

TOM MERRY.

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THE DIABOLISTS.

A GRAND TALE
OF TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



THE MASTER'S
HORRIBLE
VISION!

NO. 39.

VOL. 2.

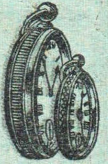
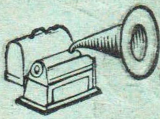
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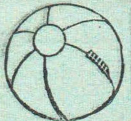


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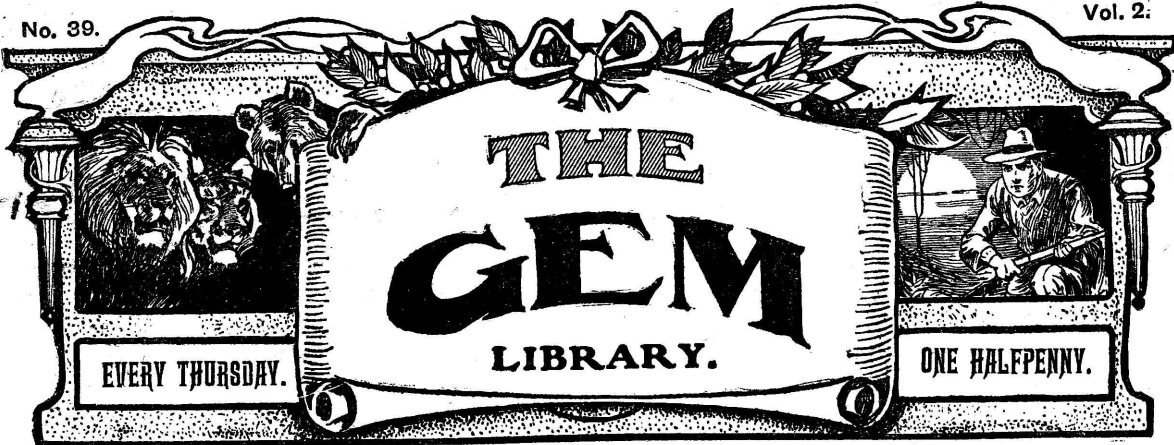
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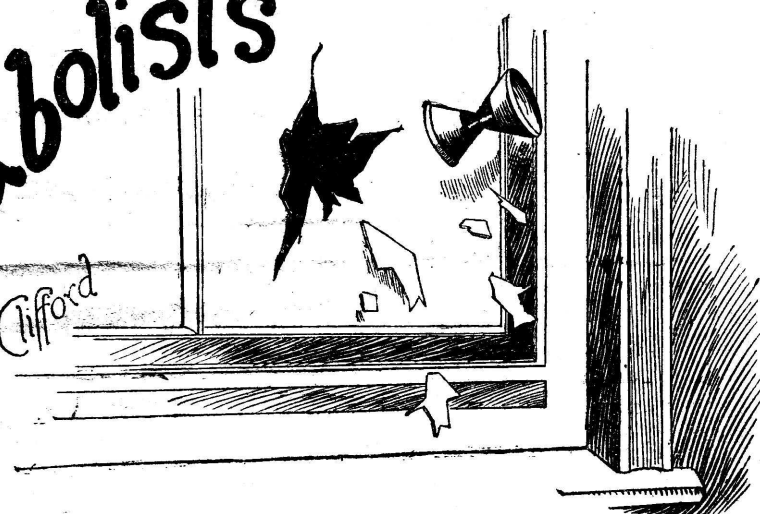
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A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

The Diabolists

by Martin Clifford



a Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays

CHAPTER 1.

The Troublesome Devils.

"IT'S those devils, sir!"

The Head of St. Jim's stared at Mrs. Mimms, the School House matron, in blank amazement.

"I—I do not quite understand you, Mrs. Mimms," he stammered.

"It's those devils, sir."

"Those—those what?"

"Those devils!"

Dr. Holmes laid down his pen, and looked steadily at Mrs. Mimms. The house-dame was very red and excited, and a suspicion crossed the doctor's mind. Mrs. Mimms had always been a quiet and peaceful old soul, extremely dutiful and very kind to the boys under her charge, and she was the last person in St. Jim's to be suspected of indulging in the glass that cheers and inebriates, but—but really—

Certainly her conduct was very strange. The Head had been writing busily when she knocked at his door. In response to his somewhat testy "Come in!" Mrs. Mimms had marched into the Principal's study with a crimson countenance and excited eyes. She carried a broken dish in her hand, and the Head wondered what she could possibly have brought that damaged specimen of crockery to his study for.

But if her looks were unusual, her words were amazing. She spoke breathlessly, like one who had endured patiently to the extreme limit of human endurance, and could not possibly endure any more. But her words did not enlighten the Head, and he had not the faintest idea of what was the matter, unless— But he had always believed Mrs. Mimms to be a perfectly sober and respectable middle-aged person.

"Now, Mrs. Mimms," said the Head, in a tone of gentle

expostulation, "I gather that you have some complaint to make to me."

"Yes, sir. Those devils——"

"Is it possible, madam, that you are alluding to my boys by that extremely opprobrious expression?" asked Dr. Holmes, with his most stately manner.

