keep Mrs. Mimms off the scent.

The box was soon filling up. When there was barely room for the clothes it contained, Figgins had to cry halt.

"That's enough," he whispered. "The rest'll keep. There's enough here to keep Tom Merry well fed for days. That'll do."

He turned towards the bed.

"I say—Tom—oh, my only pyjama hat!"

There was a step outside the door.

A voice the junior had heard before was audible.

"Where is my darling Tommy?"

The door opened.

There was no time for Figgins to get to the window again and get out. He would have been caught in the act if he had attempted it.

"Under the bed, Figgy," whispered Tom Merry.

Figgins did not need that counsel. It was the only thing to be done, and he had dived under the bed before the door had finished opening.

"Where is my darling Tommy?" The voice of Miss Priscilla Fawcett was anxious but subdued. "Is he asleep then?"

Tom Merry snored loudly.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins in a Fix.

MISS PRISCILLA FAWCETT advanced into the room. She had come down to St. Jim's immediately the news reached her of Tom Merry's illness, but owing to circumstances, her arrival was rather late. Now she had come straight to his room without removing her bonnet.

She was fearfully anxious.

"Infection!" She had sniffed when the Head had hinted that word to her. "Infection! Do you think I am afraid of being infected, Dr. Holmes? Nonsense! Lead me to my dearest boy."

And the Head had had no choice but to accede.

Miss Fawcett advanced to the bedside.

Mrs. Mimms brought in the lamp, making the old lady a sign to be silent, but that was not needed, for Miss Priscilla moved on tiptoe. If Tom Merry's life had depended upon it, she could not have been more cautious.

Tom Merry's face was very calm and sweet, what could be seen of it. Miss Priscilla was strongly inclined to stoop and kiss him on the forehead, but she refrained, for fear of waking the slumberer.

"The dear boy," she whispered to Mrs. Mimms. "How soundly he sleeps! Why, he is smiling in his sleep! The dear child."

She looked round the room.

"There is quite a draught here," she murmured, nervously.

"Is it quite judicious to have the window open?"

"The window open, madam? Do you think I should be so careless?" said the house-dame.

"But it is open."

"Bless my soul, so it is!"

Mrs. Mimms stared at the open window in amazement.

She remembered closing it, clearly enough; yet here it was open, and the night-wind was making the room quite fresh and wholesome, which, of course, was not to be permitted.

"Dear me! Tom Merry must have opened it. Dear me, then how can he have been asleep—it was closed when I left the room—yet he was—was snoring all the time."

Mrs. Mimms was suspicious.

She looked at the junior again. Tom was still smiling in his sleep, and the smile had grown very broad. As it happened, he opened his eyes for a moment, just as Mrs. Mimms looked at him, and their glances met. The house-dame shook her head severely.

"Master Merry! You were not really asleep!"

"Yaw—aw—aw!"

"Did you open the window?"

"Yaw—aw—aw!"

"The dearest child is sleepy," said Miss Priscilla. "Pray close the window. My dearest boy always had a fancy for fresh air. Even when he was a little tot he would never sleep with his window shut."

"Yaw—aw—aw! yawned Tom Merry."

"Don't you know me, Tommy? Your old nurse? Would you like to sleep?"

"Yaw—aw."

"I am going to remain here, my dearest boy, until you are well. I am glad to see that you are looking very well, considering. You will not find me in fear of infection, my dearest Tommy. I nursed you through your first attack of measles before you can remember."

"Yaw—aw."

"He wishes to sleep," said the house-dame.

"Dearest boy! I have brought him some cod-liver oil and some of Dr. Bones's Marvellous Mixture for Sorrowful Sufferers, as well as some of the Green Globules for Pining Patients. I think he should take some before he sleeps."

"I think Dr. Short should be the judge of that," said the house-dame, with some asperity.

"Yes, rather!" said Tom hastily. "I couldn't take anything without the consent of Dr. Short, nurse."

"Dear boy! I am glad to see that you have such a profound faith in your physician," said Miss Priscilla. "It shall be as you wish. Do you wish to go to sleep?"

"Yaw—aw."

Tom Merry could not tell a lie, though he would have been very glad to get rid of both the old ladies just then. Figgins must have been getting cramped under the bed all this time, he thought.

His yawning was sufficient for Miss Priscilla.

"Very well, he shall sleep, then," said the old lady fondly. "Mrs. Mimms, the doctor has acceded to my wish to take up my quarters here till my darling boy is better. I shall have a bed in the next room. Meanwhile, I will sit in this comfortable easy-chair, while Tommy sleeps. I am sure he will feel more composed and peaceful with me close at hand."

Tom Merry groaned inwardly. If Miss Fawcett settled down there in the chair beside the bed, what on earth was poor old Figgins to do?

Yet to raise an objection would have been to betray that something was in the wind; to say nothing of wounding the good-old soul's feelings, which Tom Merry naturally shrank from.

Miss Fawcett seated herself in the chair. She allowed Mrs. Mimms to take her bonnet, and laid the precious bag containing Dr. Bones's Marvellous Mixture, and the inestimable green globules, on the little table beside the bed. There were already plenty of medicine bottles in view, and not much room for more.

"Would you prefer the light to be left, dear Tommy?"

"No," grunted Tommy.

"Please take it away, Mrs. Mimms."

"My dear nurse," said Tom, with great consideration, "it is awfully kind of you to come down here like this. But you must be tired. Hadn't you better go and have a little rest? I shall be all right."

"My dear Tommy, that question shows your kind heart; but rest is nothing while you are not well."

"But I sha'n't feel comfy, dear nurse, unless you have a rest," urged Tom. "I don't mind being left alone."

"Dearest boy! Since you are so anxious, I will take a little nap in this chair," said Miss Fawcett. "Then I shall be at hand all the same in case you want me."

Tom groaned.

"My dearest, are you in pain?"

"No, no; I'm all right."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, quite—yaw—aw—aw!"

"The dear child is sleepy. Take the light away, Mrs. Mimms. I will watch over my sweetest Tommy."

The light was taken into the adjoining room. It glimmered through the opening of the door. Miss Priscilla settled back into the easy chair. Tom lay wondering what on earth Figgins would do.

Figgins, as a matter of fact, was similarly occupied—lying on the floor and wondering what he would do. There was Miss Priscilla on guard, and unless she went to sleep there was no chance of escaping undetected.

That was Figgy's hope—that the good old soul would fall asleep in the chair. After all, her long train journey must have tired her. As a matter of fact, Miss Priscilla was soon nodding off.

It was very close and stuffy under the bed. Ere long it would be bed-time in the New House, and Figgins would be missed. Then there would be a hue-and-cry. That his friends were still waiting for him in the quadrangle, ready with the ladder, he was sure; but if he did not make his escape soon they would have to go.

A sound something like the buzzing of a bee began to permeate the room. Figgins heard it, and wondered what it was. When it dawned upon him that it was Miss Fawcett's variety of snoring, he felt a thrill of satisfaction.

Now was his chance.

He moved cautiously. It was intensely dark, and in the confined space, Figgy's extremely long legs were much in the way. He came out slowly and cautiously from beneath the bed. The musical sound of the snore enabled him to navigate skilfully so as to give Miss Fawcett a wide berth. Unfortunately, in steering clear of the amiable old lady, he failed to steer clear of the table bearing the array of bottles.

Figgins felt his head knock against something, and a crash followed. A bottle had been jolted off the table, and smashed on the floor. The sudden sound startled Figgy almost out of his wits. Miss Priscilla, instantly awakened, started up with an exclamation, and Figgins popped back under the bed in a twinkling.

Mrs. Mimms had also heard the crash, and she came in quickly with the light.

"Dear me! However did you do that?" she exclaimed, as she saw the broken bottle on the floor and a dark-coloured liquid oozing away over the linoleum.

"I!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla indignantly. "It was not I!"

"Master Merry, how could you——"

"It was not Master Merry. There must be a cat in the room!"

"I don't think so—I am sure——"

"There must be a cat or a dog. I will look under the bed. Ah, did you hear that? I distinctly heard a movement under the bed."

"Dear me, so did I! It must be the cat."

"Show the light, and I will frighten it away."

"I say it doesn't matter," said Tom Merry. "I don't mind a cat. Let her alone. She won't do any harm there."

"My dear boy, the animal would disturb your slumbers. It must be driven out. Shoo, shoo!"