"The boys! Certainly not, sir! They're young limbs, they are! But I mean the devils—those awful devils, sir!"

Dr. Holmes looked utterly dismayed.

There could be no further doubt on the subject. The Head of St. Jim's had led a very quiet life himself, but he had heard that habitual intoxication leads the reckless indulger to see things—snakes, and toads, and devils! There could be no further doubt! Mrs. Mimms, the highly respectable and sedate Mrs. Mimms, Mrs. Mimms was——

"Mrs. Mimms, my dear Mrs. Mimms, I am truly shocked and grieved," said the Head soothingly. "Pray do not take the matter so much to heart."

"My best dishes broken!"

"Yes, accidents will happen!"

"Vases knocked down!"

"I am truly sorry!"

"My best bonnet smashed in by one of those horrible devils, sir, when it was upon my own head," pursued Mrs. Mimms excitedly.

The Head of St. Jim's pursed up his lips. The case was worse than he had thought. He had never dealt with anyone in such a state before, and he did not know what to do. If he could only get the lady out of his study——

"Too bad, Mrs. Mimms—too bad!" murmured the perplexed Head.

"They're everywhere, sir," said the house-dame, almost tearfully. "Wherever I go I see those horrid devils, sir!"

"Horrible!"

"They're on the floor, and on the stairs, and in the air, and falling about one's ears or on one's head, and breaking up the best crockery, sir!"

The Head had heard that it is wisest to humour lunatics, and he thought he might pursue the same plan with an intoxicated person with success. He waved his hand soothingly.

"Terrible, indeed, Mrs. Mimms! I will see into the matter at once. I—I will consult Mr. Railton, and the—the devils shall be cleared away immediately."

"No good clearing them away, sir, unless you give an order for no more to come into the house," said Mrs. Mimms.

"I—I will certainly give that order. They—they shall be sent back where they belong, Mrs. Mimms. Now, pray go and lie down!"

The house-dame stared at him.

"Lie down? Why should I go and lie down, sir?"

"I—I—you—you are agitated, Mrs. Mimms! You are extremely agitated. I—I think it will do you good to have a little rest!" stammered the doctor.

Mrs. Mimms sniffed.

"I don't want any rest when my work is not done," she said, rather tartly. "So long as I am not annoyed by those devils I shall be very well."

"I will have the matter seen to at once, my dear madam."

"Not that I want to be hard on the boys, sir. Boys will be boys—"

"Of course—of course, my dear madam!" said the doctor, who hardly knew what to say. "As you very truly observe, boys will be boys."

"But when it comes to being plagued night and day with those devils, sir—"

"Yes, yes, it is altogether too bad!"

"I don't think the boys ought to be allowed to bring them into the house, sir."

The Head gave a start. Mrs. Mimms must be in a bad state indeed, he thought. She not only saw the mystic devils of the drunkard's fancy, but she imagined that the boys brought them into the School House. Horrible! It would be a pity to part with Mrs. Mimms after so many years of careful housekeeping, but really, after this shocking exhibition, it would be impossible to allow her to remain at St. Jim's. But at present the pressing difficulty was to get the lady out of the study.

"You—you think the boys bring them into the house, Mrs. Mimms?" said the Head weakly.

"Of course, sir! I've seen them!"

"Oh, if you have seen them, of course—"

"There was Master Merry, sir, he had one in his pocket."

"Tom Merry! A—a devil in Tom Merry's pocket!"

"Yes, sir. And Master Blake was playing with one in the passage!"

"Dear me," said the doctor, faintly, trying to picture Blake playing with a Satanic monster in the passage. "Dear me, this is most distressing! But really, Mrs. Mimms, I am extremely busy now—very busy indeed."

"Yes, sir; but to have one's crockery broken by the devils—"

"Too bad—too bad! But I will see into the matter."

"Thank you, sir. Then I won't trouble you any more. Of course, I know that boys will be boys, as I said—"

"Yes—er—boys will be—er—boys—"

"I don't want to be hard on them, sir. I only want to get rid of the devils."

"You shall be rid of them, Mrs. Mimms. Pray leave me now."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

And the house-dame at last departed. Dr. Holmes wiped his brow. Never had he been through such a terrible experience before.

He knew little of intoxicated persons. He knew that sometimes they developed violent tendencies. Suppose Mrs. Mimms had started breaking up the furniture in the study! The Head gasped with sheer horror at the thought!

"Dear me!" murmured Dr. Holmes. "How distressing—how very distressing! Mrs. Mimms was such an extremely respectable person, so eminently respectable and staid! I have been greatly deceived in her. I do not know much about the effects of strong drink, but I am sure that it is only after habitual indulgence in liquor that drunkards see these—these horrible visions. Dear me!"

Tap!

The Head had just taken up his pen again, when the tap came on his door. He laid down the pen with an air of resignation.

"Come in!" he said patiently.

The door of the study opened hurriedly, and Taggles, the school porter of St. Jim's, came in. He was flushed and excited, and he came in with a kind of run, as if he could hardly contain himself.

"If you please, sir—"

"What is the matter, Taggles?"

"It's those devils, sir!"

Dr. Holmes nearly jumped out of his chair.

"What, Taggles? Those what? What did you say?"

"Those devils, sir!"

"Taggles, how dare you? I say, how dare you?"

"What's the matter, sir? I've come to make a complaint, I 'ave."

"You have been drinking!"

"Which I ain't, sir. Not a blessed drop to-day, and it's a cold day, too, and a gentleman needs something to warm him, sir. But I ain't touched a drop."

"Then what do you mean by—"

"It's them devils, sir. They're awful! I can't stand 'em, sir."

Dr. Holmes passed his hand across his brow. Taggles looked more red and excited than Mrs. Mimms had looked. Was it possible that the two had been drinking together—perhaps holding some horrible orgy in the porter's lodge?

It seemed certain. But Dr. Holmes was not likely to be as gentle in dealing with a man as with a lady. Besides, he was getting decidedly angry.

"Taggles! I am ashamed of you! Leave the room at once!"

"But I want to say, sir—"

"If you cannot keep sober, you will leave my employ. I am shocked and ashamed! A man of your age, too!"

"Which I ain't touched a blessed drop, sir! It's them devils! You'd be excited if you had a devil come a-cracking through your winder all of a sudden, and knocking the cup out of your 'and, and spilling the whisk—I mean tea over your chest, sir!"

The Head was sniffing suspiciously.

Taggles had brought a grateful aroma of spirits into the study with him, and that confirmed the idea in the Head's mind. Doubtless something had been spilled over Taggles, but it was not a cup of tea. It was a glass of something stronger than tea.

"Taggles, you—you are a rascal, sir!" exclaimed the Head.

"You are a low, disreputable rascal, Taggles!"

"Which I never did, nor wouldn't!" said Taggles. "But when a devil come crash through the winder, and knocks the glass—I mean the cup—outer yer 'and—"

"Horrible! Leave the study at once!"

"But I say, sir—"

"Leave the room!" thundered the doctor.

And Taggles, as the Head of St. Jim's half rose from his chair, thought it best to obey. He went out of the study grumbling, and closed the door with unnecessary emphasis.

The Head wiped his glasses and replaced them, breathing hard through his nose. He was very much disturbed and annoyed.

"Taggles, too!" he exclaimed. "I have long had a suspicion that he was not so sober as he should be, but he has kept the disgusting vice very secret. But now that he has brought it out into the daylight like this, he must go. Oh, dear, there is someone else to see me. Am I to have no peace this afternoon? Come in!"

The study door opened to admit the fat figure and florid countenance of Herr Schneider, the German master at St. Jim's.

The fat German was shaking from head to foot with excitement, and his spectacles were nearly falling off every moment. His florid face was red with rage.

"Herr Doctor—"

"What can I do for you, Herr Schneider? I have been very disturbed, so I hope—"

"Ach! I haf been disturbed, too, ain't it. I haf never been so worried mit meinsel' after pefore. Herr Doctor, I cannot stand—vat you call stand—it!"

"What is the matter, Herr Schneider?" asked the worried Head. "Has Taggles annoyed you? He has just left my study in a state of brutal intoxication."

"It is not Taggles, sir. It is dem devils!"

"Herr Schneider!"

"Dem devils, sir. I cannot stand dem!"

"Herr Schneider!"

"I would rader resign mit meinsel' from te college, sir. Look at tat, Herr Doctor—look at tat!" And the German master thrust the two halves of a broken pipe almost under the startled nose of the doctor.

Dr. Holmes jerked his head back.

"Yes, Herr Schneider, it is a broken pipe," he said; "I can see that very well. What do you bring it here for? Surely it is of no interest to me."

"Herr Doctor! I sit mit meinsel' at te window dis afternoon, just now after pefore," said Herr Schneider, whose English always became more and more mixed as he grew more excited; "I sometimes have a leedle peace on te half-holidays, but now—"

"What has happened?"

"Tom Merry he play mit vun devil under my vindow—"

Dr. Holmes groaned.

"He preak my bipe mit his devil!" shouted Herr Schneider. "Mein bipe, vich I pring from te Vaterland mit meinsel' pefore. I not stand dem devils, sir!"

"My dear Herr Schneider—"
"I come to complain, sir. Will you take some steps to suppress dem devils, sir, so tat ve can have some peace, ain't it?"
"Certainly, Herr Schneider—er—certainly. I—"
"Thank you, Herr Doctor. It is too pad to be vorried by dem devils. I know tat poys will be poys, but dem devils—"
"Yes, yes, of course—"
"Dem devils are eferywhere, sir—eferywhere. Mein bipe is proken mit itself after, and dere is te vindow of te house-master's study proke before. Dem devils—"
"Pray leave me now, Herr Schneider," said te doctor weakly. "I—I am busy. I shall speak to you about this later, when you are—you are calmer. Pray go now."

"Certainly, sir. I do not vish to boder you, but dem devils—"
"Exactly. Pray go."

And Herr Schneider went at last. The Head did not take up his pen again. He could not have written a line to save his life. He was too terribly disturbed and shocked. Mrs. Mimms had shocked him, Taggles had angered him, but Herr Schneider—a master at the college—that he should be in the same state. It was inexpressible!