Mrs. Mimms held down the lamp while Miss Fawcett "shoo, shooed." Then Miss Priscilla changed colour all of a sudden, and rose to her feet. She grasped the arm of the startled house-dame.

"There is someone under the bed," she said, in a deep and tragic whisper.

"Good heavens!"

"I—I saw his boot distinctly."

"Oh dear! We shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"I will deal with him," said Miss Fawcett grimly. "I am not afraid of a burglar." She picked up the poker from the grate. "Tommy, my dearest Tommy, compose yourself!"

"What's the matter, nurse?"

"You will promise me not to be frightened?"

"Rats! What's the giddy game?"

"There is someone under the bed, and I am about to strike him with the poker. You will not be frightened, my dearest boy?"

"Here, I say, steady with that poker!" exclaimed Tom excitedly. "It's old Figgins. Hold on!"

"He is wandering," murmured Miss Priscilla. "This terrible fright may have a bad effect upon his health. Wretch, come out—come forth!"

She jerked up the coverlet, and while the troubled house-dame held the lamp, Miss Fawcett made vigorous lunges under the bed with the poker. The first lunge caught Figgins in the ribs, and the next came in his back. He squirmed spasmodically, and gasped.

"There, I heard him!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "Come forth, base wretch!"

The base wretch declined to come forth.

"I say," giggled Tom Merry, "it's old Figgins. Go easy with that poker."

"Dear child, calm yourself, I beg of you. Calm yourself!"

"I tell you it's Figgins!" roared Tom.

"Yes, yes; pray calm yourself. Come forth, base ruffian!"

Another lunge under the bed, and Figgins gave a fearful yell. "Come forth!"

"Keep that blessed poker quiet, then, and I'll come," said Figgins, in a muffled voice.

"I will not strike you if you go quietly."

"Honour bright?"

"I will keep my word, base wretch!"

Then the base wretch consented to show himself. The door opened as he crawled forth; the noise had been heard, and Mr. Railton had looked in to see what was the matter.

"Oh, thank goodness you have come!" gasped Miss Priscilla. "Mr. Railton, there is a desperate villain under the bed, and——"

The house-master came quickly in. He looked down and saw Figgins, who smiled feebly. A grim smile crossed the house-master's face.

"You may get up, Figgins."

Figgins got up.

"Figgins!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett, in amazement.

"Figgins! I—I thought it was a burglar. How extremely strange for Figgins to be under the bed!"

"What are you doing here, Figgins?"

"I came to speak to Tom Merry, sir."

"You know what to expect. Go to my study!"

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Figgy came here to see me, sir, because I wanted him to. It was my fault."

"Go to my study, Figgins."

"If you want to lick anybody, lick me," said Tom recklessly.

"If you lick old Figgins, I'll—I'll get worse. I'll get really ill. I won't take any medicine, and——"

"Silence, Merry!"

"Let Figgins off, then." Tom sat up in bed. "I'll get excited—feverish—and very likely die on your hands, sir. Are you going to let Figgins off?"

"My darling child, compose yourself, compose yourself!"

"Are you going to let Figgins off?"

"Calm yourself, my sweetest boy!"

"Are you going to let Figgins off?"

"Dear Mr. Railton, do promise not to punish Figgins. You can see that Tommy is dangerously exciting himself. The dear boy never could bear not having his own way. Promise him, Mr. Railton, that Figgins shall not be punished."

Mr. Railton felt helpless. If Tom was really ill, this excitement was certainly very bad for him. The house-master nodded.

"Very well," he said. "Figgins, you are excused."

"Thank you, sir," said Figgins demurely.

"But you must not return to your own house till Dr. Short has seen you, to make sure that there is no danger of infection," said Mr. Railton. "You can wait in my study. Dr. Short will be here again to-night. You may go, Figgins."

"Yes, sir. Good-night, Tommy."

"Good-night, Figgy, and thanks awfully for coming."

Figgins left the room, the house-master following him. Once more quiet reigned in the school infirmary. Tom, satisfied with having got Figgins off the punishment, lay in blissful contemplation of the feast he would have upon the contents of the clothes-box, as soon as his guardians were asleep, and it was safe to get out of bed.

CHAPTER 6.

The First Feed.

MIDNIGHT chimed from the clock-tower of St. Jim's. The ancient school was buried in slumber, and darkness reigned supreme. Save in the school infirmary, where a subdued light glimmered from the windows. There the light still burned, and there at least one person was still awake.

Tom Merry had affected to sleep, and had satisfied his affectionate nurses. But he was far from slumber. The diet ordered for him by Dr. Short might or might not have been excellent for a real invalid, but Tom Merry certainly had no use for it. He had an aching void, and he yearned for the hour of midnight, when that void could be safely filled.

In an adjoining room the house-dame was asleep. Miss Fawcett had disposed herself for the night in an easy-chair. She was determined not to quit her beloved ward. But Miss Fawcett was a sound sleeper, and Tom hoped to be able to lay in that supply of provisions without awakening her.

As the last stroke echoed from the tower, the hero of the Shell silently crept out of bed. He hastily wrapped a dressing gown round him, and stole towards the clothes-trunk.

To open it, and to extract some of the precious contents from under the clothes, was the work of a very few moments. Tom Merry's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

He started on a pie. It was a large meat-pie, with a beautiful crust. Pie, crust, and all vanished down the throat of the famished junior. That took the edge off his hunger, but he was far from finished. He continued, with an apple-pie for his next course, which also vanished.

"My hat!" murmured Tom. "I feel better now!"

Then he started on a cake, and demolished it. Space was growing limited now, but an appetising jam-pudding followed the others, and then cake and biscuits and oranges went down the same way.

In a short time Tom Merry had made a considerable hole in the provisions Figgins had packed in the trunk.

At last he was filled. He drank a bottle of red currant wine, from the bottle as he was not provided with a glass, and finished it. Then, carefully closing the box, he turned to go back to bed.

To his horror, Miss Fawcett moved in her chair. Tom remained quite still, in an agony of apprehension. The old lady moved, and yawned, and opened her eyes. She glanced at the bed, and saw that Tom was not there, and started up in alarm.

"Tom! Tom! My darling Tommy!"

"Here I am," said Tom, "don't make a row."

"My dearest boy! I was afraid you had wandered in your sleep!"

"Well, I didn't."



Mr. Railton shook the swell of the School House violently. It had an unexpected effect. From all parts of Arthur Augustus, provisions of all kinds rained in a shower. Apples and oranges, cakes and biscuits, toffee and chocolate, sandwiches and bananas, were scattered at the feet of the astounded master.

Tom climbed back into bed. His old governess affectionately tucked him in.

"My dearest Tommy! do you feel inclined to take a little medicine?"

Tom shuddered. "No thanks."

"Are you hungry?"

"No."

"A little gruel——"

"I'm not hungry."

"Ah, you see how right Dr. Short was, after all, Tommy. That desire to eat your accustomed diet would soon pass off, he said."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, it has passed off now, and no mistake."

"You see, he was quite right. Will you go to sleep now, darling?"

"Yaw—aw—yes."

Tom Merry was soon asleep. He had had a record feed, which quite made up for the losses of the day, and he felt sleepy. Miss Priscilla, satisfied that he slept, returned to her armchair. Slumber at last reigned in the sick-room.

There was no further stirring till the morning sunlight streamed in through the curtains, and Miss Priscilla awoke as the house-dame came in.

Mrs. Mimms looked at the patient with a suspicious eye.

"Bless my soul! what has he been eating?"

"Eating? He has not been eating."

"Look at him, my dear madam."

Miss Priscilla looked and marvelled. Tom Merry was a very cleanly eater as a rule, but his meal of the previous night had been made under difficulties, and it was no wonder that he had spilled some gravy from the pie over his shirt, and left traces of the jam pudding on his face.

The house-dame looked round the room. Close by the clothes-box were crumbs, and a few little clots of gravy, which were a sufficient clue to the keen-eyed house-dame.

She opened the box. The clothes within looked very innocent, but upon raising them the remains of last night's feast were discovered, and the house-dame gave a gasp of horror.

"Dear me, look here!"

Miss Fawcett looked and was equally horrified.

"Bless my soul! That dreadful boy Figgins must have placed them here."

"The young rascal!"

"And Tommy must have eaten some during the night! Dear me, send for Dr. Short at once! Bless my-soul! My own Tommy, he may expire!"

Tommy did not look much like expiring. In fact, he looked a great deal better than he had looked the previous day, and any unprejudiced observer might have thought that the meal had done him good.