"I think the whole school must have gone insane," murmured the doctor. "There has been a most unusual amount of noise in the quadrangle this afternoon, yet the football field seems to be deserted. Mrs. Mimms—Taggles—that was bad enough—but Herr Schneider! It is unspeakably shocking. I must see Mr. Railton—oh, come in!"

It was Mr. Railton who entered. The young master of the School House was a personal friend of the Head's, and his right-hand man in the management of the school; the doctor reposing much more confidence in him than in Mr. Rateliff, the master of the New House, though the latter was a great deal the older of the two.

"Ah, it is you, Railton!" said the Head, with a sigh of relief. "I am very glad to see you. I was about to send for you, as I want to see you most particularly. I have been very worried this afternoon."

"I think we all have, sir," said Mr. Railton; "and doubtless from the same cause. With the air simply full of devils—"

The Head's look stopped Mr. Railton. Dr. Holmes could not speak. He simply gazed at the house-master, and sank back into his chair, gasping.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" exclaimed the house-master. "Railton! You too!"

"I, sir? I—I don't understand. What is the matter?"

"Perhaps my ears deceived me. What did you say just now? I beg you to repeat your remark."

"I was saying, sir, that with the air so full of devils, it was no wonder we were all bothered this afternoon. There are devils everywhere!"

"Mr. Railton!"

"Yes, sir. I do not know why you should look at me like that, Dr. Holmes. Have I inadvertently given you offence?"

"Mr. Railton! You too! You too! Bless my soul!"

"But, really, my dear sir—"

Crash!

The house-master was suddenly interrupted. A pane in the study window crashed through in fragments, and scattered over the room. Something heavy came hurtling through, and dropped on the carpet, and rolled under the doctor's writing-table. In his present state of nervous tension the shock was too much for the Head. He jumped up with a sharp exclamation, and his papers went flying on one side, his inkpot on the other.

"Bless my soul! What—what—what was that!" The doctor gasped out the words feebly.

Mr. Railton was about to speak, when an insinuating voice was heard under the window outside.

"Please, sir, may I have my devil?"

CHAPTER 2.

Diabolo.

DR. HOLMES was too flabbergasted to speak. He sank into his chair again, and sat staring at the broken pane in the window, unconscious of the fact that the ink from the upset inkpot was running down his table and over his trousers.

And again the insinuating, apologetic voice came from the quadrangle—a voice the Head knew well—that of Tom Merry, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

"Please, sir, may I have my devil?"

Mr. Railton smiled slightly.

"What—what does he mean?" gasped the doctor. "Call him—tell him to come here at once—this must be explained."

The house-master stepped to the window.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir. May I have my—"

"You are to come into the study at once."

"I am sorry I broke—"

"Come in at once."

"It was quite an accident, sir. I was sure I should catch the devil that time, but I want more practice. I had an idea—"

"Obey me at once, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton stepped back from the window. The Head had by this time become aware of the direction taken by the flowing ink, and he had jerked his chair away from the table and jumped up. He was mopping the ink from his trousers with his handkerchief, making the latter into a shocking state, without improving the trousers much.

"Dear me, Mr. Railton, this is most disturbing! Can you tell me what it was that came through my window? Is it possible that Merry has had the unparalleled effrontery to hurl a stone through my window?"

"Not at all, sir. It was his devil."

"His what?"

"His devil, sir. He was playing diabolo, and very recklessly near your window. My own has been broken in the same manner, by a devil sent in by D'Arcy."

"I—I do not understand, Mr. Railton. What is diabolo? What do you mean by saying that a devil—"

"Look at this, sir."

Mr. Railton stooped and picked up a small object from under the table. The doctor looked at it in wonder—a round object, a few inches in length, and extremely narrow in the middle, with rubber bands round the broad ends of it.

"What is that, Mr. Railton?"

"That's—ah, here is Merry!"

Tom Merry entered the study. The hero of the Shell was looking as innocent as he could, but there was a glimmer of fun in his eyes as he saw the ink spilt on the august trousers of the Head, and the devil in the house-master's hand.

Dr. Holmes fixed a stern glance upon him.

"Merry, did you hurl this—this object through my window?"

"It came through itself, sir. I didn't catch it as I ought to have done; but I've only had it a few hours, sir, and I'm not practised yet."

"Explain yourself. What were you doing with it?"

"Playing diabolo, sir."

"Diabolo! The word is familiar to me. It is the name of some new game, I think."

"Yes, sir; and a jolly good game."

"And—and what is that curious-looking circular object?"

"That's the devil, sir."

"Do you mean that it is called a devil?" asked the Head, a light breaking upon his perplexed mind at last.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, with a twinkle of fun in his eyes.

"It's the devil on two sticks, you know, sir."

"I—I understand. Then I—I—dear me! That is the kind of devil Mrs. Mimms was complaining of, then—and Taggles—and Herr Schneider! I comprehend now. I am afraid that I— No matter. What are those sticks you have in your hand, Merry?"

"We play the game with sticks, sir—two sticks, with a cord between, and we have to keep the devil spinning on the string, sir. Shall I show you?"