"The poor dear boy! How he must suffer!"

Tom Merry opened his eyes. "Hallo! what's the row?" he said sleepily.

"Do you feel very bad, my darling boy? Do you suffer very much?"

"No. I feel A1," said Tom Merry. "What's the matter? Hallo! who's opened that box? Here, I say, Mrs. Mimms, you let that grub alone."

"My dear child, it must be taken away. That dreadful boy Figgins may have been the cause of a relapse. You must not eat that terrible stuff. Take it all away, Mrs. Mimms. It had better be destroyed, or given to the poor."

"Give it to Figgins," said Tom. "Hang it all, it belongs to Figgy. Take it down to Study No. 6, Mrs. Mimms. If you don't, I'll get excited and feverish, upon my word."

"Calm yourself, my darling child——"
"Are you going to take that grub to Study No. 6?"
"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Mimms, hastily.
"Righto! Now, don't offer me any medicine. I don't want any. I want some eggs and bacon, and I could do with some coffee."

"My sweetest Tommy! A little cod-liver oil——"
"Gr-r-r-r!"
"I have Dr. Short's permission to give you both cod-liver oil and the green globules if you fancy them, Tommy."

"Gr-r-r-r!"
"You would like a little gruel, then?"
"No, I wouldn't."

"Some nice warm broth?"
"Nice, warm grandmother!"
"My dearest boy!"

"Well, I won't have anything, then. I'm not ill. Dr. Short is a giddy ass. I don't know how this rash came on my face, but I know it's not so bad this morning. I think something must have happened to my phiz in that study row the night before last. Anyway, I'm not ill. Oh, crumbs, how I should like a sprint round the quad now!"

The provisions were carried away. The house-dame was a woman of her word, and she dumped them into study No. 6. There Blake found them when he went into the study before breakfast.

When Mrs. Mimms returned to the sick-room, it was time for Tom to take his medicine. He was in a state of fury whenever that time came round, and Miss Priscilla retired to the next room so as not to witness the sufferings of her darling.

Mrs. Mimms selected a bottle from the goodly array on the table, and carefully measured out a tablespoonful of a far from attractive-looking liquid.

Tom Merry watched her gloomily. As she came towards the bed he gave a grunt of disgust.

"Hang it! I won't!"

"Now, Master Merry."

"Take the beastly stuff yourself, then."

"My dear boy——"

Tom Merry threw up his hands as if to ward off the insistent house-dame and the medicine. "I can't! Take it away! Gr-r-r-r!" He turned away his head with the wryest face he could make.

But Mrs. Mimms had her duty to do, and she did it like a Briton.

"My dear Master Merry, you must really take the medicine."

"Oh, the poor, dear boy!" came a murmur from the next room. "Be gentle with him, Mrs. Mimms. Oh, the poor, dear, suffering darling."

"Now, Master Merry."

"Look here, Mrs. Mimms, I've told you before that I'm not ill."

"Yes, yes, but you must take your medicine, like a good little boy. You—you must be brave," said Mrs. Mimms, struck by a bright idea, "you must play the game, you know."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Oh, all right, chuck it in."

Mrs. Mimms did not "chuck" it in, she poured it in very carefully, and Tom's face was twisted up into something like a Guy Fawkes mask as it went down.

"There's a good little boy!"

"Oh, rats!"

When Dr. Short arrived, as he soon did, he looked Tom over very carefully, and wore an exceedingly grave and learned expression, which impressed both Mrs. Mimms and Miss Fawcett extremely. He gave some new directions, for the sake of doing something; but Tom was quite keen enough to know that the physician was puzzled. Tom was puzzled himself to know how the rash had come over his face, but he knew perfectly well that he had never been in better health in his life.

"Can I get up this morning, doctor?" he asked, meekly, "I feel ever so much better."

Dr. Short shook his head and smiled.

"We will see in a day or two, my boy," he said. "For the present——"

"It's a half-holiday to-day," said Tom rebelliously. "The Shell are getting up a football match with the Fourth Form."

"I hope we shall see you playing football again in a few weeks——"

"Weeks!" howled Tom. "I won't stand it! I won't——"

"Feverish, very," said Dr. Short, shaking his head. "This sudden access of excitement is a bad symptom, I am afraid. Calm yourself, Merry."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Dr. Short retired. Tom Merry kicked the clothes off the bed and sat up. Miss Priscilla shrieked.

"Tommy! My rash darling——"

"My darling rash," said Tom, "I wish I knew how it came there! I know I had a fearful clump from Gore in that row, but I don't see how that could have done it."

"My dearest child, you must be quiet."

Tom Merry resigned himself to his fate. He was too fond of

his old governess to wish to distress her. He lay and stared at the sunny windows, and wondered whether his allies would find some fresh means of conveying supplies to him.

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins & Co. Come out Strong.

BLAKE was looking worried as he went into class with the Fourth Form that morning; so were Herries and D'Arcy. They had found the provisions in the study, and knew therefore that the ruse had been discovered, and that Tom Merry was once more in a state of famine. Doubtless he had made at least one good meal, which would last him for a time. But for the present day, what was to be done?

Twice the chums had tried to convey the necessaries of life to him, and although the second attempt had been more successful than the first, the success had been only temporary. They were now back again where they had started from. What was to be done?

Figgins soon noticed the glum looks of the chums of Study No. 6, and he whispered to D'Arcy, who sat nearest him in the class-room. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was a very short-sighted gentleman, and very seldom noticed what was going on in the class.

"I say, Adolphus!" whispered Figgins.

D'Arcy turned his head languidly.

"I think I have pweviously wemarked to you, Figgins, that my name is not Adolphus," he said. "It seems extwemely curvius to me that you cannot address me by my pwopah name, deah boy."

"That's all right, Aubrey——"

"My name is not Aubrey, eithah. My name is Arthaw Augustus."

"Well, Arthur Augustus Fathead, what is the matter with——"

"Pway do not address me again, Figgins! I have an extwemely stwong objection to bein' chawactewised as a fathead."

"Never mind. What's the——"

"I have wequested you not to address me."

"Look here, what's the cause of——"

"I wefuse to weply."

"Oh, you image—you ass!" murmured Figgins. "I mean—I beg your pardon, Gussy. Now tell me what's the rumpus."

"Your apology is accepted, Figgins," said D'Arcy, with a beaming smile. The amende honourable always satisfied the swell of the School House at once. "I am feelin' a little dispwited this morning owin' to the unfortunate circ——"

"The unfortunate what?"

"The unfortunate circ. that the——"

"What the dickens do you mean by a circ.?" asked the puzzled New House junior.

"Circumstance, deah boy. Owin' to the unfortunate circumstance that the gwub has been discovahed in the bed-room of Tom Mewwy."

"My hat! Has it?"

"Yaas, wathah! We found it in the study this mornin', except a few things which, I suppose, Tom Mewwy has eaten."

"What a beastly frost!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I've got an idea for a new dodge," said Figgins. "We've been talking it over in the New House. I——"

"Figgins, you are talking!" said Mr. Lathom, waking up at last to the fact that a conversation was being carried on under his nose. "You will take fifty lines."

Figgins made a grimace, and the talk ended for the time.

When morning school was over, Blake met Monty Lowther and Manners coming out of the Shell. They were as dismayed as Figgins to learn what had happened.

"Never mind," said Lowther resolutely. "If one plan busts up, we must try another, that's all. It's a half-holiday to-day, so we've got plenty of time."

"Figgy says he's got an idea," said Blake. "I don't think much of New House ideas, as a rule, but we may as well hear it. We're holding a meeting in No. 6 after dinnee. Don't forget to come along, you two."

"Rather not!"

And ere long the juniors were met together in the study, to discuss ways and means of saving Tom Merry from the threatened famine.

"Figgins says he's got an idea," Blake observed. "I don't know where he got it, or whose it is, but——"

"It's my own," said Figgins indignantly. "At least, Kerr and I hit on it, talking the thing over. And it's a jolly good wheeze, too."

"Well, let's hear it," said Blake condescendingly. "It's quite possible that you chaps might hit on a good idea. I've never known it to happen, but I wouldn't say it was impossible. Go ahead, Figgy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well," said Figgins, looking round, "you chaps remember

Kerr's giddy impersonations, don't you, and how jolly well he does 'em?"

Kerr—who was the Henry Irving of the New House Dramatic Society—blushed with becoming modesty.

"Yes," said Blake, "we'll admit that. He's made up as Herr Schneider and Mr. Lathom in a way that took in even us, and that wants some doing. Granted; go on."

"Well, the idea is for Kerr to go to Tom Merry's room in disguise."

Blake looked thoughtful.

"We want to get grub in to Tom Merry," he said. "You don't mean that Kerr is going there disguised as a meat pie, or an apple tart—"

"Look here, Blake, if you're going to be funny——"

"I'm not! I only want to know, you know."

"Well, what's the matter with Kerr making up as old Dr. Short?" said Figgins. "He can do it. He's got some of the things that will be wanted, and, as a matter of fact, we had a rehearsal last night over in the New House, and he did it rippingly. He only wants a black frockcoat to finish him. As for his face, the make-up was perfect."

"Think you'd have the nerve, Kerr?"

"I should say so," said Kerr disdainfully. "It wouldn't do for a School House kid to try anything of the sort, of course. I can manage it."

"Anyway, he'll take the risk," said Figgins.

"And he's to take Merry a supply of grub in his pockets?" said Blake. "You won't get much to him that way; and then there's the house-dame and Miss Fawcett will be in the room, watching. I don't see how Kerr will work it."

"That's because you don't know the whole idea, yet, and are jumping to conclusions, like a silly ass," said Figgins.

"Thanks! Let's have the whole idea, then."

"Of course it's no good Kerr trying to get anything to Tom Merry like that. There would be too many eyes about; and besides, Merry would have no chance of eating the stuff. It would be taken away from him. The wheeze is for Dr. Short to order the patient a change of diet."

Blake gasped.

"My only pyjama hat! That's ripping!"

Figgins looked pleased at this unsolicited testimonial.

"That's what we thought," he said. "If Dr. Short orders Merry a change of diet, they'll have to feed him up, that's all. Now, the doctor comes three times a day—morning, afternoon, and evening. He'll be here soon now, and when he's gone, he won't be due again for six hours, unless he's specially sent for. Six hours will be time for Tom Merry to eat enough to last him a day or so, I should think. Dr. Short will be due again at nine o'clock. Instead of coming at nine, he—that is, Kerr—will come, say, at four or five—a doctor can come when he likes, and he needn't explain—and then Kerr orders the change of diet."

"But the real doctor will turn up at nine o'clock."

"Let him!" said Figgins sententiously. "Tom Merry will be fed, and that can't be undone. If Dr. Short discovers that he has been personated—well, he won't know who did the little trick, and it won't matter, anyway."

The idea was certainly a daring one, but the amateur actor's skill in the art of impersonation was so great that it was very probable that he would be quite successful. He had played more difficult parts before.

"Well, it's a jolly good idea," said Blake. "I'll say that for you, Figgy."

"Thank you for nothing," said Figgy.

"If Kerr's willing to take the risk," said Manners, "it's a go."

"I'm willing," said Kerr.

"Then it's settled. You had better scorch down to the costumier's in Rylcombe on your bike and get the extra things you want for the make-up. We'll all stand our whack for the exes, of course."

"That's agreed?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was settled. Figgins & Co. departed, well satisfied, to make the expedition to the village. Blake opened a locker and looked at the provisions.

"There's a jolly lot here," he remarked. "Poor old Tom Merry! We'll give him a ripping feed when he's out of that rotten infirmary."

"Yaas, wathah! I have been thinkin', chaps——"

"Hallo! what have you been thinking?"

"I think that it would pewwaps be bettah if I were to make up as Doctah Short instead of Kerr," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "You see, dear boys, what is wequired in a thing of this kind is tact, and I weally considah——"

"Rats!"

"Boo!"

"Bosh!"

"I am not the kind of fellah to put myself forward, I think," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I am speakin' now simply for the good of the cause. I weally think that, as the

circs. wequire tact and judgment, it would be safah to twast the mattah to me."

"Oh, ring off!" said Monty Lowthes. "You make me tired."

"I weally do not see——"

"You don't see what a giddy ox you are," said Monty. "We do, though. Dry up!"

"Of course, if my ideah is not weceived with pwopah wespect——"

"Cheese it!"

"I wegard all these wemarks as wude in the extweme," said D'Arcy. "I will not cheese it. I will point out to you——"

There was a general exodus from the study. When D'Arcy mounted the high horse there was no stopping him, and the chums fled.

Blake and Herries strolled away to wait for Figgins & Co. at the gate. Gore met them in the quadrangle, and grinned.

"Hallo! getting up some more plans for feeding Tom Merry?" he asked.

"Don't ask any questions," said Blake, "and you won't get any incorrect information."

"Ha, ha! Tom Merry is having a high old time, isn't he? Medicine three times a day, and nothing to eat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you rotter, you look as if you were glad!"

"So I am," said Gore. "I think it's a good joke on Tom Merry. He's always playing some little game on somebody, and it's time his own turn came. Don't you think so?"

Blake looked at him curiously.

"Look here," he said, "we all know now that Tom Merry's not really ill. That rash on his face came there by accident somehow. Do you know anything about it?"

"Ha, ha!"

"Look here, Gore, you had better speak out. If you know anything——"

"I know what I know," said Gore. "But mum's the word."

"Precious little you know, I expect," said Blake disdainfully. "He's talking out of his hat, Herries. Come along."

"I'm not! I tell you I know the whole thing, and I could get Tom Merry yanked out of the hospital to-day, if I liked!" exclaimed Gore defiantly.

"How could you do it?"

"By telling what I know."

"Why don't you, then?" demanded Blake.

"Because I don't choose. This is the joke of the season, and Tom Merry hasn't been half put through it yet," said Gore coolly.

"Oh, rats! You're gassing! Come on, Herries."

The chums walked on. Gore scowled after them.

"I say, Blake, do you really think he knows anything?" asked Herries.

"Yes, I do," said Blake, with a nod. "Blessed if I know how, but I think there's something in it. But he's not the chap to tell! He's got an old grudge against Tom Merry. The best way to make him talk is to pretend to believe that he doesn't know anything."

The chums went on to the gate. In a short time Figgins & Co. came pedalling up Rylcombe Lane. Figgins had a bundle fastened on his bike.

"Got it?" asked Blake, as Figgins jumped off.

"Yes, all serene. Everything in the garden is ripping."

"But I say, it's no good Kerr starting out from the New House as Dr. Short. That would look curious, to say the least of it."

"I've thought of that. He's going to change in the old barn, and we're going to help him make up there. Then he'll just walk into St. Jim's as cool as you please."

"Short usually comes in a carriage."

"He could walk for once, I suppose. Don't make difficulties. Come on, kids!"

Ten minutes later the youthful plotters were congregated in the barn, and the transformation was proceeding with great success.

CHAPTER 8.

A Change of Diet.

"D R. SHORT!"

Miss Priscilla rose to her feet. She was conversing in subdued tones with Mrs. Mimms in the window of the sick-room. Tom Merry was in bed, but in acquiescence to his earnest entreaties, and to prevent a threatened return of feverishness, he had been allowed to have the latest number of "Pluck," which he was reading with a great deal of satisfaction.

Dr. Short was unexpectedly announced. He was not expected

till nine, and it was now barely five. But Miss Priscilla was glad to see him. His early return showed, of course, how deep an interest he took in his precious patient.

Tom Merry looked up from "Pluck."

"I say, Dr. Short!"

"Yes, my dear boy? How do we feel this afternoon?"

"Hungry."

"Ah—er—hum—ahem!" said the medical man, shaking his head wisely.

He came to the bedside, after greeting Miss Priscilla. He seemed the same little fat man with the white waistcoat, the black frock-coat, and the bushy, white whiskers. If there was any change in him, it was a slight change in his voice—but it was really hardly perceptible.

"Can I have something to eat, doctor?" said Tom persuasively. "I feel ever so much better."

The doctor looked at him with positively owl-like gravity and wisdom. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Let me see! You have observed my instructions, my dear madam, as to the diet of Master Merry?"

"Implicitly, Dr. Short."

"The medicine—"

"My dear boy has taken it regularly."

"Does he like it?"

"Well, he—I—"

"No, I don't!" said Tom. "It's horrid!"

Dr. Short rubbed his hands.

"Dear me! That is a peculiar fancy of yours, Master Merry. You will get to like it in time, I've no doubt."

"Rats—I mean I shouldn't!"

"Well, well, as a matter of fact, I have decided to change the medicine. That is why I have returned so early," said the medical man. "Ahem! The diet, too, will now require to be somewhat altered."