"I—er—perhaps you had better."

Mr. Railton, with a smile, dropped the devil upon the carpet. Tom Merry took a stick in either hand, and hooked the string under the devil, and with a motion of his right hand set the round object spinning on the string.

Although he had been in possession of the game only that afternoon, Tom Merry had already learned to keep the devil spinning on the string, and with easy movements of right and left he kept it going, much to the amazement of the doctor.

"Dear me! I understand now," said the Head, looking on with great interest. "I should say that that game would provide an—er—an interesting and gentle exercise for middle-age persons. But—but is that all?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Tom Merry. "When you can keep the devil spinning all right, then you have to learn to spin it off the string into the air, and you catch it on the string again, on the right hand side—so."

Tom sent the spinning devil into the air, and with a movement of his right hand stick caught it on the string again, and it continued to spin.

"Very clever!" exclaimed the Head.

"I can't always catch it yet, sir," said Tom Merry. "Sometimes it flies too far—sometimes through a window, for instance."

"Ahem! I really think that this game will lead to a great many breakages. But is there anything further?"

"Oh, yes, sir. When you play the game you send the devil to another fellow, who catches it on his string and sends it back to you. You have a net between, same as in ping-pong. You can play matches indoors or out."

"Not without considerable damage, I should say," re-

marked the Head drily. "A great deal of skill and confidence is certainly required—"

The doctor was interrupted.

Tom Merry had kept the devil spinning all the time he was talking, and he now sent it up into the air again as a demonstration of what he could do with it. Unfortunately he did not calculate so well this time, and the devil flew off at an unexpected angle, and there was a terrific crash as it smashed upon a case of stuffed birds in the corner of the study. Broken glass littered the floor. Tom made a dive for his devil, and sent the case and the stuffed birds over.

"Merry, how dare—! But it was my fault. Take those instruments away at once. Leave the study, sir."

Tom Merry, glad enough to escape so cheaply, gathered up his sticks and his devil and departed. The Head breathed hard as he glanced at Mr. Railton.

"I have not seen that game played before, Mr. Railton. I am afraid that among my books I have withdrawn myself a little from the world, and have not taken due notice of the fact that a new plague is upon us. A plague I am afraid it will prove."

"Some have found it so already, sir. Mrs. Mimms—"

"Yes, she was here complaining a short time ago," said the Doctor, turning red. "She spoke of seeing devils, and she looked so excited that—that I feared— And then there was Taggles—and then Herr Schneider. I thought—or, rather, I did not know what to think."

The house-master laughed.

"It was a natural mistake. This game has been played in London for some time now, but it is its first appearance at St. Jim's. The boys seem to have gone quite frantic about it. Of course it is simply a craze and will pass."

"Ye-es, I suppose so, but meanwhile—"

"It would be very drastic to forbid the game, sir."

"Yes, I suppose so. But it must be played within limits. I think it can safely be left to the prefects to see that it does not go too far."

"Yes, that is my idea. I was coming to speak to you about it, sir, as I was aware that complaints were to be made. So long as we keep it within bounds I think we may let the boys have their amusement—and so long as they pay for all breakages."

The Head looked down ruefully at his stained trousers.

"Ye-es. But there will be some damages that cannot be very well paid for. However, we must exercise our patience. But, really, Mr. Railton, I think the game is very rightly named—and the object that it is played with especially so. I think that we shall need all our patience if diabolito catches on at St. Jim's."

CHAPTER 3.

A Diabolic Craze.

DIABOLO had, in fact, descended upon St. Jim's like an epidemic. The game, which had long been talked of among the boys, was introduced quite suddenly, and it caught on like wildfire. All St. Jim's, from the Sixth to the Second, was diabolito.

The first diabolito set had come as a present to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of Study No. 6 in the School House, as a present from an affectionate uncle. D'Arcy, Blake and Herries had experimented with the new toy with great enthusiasm, as they found themselves actually able to keep the devil on the string. Fellows had come from far and near to see them doing it, and had started making themselves sets of all sorts of materials. There was a general rush to the post-office in Rylcombe to send off telegrams to affectionate parents and guardians begging for diabolito sets. Those who had cash rushed to the post-office for postal orders to send to London emporiums. Diabolito had not as yet found its way into the sleepy little village of Rylcombe.

For that Tuesday Arthur Augustus had reigned supreme as the possessor of the sole diabolito set at St. Jim's. D'Arcy, Blake, and Herries, the happy occupants of Study No. 6, had been the envy of all. Even the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther—had come to watch and admire, and had been the first to wire off for sets. The news spread to the New House, and Figgins & Co., the chiefs of the New House juniors, rushed over to see the new wheeze. Figgins had a fertile brain, and on Wednesday morning he might have been seen—and, as a matter of fact, was seen,—playing diabolito in the passage in the New House with a blind cord tied between two cricket stumps and a "devil" formed of two pegtops jammed into one another. It was rough and ready, but it was diabolito, and Figgins was greatly admired.