"You think my darling is better, doctor?" said Miss Priscilla anxiously.

Dr. Short rubbed his chin.

"Yes—er—undoubtedly, Miss Fawcett."

"Oh, I am so happy to hear you say so!"

"I haven't been ill," said Tom—"it's all rot!"

"My dear Master Merry, you must allow me to know best," said the doctor, wagging his finger at Tom reprovingly. "With an experience of twenty years—"

"Oh, pray excuse him, doctor," said Miss Priscilla; "the darling boy is naturally impatient. From a baby he never could bear not having his own way."

"Then he wanted a thundering good licking—I mean—er—ahem!—a little chastisement would have been judicious, my dear madam."

Tom Merry looked curiously at the doctor.

"I have decided to change the diet," said the latter hastily.

"Let me see! So far, you have been giving him—"

"The gruel—"

"No more of that!"

"The broth—"

"Throw it away!"

"The beef-tea—"

"Chuck it out of the window—I mean, let it be conveyed away. Merry, please let me see your tongue."

Tom Merry put out his tongue.

The doctor took a survey of it through his pincenez.

"Ah, slightly coated—somewhat symptomatic of—of malingeritis! Decidedly it is time to change the patient's diet!"

"Jolly good idea, anyway!" said Tom Merry.

"Let me have your fist—I mean your wrist, please."

The doctor felt Tom Merry's pulse.

"Ah, quite normal now! A little abnormal, perhaps; otherwise quite normal! Yes, decidedly it is time to change the patient's diet."

"Done with my fist?" asked Tom.

"Yes, my little lad."

"And what shall we give him now, doctor?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"In the present state of the patient, our aim should be to—to build up his strength," said the doctor—"yes, decidedly. we must do some building up. When his strength is built up—or rebuilt, I should say—then we shall—we shall see! Meanwhile, we must build up his strength—yes, decidedly I think in that matter we may be safely guided by the desire of the patient himself."

Tom's eyes sparkled.

"My hat, that's a jolly good idea!"

"What would you like, Master Merry?"

"Well, a jolly good cut of beef," said Tom, "Yorkshire pudding, and greens and potatoes, to start with."

"Yes, I think we may let the patient have that," said the doctor, wagging his head solemnly.

"Then a plum pie and a jam pudding."

"Yes, we may pass the plum pie and the jam pudding."

"A currant cake and a bottle of red-currant wine."

"Yes, I do not think that will harm the patient."

"Some jelly, and custard and prunes, and some apples and oranges and bananas and nuts."

"Excellent!"

"Biscuits, and toffee, and chocolate."

"Er—I think we will bar the toffee," said the doctor, with a great air of wisdom. "Under the circumstances, I cannot consent to the toffee. But I think the rest of the diet named is extremely suitable."

"I will have it prepared at once," said Mrs. Mimms.

"Thank you, madam! I am sure I could not leave my young patient in better hands."

"And when—?" began Miss Priscilla.

"Oh, at once—at once—as soon as the diet can be prepared."

Mrs. Mimms left the room.

"Can you get me a—a glass of water, madam?" asked the doctor, looking round.

"Certainly!" said Miss Priscilla, and she passed into the adjoining room.

The doctor bent over the astonished patient.

"How do you like 'em done, Tom, old buck?" he inquired.

Tom Merry gasped.

"Eh—what?"

"Ha, ha! Don't you know me?"

"Kerr?"

"Yes, rather."

"Kerr! My only hat!"

"Make the most of the grub while it lasts," whispered Kerr.

"The real doctor will be here to-night; and you'll be starved again."

"I say, old chap, this is awfully ripping of you—"

"Mum's the word."

Miss Priscilla was coming back with a tumbler of water.

"Er—thanks so much!" said the doctor. "I shall not, after all, require it, but thank you very much all the same. Good-bye, my little patient!"

"Good-bye, old kid—I mean sir!"

"Good-afternoon, my dear Miss Fawcett! What lovely weather we are having for October! The football is coming on nicely—I mean the—that is to say, good-afternoon!"

And the little doctor bowed himself out.

"My dearest Tommy, I am so glad that the doctor came early," said Miss Priscilla. "It is very kind of him to take so much interest in your case, is it not?"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "I'm glad he came."

"You have faith in his judgment now?"

"Never knew such a sensible chap."

"I hope the new diet will agree with you. The change very sudden."

"The quicker the sooner! I'm jolly glad he came! He's a funny merchant, isn't he?"

"Oh, Tom, he is a good, kind—"

"So he is; I'm not saying anything against him! How long will they be with that grub, do you think?"

"Not very long, darling."

"I shall want another meal about—about half-past seven," said Tom Merry. "It may as well be got ready for me."

"Certainly, dearest."

"I'll think out the details," said Tom. "It will have to be a ripper, as it may have to last me a long time. I say, tell Mrs. Mimms to buck up!"

The house-dame lost no time. As soon as it was humanly possible, the meal prescribed by the doctor was placed before Tom Merry, and he did it full justice.

Meanwhile, Dr. Short crossed the quadrangle with a solemn step. Some of the boys came to ask him how Tom Merry was. Among the inquirers was Gore.

"Is Tom Merry better, sir?" Gore asked, with a lurking grin.

"Yes, I am happy to—er—be able to tell you that he is much better, my lad," said the doctor. "There is a—er—a decided improvement."

"Has that giddy rash gone, sir?"

"No, it is not all gone, Gore."

"Ha, ha! Is it small-pox or measles, do you think, sir?"

"Your hilarity is unbecoming, Gore," said the doctor severely. "I feel called upon to administer some slight correction."

And he boxed the ears of the astonished Gore, and walked on, leaving him serious enough now.

He passed out of the gates, and solemnly paced along the lane, till he came to a gap in the hedge, and through that he suddenly darted, and started running, and did not stop till he was well inside the old barn in the field.

Seven juniors were waiting there. They surrounded the "doctor" at once. There was a babel of inquiry.

"How did it go?"

"Did it work?"

"Have you changed the diet?"

"Tell us all about it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It worked like a giddy charm!" said the doctor, throwing off his silk hat, his whiskers, and his glasses. "Tom Merry's having a good feed. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Hear me smile!"
And a chorus of cachinnations sounded from the old barn, which would certainly have made a passer-by imagine that it was tenanted by a company of lunatics.

CHAPTER 9.

What Did Gore Know?

THE "wheeze" had worked! But there was trouble at St. Jim's that evening. When Dr. Short called, in the usual course, and discovered the change of diet, he was astounded, and still more astounded when he learned that the change had been made at his own order!

Naturally he was annoyed. It was evident that someone had personated him, and he at once went to Dr. Holmes to expostulate.

The Head of St. Jim's listened in amazement

"Dear me!" he said. "This is very serious! Have you any idea as to who the impostor may have been, Dr. Short?"

"Yes, sir; I have," said the medical man emphatically. "I have no doubt whatever that it was one of the young rascals belonging to the school."

"Impossible!"

"It was a trick, sir, to get food to the patient. I have learned from Mrs. Mimms of the previous attempts. Some impertinent boy has actually dared to impersonate me—me!" The little doctor spluttered with indignation. "The effect upon the patient may be serious!"

"I understood that he was much better."

"A merely outward factitious appearance of health."

"The rash has almost gone, has it not?"

"To some extent."

"And other symptoms of the disease have not appeared?"

"You must allow me, as a medical man, to——"

"Certainly, certainly!"

"I have been impersonated by a boy belonging to this school. I, Dr. Short, have been mimicked by—by an impostor! I insist——"

"Rest assured, my dear sir, that the matter shall be strictly inquired into, and the culprit punished," said the Head.

With that assurance the little doctor departed satisfied. The Head sent for Mr. Railton as soon as he was gone. The house-master looked properly serious as he heard the strange tale.

"Have you any idea as to the culprit, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head.

"I believe there is only one lad in St. Jim's who could carry out such a deception successfully," said the house-master. "That is Kerr, of the New House. I will question him."

Mr. Railton did so. The result was extremely painful for the amateur dramatist of the New House.

It was near bedtime when Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were gathered in Study No. 6 with Manners and Lowther, and the door opened to admit Figgins & Co.

"Hallo, kids!" said Blake hospitably. "Come in! Sit down!"

Figgins and Fatty Wynn accepted the invitation. Blake pushed a chair towards Kerr.

"You can sit down, old chap."

"Er—thanks," said Kerr, with a wry face. "I'd rather stand if you don't mind."

"What's the matter?"