But all through Wednesday morning and afternoon parcels were delivered at the school in ever increasing quantities, and the delighted fellows opened them and found themselves the proud possessors of the famous game. Then they started diabolito in all directions. The devils smashed and crashed everywhere. The Head of St. Jim's was in blissful ignorance of it all. But the rest of the school found the diabolito terrible. The contagion spread. While the juniors diabolito in the

quadrangle the seniors diabolito in their studies, and it was whispered that even some of the masters were practising behind locked doors. Certainly mysterious bumps were heard proceeding from some of the masters' studies, and the looking-glass in Monsieur Morny's room was found cracked across in a way that was never satisfactorily accounted for.

Arthur Augustus, who had had the earliest practice, was most expert at the game for a time, but Tom Merry soon outstripped him.

The hero of the Shell was as yet far from perfect, but he was getting on well, and certainly he was now the best diabolito in the school.

The fact that the new game was introduced at St. Jim's and had caught on there had been now officially brought to the notice of the Head by the breaking of his study window. There was a grin on Tom Merry's sunny face as he left the Head's study. Several juniors were waiting for him in the passage.

"Licked?" asked Monty Lowther, with cheerful brevity.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. The Head was quite tame. He looks as though he might soon have enough of the new game, though."

"Ha, ha! I fancy he'll soon get fed up with it if you practise so near his study window," laughed Manners.

"Yes, it was careless; but a chap gets excited you see. If we can get expert, some of us, we might challenge the New House to a match. We've licked them at everything else, and so we might as well give them the kybosh at diabolito."

"Good idea. I hear that Figgins & Co. have taken it up. Figgins had a set come down this morning, and he's getting on well, I hear. But come on, let's get some more before it gets dark. It's dark so beastly early this month."

"Righto! Come along, and we'll give the Principal's study a wider berth this time," laughed Tom Merry.

And they adjourned to the quadrangle, sticks in hand. Here Schneider met them as they were going out. He frowned at the sight of the diabolito sticks.

"Ach, was you play tat peastly game again mit yourselves before," he exclaimed. "I have had mein bipe proke after. I haf gomplain to te Doctor, and I tink tat ve soon see te last of tat diabolito, ain't it?"

"Don't you like it, sir?" said Tom Merry innocently.

"Ach, you was impertinent, Merry."

"Not at all, sir. I respect you too highly to think of being impertinent to you, sir. I'd rather be impertinent to my own grandfather."

Herr Schneider sniffed and walked away.

"Come on," chuckled Lowther. "Don't waste time pulling his Deutch leg; it won't be light much longer."

"Merry, Lowther, Manners!"

It was the voice of Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame. The boys turned round. They were always respectful to Mrs. Mimms, who was a good old soul in her way.

"Where are you going with those sticks?" asked the School House matron, severely.

"Going to play diabolito, Mrs. Mimms," said Tom Merry, cheerfully.

"I thought so. It is a wretched game, and I have asked the doctor to prohibit it. He has told me that not a devil shall be allowed in the house."

Tom Merry's face fell.

"Oh, Mrs. Mimms!"

"It is too dangerous," said Mrs. Mimms. "You must make up your minds to that."

And the house-dame walked away majestically, without waiting for further expostulations. It was evident that the usually placid Mrs. Mimms was very much ruffled. The chums of the Spell stared blankly at one another.

"I say, do you think that that can be correct?" asked Lowther. "I think Mrs. Mimms must have allowed the wish to be the father to the thought. The Head wouldn't be such a tyrant."

"If it's true," said Tom Merry, "there will be rows. Come on."

They went out. In case of accidents, they put a good space between themselves and the School House, and this brought them near to the porter's lodge. Mr. Taggles looked out of his broken window at them with strong disfavour.

"Clear off from here," he called out. "My winder's been broken once, you young rips."

But the young rips neither heard nor heeded.

They were busy diabolito, and Tom Merry's devil was spinning in fine style. Manners was clumsier. He got the devil spinning, but as soon as he tried to make it quit the string it shot off at an unexpected tangent, and flew he knew not whither.

But Taggles knew.

The pane of glass could not be broken, because it was gone already, but the devil shot in at the same place, and found a billet upon the school porter's prominent red nose.

Taggles gave a terrific whoop.

"Oh, murder! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry. "Taggy has stopped it, Manners, old man. Go in and ask him for it."

Manners hesitated. The sounds that Taggles made seemed to indicate that it would not be safe to ask him for the devil. Manners' hesitation was cut short by the opening of the lodge door, and the appearance of Taggles with a poker in his hand. The porter evidently meant business, and the Terrible Three promptly fled.

"I'll devil you!" roared Taggles, following in pursuit. "My hat, he's mad!" gasped Lowther. "Cut it." The chums cut it at top speed.

Taggles chased them furiously through the growing dusk in the quadrangle. To have first his window broken, and then his nose pulverised by the reckless diabolists was really too bad. Taggles meant business this time, and he ran well too. The Terrible Three dodged under the shadowy elms in the quad, and Taggles lost them for a minute. He rushed on, and collided with someone, whom he sent spinning. In a moment Taggles was clutching at the unfortunate person.

"Got yer!" he roared, "Got yer! I'll teach yer——"
"Ach! Vat was all tat after? Daggles, how dare you!"
"My eye!" gasped Taggles. "It's old Schneider!"

He could see his mistake now. He released the German master, who was gasping with rage. Taggles' unguarded words had not improved his temper.

"Olt Schneider hein! I vill report you to te Head—mein gootness, I vill!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I was runnin' after them young rips—they've bashed one of their devils on my nose, sir—you can see it swellin' yourself, sir."

"Ach! Tat alters te matter," said Herr Schneider, recovering his breath. "But you vill please be more careful in te future, Daggles."

"Certainly, sir; I'm very sorry," said Taggles, and he walked away, muttering under his breath, "Silly old duffer! What did he want to get in the way for?"

The Terrible Three had seen the little catastrophe from a distance, and they trotted off towards the School House, chuckling.

"Lucky Schneider was there to stop Taggles," grinned Monty Lowther. "He meant to use that poker, Taggles is a beast."

"Yes, he does make a fuss about a trifle," Manners explained. "Oh, I don't know," laughed Tom Merry. "Do you call it a trifle to have a devil plumped right on your nose?"

"Of course it is," exclaimed Lowther. "It's merely nothing. A fellow ought to learn to put up with little things like that. I should never—Ow!"

Lowther was cut short suddenly. A whizzing object came out of the dusk, and smote him under the chin, and he staggered back with a sharp cry. A figure came running up.

"Pway have you seen my devil, deah boys?"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of Study No. 6. It was the devil from his sticks that had smitten Monty Lowther under the chin. Lowther gave a roar, and hurled himself upon the swell of the School House.

"I say—what—don't you know—I say—pway don't be so wuff!"

Lowther jammed the swell of St. Jim's against the School House wall.

"You image!" he roared. "Do you know you chucked that beastly thing right on my beastly chin, eh? Do you know that, you silly ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry. "Who's making a fuss about a trifle now, Monty?"

"Well, this is different," growled Monty. "Besides, my chin is more important than Taggles' nose, ain't it?"

"Pway welease me," gasped D'Arcy. "You are wubbin' the back of my jacket on the wall, and that is certain to weally spoil the cloth, Lowthah; and, besides, you are wumplin' my collah."

"I'll rumpel your neck," exclaimed Lowther. "You've nearly busted my chin, and I sha'n't be able to talk——"

"Weally, that won't be a gweat disadvantage. I have often thought that you talk a great deal too much, Lowthah."

"You—you—you tailor's dummy! I'll——"

"I wufuse to be chawacteweised as a tailah's dummy. Pway welease me, or I shall probably lose my tempah and stwike you."

Monty Lowther gave D'Arcy a jerk which sat him down in the quad, and then wound the diabolito string round his neck and stuck the sticks down the back of his jacket. Then he left him. The Terrible Three went in, grinning, and Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet.

"Weally, those persons are extwemely wuff," murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "I weally cannot welease my neck fwom this beastly stwing. I shall have to wqwest assistance."

D'Arcy entered the School House. He met Knox, the prefect, in the passage. Knox was the least popular prefect in the house, with good reason. He stared at D'Arcy.

"What have you been doing with yourself, kid?" he exclaimed.

"Nothin' Knox. A wude boundah has wound the stwing wound my thwoat and jammed the beastly sticks down the back of my neck, you know. I cannot weach them. Will you have the gweat kindness to wemove the beastly things, deah boy?"

"Not in the least," said Knox. "You're all right like that." "Pway pull them out for me, deah boy——"

"Oh, come here."

D'Arcy approached nearer, but the prefect did not pull the sticks out. He gave them a shove that jammed them in further, and scored D'Arcy's back into the bargain.

"There you are," he said, walking away. "Cut it!"

"Knox! I wegard your action as that of a wotten cad." The prefect swung round.

"What's that?"

"I wegard your action as caddish. I considah——"

The prefect came back, his eyes gleaming unpleasantly, and his hands clenched. Just then Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came out of his study.

Knox saw him out of the corner of his eye, and instead of striking the swell of St. Jim's, he turned and thrust his hands into his pockets and walked away. Kildare glanced after him suspiciously. He knew that Knox was a bully.

"I say, Kildare," exclaimed D'Arcy immediately. "Pway welease me fwom this widiculous position, deah boy."]

Kildare laughed good-naturedly, and jerked the sticks out from the inside of Gussy's jacket, and the swell of St. Jim's unwound the string from his neck. Then he went out into the dusky quadrangle to hunt for his lost "devil."

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble with the Prefect.

THEA in Tom Merry's study was usually a peaceful and cosy meal, and not by any means hurried. But this evening there was a change. The chums of the Shell were in a hurry to resume playing the game which had taken so sudden and so strong a hold upon them, and the study tea was in consequence quickly taken.

"Can't waste time," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get expert if we are going to play Figgins & Co. and beat them at diabolito. Another cup of tea, Monty?"

"Oh, no; let's clear the table back."

"Finished, Manners?"

"Yes, yea. Leave the things where they are, only just shove the table into the corner."

"Righto. Get out the sticks and devils."

The table was put in a corner. The chairs were cleared back, and as large a space as possible left in the middle of the study for the game. There certainly wasn't much room for three, but the chums of the Shell had to make the best of it.