"There's been a row," said Figgins. "Railton spotted the wheeze somehow, and Kerr has been through it."

The juniors looked grave.

"Oh, I say, that's rotten!" said Blake. "I propose that we pass a vote of sympathy for the noble hero who has suffered in the common cause."

"I second that motion," said Manners promptly.

The motion was passed unanimously. That was very gratifying to Kerr, of course, but he still preferred to stand up.

"I don't mind," he said. "I can face the music. But that wheeze is worked out, and if Tom Merry is kept in the hospital, I don't see how we're to get any more grub to him."

"We can't desert a fellow creature in distress," said Monty Lowther.

"Of course we can't; but what's to be done?"

"I've got a weally wipping ideah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, whose brow had worn a thoughtful shade for some time.

"Get it off your chest, then."

"Suppose I were to twy——"

"Yes, you would do a lot of good," said Figgins.

"Don't intewwupt me so wudely. Supposin' I were to disguise myself as a chimney-sweepah——"

"As a what?"

"As a chimney-sweepah."

"Whoever saw a chimney-sweeper in an eyeglass?"

"I would leave the eyeglass in this study. I am not afraid to make sacrifices for the common cause," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Ha, ha! Gussy, old fellow, your ideas are simply rotten."

"I don't see why they should be chawactewised as wotten, Blake. I could get up a wippin' disguise as a chim——"

"A chimpanzee," interrupted Figgins. "That's a good idea. You wouldn't have to make up for the part."

"A chimney-sweepah," said D'Arcy, unheeding. "I could take Tom Mewwy a weally great-amount of gwub in the sack. That's what makes the ideah so awfully wippin'."

"But how could a chimney-sweep get admitted to the sick-room?" asked Blake patiently.

"I haven't thought that out yet."

"Don't start thinking it out, Gussy. You'll break something."

"I stwongly object to such——"

"Look here," said Blake. "I've got an idea, kids, and I think there's something in it. That thing came out on Tom Merry's face by some accident or other, and Gore knows all about it. Suppose we all go to Gore's study and rag him till he tells us what he knows? Then the cat would be out of the bag."

"Do you think he really knows anything?"

"Yes, I do; but anyway, a thrashing won't do him any harm."

"Well, that's true enough. Let's go."

"Come on then," said Blake. "There's enough of us to give him as much as he asks for, I think."

The plan was adopted. In a body the juniors proceeded to George Gore's study, and Blake kicked the door open. Gore, who was indulging in the forbidden luxury of a cigarette with his chum Mellish, jumped up in a fright. He breathed again as he saw that his visitors were only juniors.

"Confound you! What do you mean by bursting in on a fellow like that?" he exclaimed angrily. "What do you want here?"

"Shut the door, Figgy."

Blake advanced towards the alarmed occupant of the study.

"If you interfere, Mellish, we shall scrag you. Stand aside!"

"Oh, I'm just going," said Mellish.

"No, you're not," said Blake coolly. "You're going to stand there and keep quiet. Keep an eye on him, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, Gore, you know something about Tom Merry's illness. What is it? You know what the giddy secret is? Are you going to expound?"

"No, I'm not."

"Then you're going to have a high old time. Collar him."

The juniors rushed on Gore. That youth looked round wildly for a weapon, and caught up a hairbrush from the table. It was a hard brush, with very stiff bristles, and rather a dangerous weapon at close quarters.

"Stand back, you cads! Keep off or——"

"Rats! Collar him!"

Gore brandished his novel weapon; but the juniors rushed on. Figgins staggered back as the hard bristles of the hairbrush came in violent contact with his face. But they had Gore down in a twinkling.

"Help!" yelled Gore. "Mellish, you cad, why don't you help?"

"We're not going to hurt you, Gore," said Blake. "We're only going to persuade——"

The door of the study opened.

"What is this disturbance about?"

Mr. Railton was looking into the study.

The juniors released Gore as if he had suddenly become red-hot. The bully of the Shell staggered to his feet.

"If you please, sir," stammered Blake, "we were explaining something to Gore——"

"Go to your own studies immediately. You New House boys go back to your own house! Go at once!"

"Yes, sir."

Figgins & Co retreated. Mr. Railton saw them out of the School House. The rest of the youngsters returned disconsolately to Study No. 6.

"Blow the thing," said Blake discontentedly. "Something's always going wrong. We'd have had a secret out of Gore in another minute. We shall have to think of something else."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think that you'll have to come back to my idea of disguising me as a chimney-sweepah," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.

But no new idea had presented itself to the juniors by the time a remorseless prefect bundled them off to bed.

CHAPTER 10.

The Truth at Last—And Tom Merry Returns.

THE rising-bell was going merrily, and Figgins sat up in bed in the New House dormitory. Fatty Wynn sat up too and yawned.

The morning sun was streaming in at the high window. Another day had dawned upon St. Jim's. Fatty Wynn glanced at Figgins and uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, Figgy, what's the matter with your face?"

"My face!" said Figgins, passing his hand over it. "Nothing that I know of."

"My hat! Tom Merry's really got something, and you caught it that time under his bed!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn in alarm. "Your face has got a rash all over it."

"My word!"

Figgins jumped out of bed and rushed to the nearest glass. It was true. There was a red rash all over one side of his face, and the sight of it fairly startled Figgins.

"My hat!" said Kerr, looking at him. "You've got it, Figgy!"

"Poor old Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn sympathetically. "Now you'll have to be shut up in the infirmary with Tom Merry, and fed on sloppy muck."

"Oh, chuck it!"

"Well, you will, I know. I——"

Figgins was staring at his face in the glass. He gave a sudden yell.

"I've got it!"

"Yes, we can see you've got it."

"Ass! I mean I know how it came about."

"You caught it off Tom Merry."

"Fathead! I caught it off Gore's hairbrush!"

"What?"

"I've got it," said Figgins, with conviction. "Gore slammed me in the face with a hard brush last evening in that row in the study. I didn't notice it much at the time, but it was a nasty whack, and it punctured the skin all over. That's what's made this beastly rash."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Ass! It's certain," said Figgins. "And depend upon it, that's how Tommy came by his rash. I knew he wasn't ill. I'm going over to tell Blake."

"My aunt!" exclaimed Kerr. "That's so, now you think of it. You remember they had a study row the night before and Gore and Tom Merry were fighting. Ten to one he slammed him with a hair-brush same as he did you."

"Yes," said Fatty Wynn, "and he knew the truth all along, too. That's what he's been keeping dark; that's the giddy secret."

Figgins tore into his clothes, and rushed across to the School House. Blake and his chums had just come down, and they heard his tale with amazement and satisfaction. Manners and Monty Lowther listened with equal interest.

"It's plain as the nose on your face," said Figgins. "I've hit it."

"You have, Figgy," said Blake cordially. "We've got down to the facts now. We'd have screwed it out of Gore if Railton had given us a little more time."

"No doubt about it," said Monty Lowther. "I remember perfectly well that Gore caught up a hairbrush in that row and

whacked Tom in the face with it when Tom had his head in chancery. It's a dead cert."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We had bettah go and explain to the house-master, and it will not be necessary for me to disguise myself as a chimney-sweepah aftah all."

The juniors hurried in search of the house-master. Mr. Railton listened with interest to what they had to tell him. Gore was sent for, and he admitted having brought the hairbrush into play on Tom Merry's countenance in the study row.

"I think you must have known the truth all along, Gore," said Mr. Railton severely. "If I were sure I should cane you. You may go, boys. I shall speak to the Head, and when Dr. Short arrives we shall see what is to be done."

There was a good deal of excitement in the class-rooms that morning. The story had soon spread over the school, and Dr. Short's verdict was awaited with interest.

After morning school the juniors prepared a really ripping feast in Study No. 6. They had, as it were, killed the fatted calf for Tom Merry. But Tom Merry had not as yet appeared. What was the cause of the delay? Eight juniors wore anxious looks.

"Short won't let him escape if he can help it," said Monty Lowther glumly. "He's not likely to confess himself a donkey unless he's driven to it. Then there's Miss Fawcett; she's always anxious to make out that Tom Merry is ill. Between them they'll try to keep him in bed as a giddy invalid."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Blake. "Still, the Head knows the truth now, and he'll put his foot down. I wish Tom Merry would come! This is a jolly good spread, and Railton's given us permission to dine here instead of in the hall with the rest, so it stands to reason Tom Merry will be let out of quarrantine. If he ain't——"

"If he isn't, deah boys, it will still be necessary for me to disguise myself as a chimney-sweepah, and go to him with——"

"Hallo, what's that?" exclaimed Figgins.

A sibilant sound had floated in at the open door.

"Why, that's——"

Blake broke off. Tom Merry stepped into the study.

"Hallo, kids!" said Tom Merry. "Here I am, as hungry as a hunter." He looked out of the doorway and waved his hand, and then came in. "Anything to eat?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake. "Here's the giddy invalid. We've done the trick; we've worked the wheeze! We are triumphant! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther seized Tom Merry and plumped him into a seat at the head of the table.

"Fall to, kid! There's lots of tommy, lots and lots, and more in the locker. Wire in!"

There was a sound of wheels in the quadrangle. Miss Priscilla was departing from St. Jim's, satisfied that her beloved ward was in his normal state of health once more.

Tom Merry fell to with a will. It was a glorious feast, and the juniors enjoyed it immensely. Tom Merry, of course, was the gayest of all. His long isolation gave him a keen sense of the delights of freedom and comradeship.

The table groaned with good things; but the juniors effected a clearance in a remarkably short space of time. Then toasts were drunk in currant wine and ginger-pop, and a scene of great hilarity was interrupted at last by the summons to afternoon lessons.

The juniors parted on the best of terms, and it was nearly twenty-four hours before there was a row between Figgins & Co. and the School House chums, which was something like a record.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays next Thursday, entitled "A Regular Rascal," by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library.)



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. A new boy named Alburton comes to Stormpoint, and the chums object to his swaggering disposition, so nickname him "Swipes." Alburton is punished for talking by Mr. Salmon, who tells the boy he would not have minded the offence if he had not denied having spoken. "Are you talking, Perkins?" demanded Mr. Salmon. "No, sir; I never talk in class! I'd rather be shot dead than do a thing like that, because I know you don't like it!" (Now go on with the story.)

Straightforward Bob Bouncer.

It was Saturday morning, and Mr. Salmon was doing his utmost to get some sort of attention from boys whose minds were fixed on the half-holiday.

Bob was making plans with Rex, or, rather, he was explaining the plans he had already made.

"But look here, Bob, it will be spiffin," exclaimed Rex, "only you must let Jim and me take our share of the expense."

"No, I won't," growled Bob. "I've just got some more money in."

"He must have a gold-mine somewhere," murmured Jim.

"Well, I get in more money than I can spend, and—"

"Are you talking, Bouncer?" demanded Mr. Salmon.

"Yes, sir."

"Attend to me, then. This is the third time I have had to speak to you."

"Yes, sir. As I was saying, it's not the slightest use hoarding money up. Besides, I've asked you to come, so it's natural that I shall pay expenses. I've paid most of them in advance. No. We will start directly after dinner, and—"

"Are you talking, Bouncer?" inquired Mr. Salmon.

"Yes, sir."

"Your half-holiday is stopped."

"Oh, I say, sir! You mustn't really do that! I've got a most important engagement on."

"You should have thought of that before."

"I was arranging it, sir."

"I have warned you time after time. Now I shall make an example of you. Your half-holiday is stopped."

"Then I shall have to break bounds," murmured Bob.

"Oh, I say, Bob Bouncer!" exclaimed Perkins. "You will get a licking if you do, won't he, sir?"

"I did not hear what Bouncer said," observed Mr. Salmon coldly. He detested sneaking.

"Why, of course, sir; I wouldn't think of sneaking, but if he does break bounds, I know you will flog him."

"You miserable little sneak!" exclaimed Bob.

"Are you talking again, Bouncer?"

"Yes, sir! I called him a miserable little sneak."

"I see. Well, don't talk any more. Did you say you would break bounds this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; but I'm afraid I shall not get the chance now."

"I do not think you will," answered Mr. Salmon quietly.

"You quite understand that you are gated for this afternoon. Now attend to the lesson."

Bob was fearfully disappointed, but he was too sensible to sulk, because he knew perfectly well that he deserved what he had got. He did his best, and after dinner went to Mr. Salmon's study, as ordered.

"Now, Bouncer," exclaimed Mr. Salmon fixing his eyes on him, "as I have explained, I intend to make an example of you, and I hope it will be a lesson that you will not forget. You say that if you get the chance you will break bounds?"

"I'm certain I shall, sir."

"You know what the penalty would be?"

"Yes, sir. You would whack me, and stop another afternoon, but I don't mind that. Why not flog me now and let me go? You are bound to have to do it when I come back."

"I do not consider that you have been guilty of an offence to merit a flogging; besides, I was not intended to hear your threat."

"Well, sir, I admit it is my intention to break bounds if I get the chance."

"Very well, I shall have to stop here with you. Of course, that will spoil my afternoon, but it is my duty to see that you do not grossly disobey me. I shall remain with you all the afternoon, unless you give me your word that you will remain in."

"Well, sir, if you put it that way, I promise."

"Thank you! Your word is quite sufficient for me."

"All the same, sir; I do wish you would flog me, and stop next Wednesday—or even two half holidays."

"No; I cannot do that. At the same time you could get this afternoon, and a flogging when you came back."

"Well, sir, that's what would have happened," growled Bob, "and it's no good disguising the fact. I would have broken bounds, but I can't now."

"How's that?"

"Why, I've pledged my word, sir!" exclaimed Bob, looking up in surprise.

"True. That is so. Rather a false move, wasn't it. You might have made me stay in."

"There would be no sense in that, sir. I know I've deserved what I've got, and it would be a caddish thing to try to spoil your afternoon. It's bad enough for one to have to stick in this beastly place. Still, that's what I'm going to do, whatever happens. I'll be like the boy on the burning deck, but I shall scoot if flames come. I shall draw the line at being burnt to death."

"Oh, yes! I wouldn't expect you to go as far as that. Now, Bob, I am very pleased to know that I can trust your word implicitly. I have never known you speak falsely, and I believe you know that, apart from the morality of the matter, it is always the best thing to do. It may not seem so at the moment, but it does afterwards. You see, it gives a master absolute faith in the lad, and in after life it gives men absolute confidence in the man. I am very pleased with your straightforward conduct. I shall give you a free pardon."

"What, you will let me go, sir?"

"Yes. Perhaps I shall punish you more severely next time you talk in class, so just you take care."

"I say, sir, this is awfully good of you!"

"Then try to talk less in class in the future."

"I'm afraid I sha'n't succeed, sir. You see, I get ideas for larks while I'm in class, and when I'm out of it I have the larks."

"You could do a great deal better at lessons if you tried. However, you can go out as soon as you like."

Bob did, and he at once told his chums the good news, while they quite agreed with him that Perkins ought to be punished for sneaking, and they planned the little matter between themselves.

"There goes Seaslug!" exclaimed Bob. "Now fetch the measly little creature to the study, and you will find me there. Of course, it has happened for the best; all the same, we will make the little sneak look ridiculous."

In about five minutes, Rex and Jim, accompanied by Tim Perkins, made their appearance.

"I say, Bob," exclaimed Rex, "it's an awful nuisance you are gated, for we would have had some splendid sport on the water. But if you really can't come, do you see any objection to our taking Tim Perkins?"

"Well, it was he who got me kept in, you know."

STORMPOINT (continued).

"Yes, I know that; but, you see, we need someone to steer, and you are not vindictive."

"It was quite a slip I let it out," declared Tim.

"Well, I don't mind him going, in a sense," observed Bob. "I would like to have gone, too. That net-fishing is jolly. Then we could cook the fish on the bank of the estuary. The tide will be grand. You will catch no end, and I've got loaves of new bread, and a pound of best fresh butter, to say nothing of ginger-pop and pastry."

"I suppose you can't come?" inquired Rex.

"You see, I pledged my word to Mr. Salmon not to go out, and he said he knew he could rely on it. He behaved very nicely about the matter. It's a lovely afternoon."

"It is. Couldn't be better."

"I'll come."

"Oh, I say, Bob," exclaimed Perkins, "that's telling a lie to Mr. Salmon!"

"He won't be in till calling-over. Bother this study! I'm off, and, of course, we sha'n't need you, Perkins. You can stay in and play marbles with old Parker, then perhaps the old pig will catch the measles from you. I should say a measly little brute like you would be able to give them to the fat old pig."

"You won't take me?"

"Certainly not, Measles."

"Then I'll put a spoke in your wheel!" cried Perkins, bolting to the lodge, where he found Parker just preparing for his after-dinner nap.

"Oh, I say, Parker," cried Perkins, "Salmon has gated Bob Bouncer, and he's going to break bounds!"

"Why, Salmon has just gone out, and he didn't give me Bouncer's name!"

"No matter! You can take it from me. I heard him gated; besides, he admits it. Who's this?"

It was Dr. Andale, who had come to give Parker an order on his way out.

"If you please, sir," exclaimed Parker, "it is my dooty to inform you that Master Bob Bouncer has been gated by Mr. Salmon, and that he's going to break bounds."

"Going to break bounds! How do you know that?"

"Master Perkins has—"

"Parker—I mean Parker heard that Bob was going to break bounds, sir," interposed Perkins hurriedly. "He was passing the door, and when he put the question to me, of course, I had to confirm the decision, because I could not speak falsely. Parker is wonderfully quick at finding out anything like a boy breaking bounds, though, of course, he knows Bouncer is always doing it. Of course, what makes it worse on this occasion, is that Parker discovered that Bouncer had pledged his solemn oath not to break bounds, and as Mr. Salmon trusted to his honour, Parker naturally thinks that Bouncer ought to keep his oath."

Dr. Andale could easily read between the lines. He knew that Perkins was perverting the truth; but that was nothing new.

"Do you confirm that statement, Parker?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. It is exactly what happened."

"Where is Master Bouncer?"

"He's—he's—"

"In Mr. Salmon's study, isn't he, Parker?" prompted Perkins.

"That's exactly where he is, sir," added Parker.

The doctor sighed, and Perkins felt a little uncomfortable.

"I think it is only fair to tell you, sir, that Bob gave Sealug—gave his master notice of his intention to break bounds. I will say Bob owned the truth, and—"

"Both of you follow me to Mr. Salmon's study," ordered Dr. Andale. And there they found the conspirators, who had never hoped that their little-scheme of retaliation would come off so well.

"I am given to understand, Bouncer, that you have been gated by Mr. Salmon," said Dr. Andale.

"Yes, sir, he did all that."

"Of course, you deserved it?"

"Yes, sir. I told him so."

"I am given to understand that you also told him you intended to break bounds."

"Well, someone else told him that, sir."

"I am informed that you pledged your oath to Mr. Salmon that you would not break bounds, and that he trusted to your honour; but the same informant tells me that you intend to go out."

"It's all correct, in a sense, sir."

"Explain!"

"I did not take any oath, sir. You know Mr. Salmon would never allow a boy to take an oath. He trusted to my word. I gave him the promise, because otherwise he said he should remain in, and there wasn't any sense in that."

"Quite right! But it is not your intention to break your word?"

"Certainly not, sir. Mr. Salmon decided to give me a free pardon. I wanted him to whack me and let me loose, but he wouldn't do that."

"I suppose the offence was not sufficiently serious for a caning?"

"Talking in class several times, sir. But the punishment of being kept in was more serious than the caning. However, he gave me a free pardon, and said I might go out when I liked."

"So long as you assure me of that, the matter is ended," said Dr. Andale.

"But I know he didn't give the pardon," declared Perkins—"or, if he did, they have been humbugging you, sir, because they led me to believe that they were going to break bounds. You know you did, Bob Bouncer, and to my mind it is an awful offence to try to humbug the Head of this great college. He has quite enough on his shoulders without having boys trying to humbug him."

"Then it is a great pity that you so often try to do so, Perkins," retorted the doctor. "I don't suppose Bouncer imagined that I should have anything to do with the matter."

"No, sir," answered Bob. "I wanted to humbug Perkins and Parker, and I believe I have succeeded pretty well."

"I think it would be far better, Perkins," exclaimed the doctor, "if you paid a little more attention to your own faults, and left other lads alone. In this case, both you and Parker have tried to deceive me."

"Oh, sir, I never did!" declared Perkins.

"I'd scorn the haction!" vowed Parker.

"Don't dare to tell me such falsehoods!" cried the doctor.

"You knew nothing about the matter, Parker, except what this simple lad Perkins told you. He asserted that it was you who got to know Master Bouncer was going to break bounds. It was no such thing. You went to tell him, Perkins, and you tried to conceal the fact from me that you had sneaked!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Perkins, as the doctor strode away. "Did you ever see such beastly ingratitude? If it had been my case, he would not have let me out on my word."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Rex. "Fancy the doctor taking your word! Why, bother it, Perkins, you never speak the truth unless it suits your purpose to do so; and as for old Parker—well, he's too disgusting to talk about. I'm sure the man was intended for a pig."

(Another long instalment in next Thursday's issue of "The Gem" Library.)



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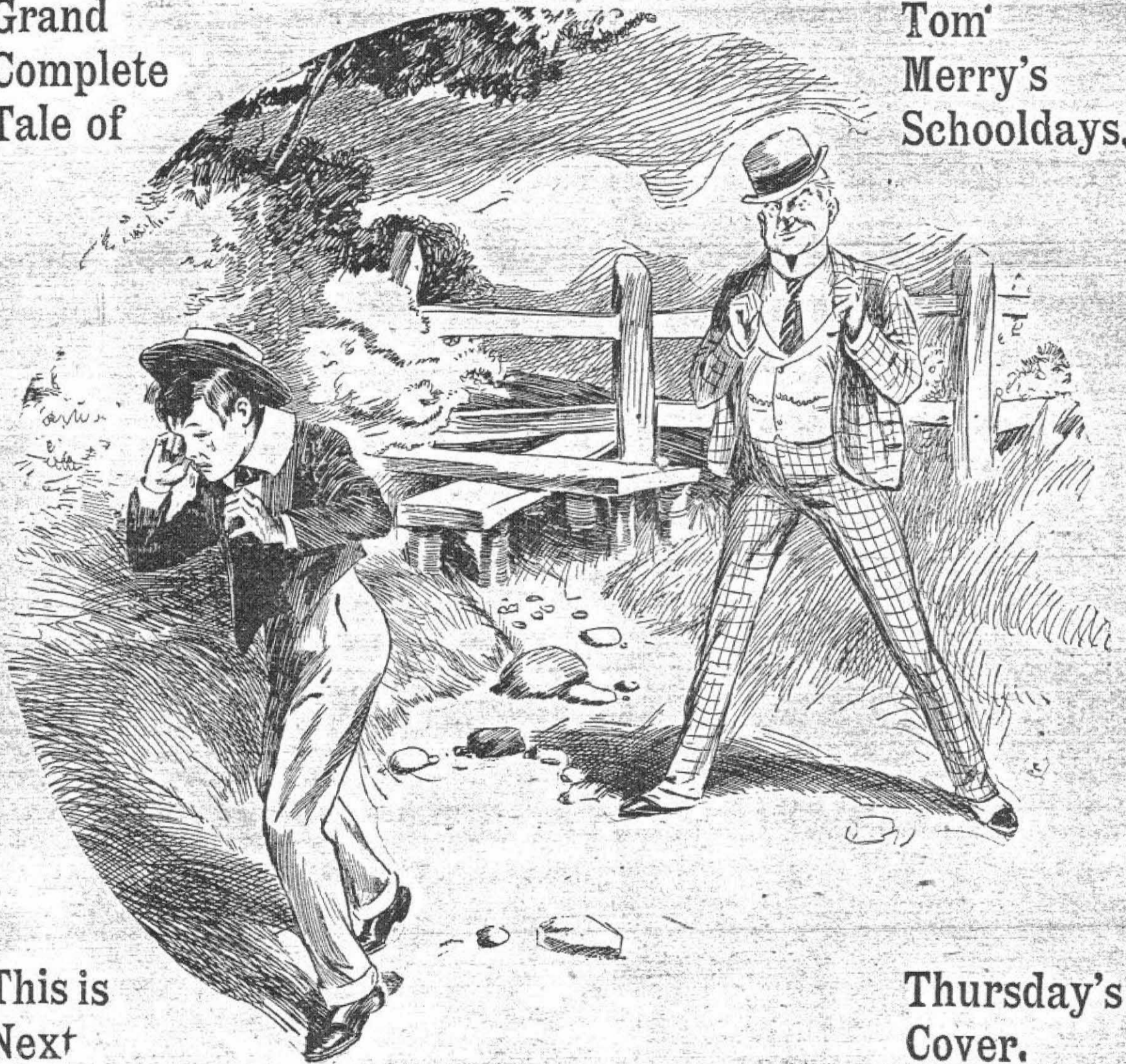
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