Tom Merry was soon going, and so was Lowther. Manners, who had a second devil, followed suit. He was not likely to ever recover the one that had been left in Taggles' lodge.

The three were soon hard at it, tramping to and fro, and the bump, bump of the devils on the floor was pretty continuous. To keep them on the string came pretty easily after a little practice, but to catch them from the air required more skill than the juniors at present possessed.

There was a thump at the door, and Tom Merry gave a jump. "My hat! I say, that must be Knox. You know his study is below ours, and—— Oh, come in!"

It was not the Sixth-Former. The door opened, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy came in. They had devils in their hands, and diabolito sticks under their arms.

"Hullo!" said Tom Merry, relieved. "So it's you is it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you want? We're busy."

"We've just had a gentle hint from the Schneider-bird to stop making a row over his head," said Blake ruefully. "His room's under No. 6, you know."

"That's hard cheese. Can't you play?"



POLLIE GREEN

IS IN

This Week's

"Girls' Friend."

PRICE ONE PENNY.

"No. I believe he's sticking in that room on purpose to have an excuse for ragging us," said Blake indignantly. "He can't let innocent kids alone to amuse themselves."

"Ha, ha! I'm sorry, but—"

"So we've come here," said Herries. "You can find room for us, can't you? Mr. Railton has forbidden diablo to be played in the passages. The prefects have stopped it in the common-room since Mellish broke the looking-glass."

"My dear chap, we've hardly room for ourselves. Still, we can't be inhospitable. Come in, by all means. It's just as well to have a lot of us, perhaps. If Knox comes up and makes a row, we shall be able to talk to him."

"Righto. We'll back you up. We're not going to be down-trodden by any beastly prefects, that's certain. I say, shall we have a match?"

"I don't know if we can play well enough."

"Oh, that's all right. We shall learn."

"Just as you like," said Tom Merry. "Have mercy on our luxurious furniture. Spare the gilt-edged looking-glasses, and the embroidered fauteuils, and the—"

"Oh, come on, and begin."

"Yaas, wathah. I have a presentiment that Knox the prefect will not like this noise goin' on ovah his head, so we had better buck up, deah boys."

The six juniors were soon "going it" hammer and tongs.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was pretty expert, and he opposed Tom Merry, and between them they kept the devil up pretty well.

But Blake against Lowther, and Herries against Manners, found the task harder, and the devil bumped on the floor at almost every shot.

The continual bumps, and the tramping to and fro, made a terrific din, which the juniors soon grew too excited to think about.

Crash!

The devil from Herries' string crashed into the very centre of the looking-glass over the mantelpiece, and smashed it into a thousand fragments.

"My hat!" said Herries. "Who'd have thought it!"

Crash!

Lowther sent his devil crashing through the glass front of the bookcase. Startled by the smash, Tom Merry let his devil fly off in the wrong direction, and it alighted upon the table, from which the tea-things had not been cleared away. Crash! Crash!

"My hat!" gasped Tom. "We shall wreck the study soon— Look out!"

He rapped out the warning as the study door flew open, and the enraged face of Knox the prefect glared into the room.

"Ah, I thought so!" shouted Knox. "I thought so, you young hounds! Do you think I am going to do my work with you tramping over my head, and kicking up this confounded row, hey?"

"Haven't thought a word about it," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Are you annoyed by it?"

"Ha, ha!" howled Blake. "He looks rather annoyed."

Knox did not trouble to reply to Tom Merry's rather superfluous question.

He rushed into the study, right at the hero of the Shell, intending to administer condign punishment on the spot.

But the juniors were strong in numbers.

Some prefects they would never have thought of opposing, but it was different with Knox, who was a bully, and became worse the more he was given way to.

He grasped hold of Tom Merry, but instead of submitting quietly to having his ears boxed, like a dutiful junior, Tom returned grasp for grasp, and struggled valiantly.

Even the most athletic fellow in the Shell was not, naturally, a match for a Sixth-Former, and Tom Merry would have suffered had not his chums rushed to the rescue.

But they lost no time. They tumbled over each other in their haste to get at Knox.

The prefect was seized by three or four pairs of hands at once, and dragged bodily off Tom Merry. He struggled furiously in the grasp of the juniors.

"Weally, he is howwidly wuff," gasped D'Arcy. "I am opposed to violence on p'nciple, but I weally think he is askin' for a feahful thwashin'."

"And he'll get it," sputtered Blake, who had just received Knox's clenched fists full in the face. "Knox, smuck it, or we'll give you some harder knocks."

"You young hounds! I'll—I'll be the death of you!" sputtered the furious bully.

"Outside!" said Tom Merry.

Knox's reply was a blow, which sent the hero of the Shell reeling. Knox was hitting out spitefully, in a way that a senior should never have struck youngsters, and it was no wonder that the juniors retaliated in kind. And when they began to hit out, Knox found that he had the worst of it.

"Stop it, you young beasts! Stop it, I say!"

"Outside!"

They grasped him again and hustled him to the door. Blake

opened it, and Knox was hurled forth ignominiously into the passage.

He jumped up, his face flaming with rage, and seemed inclined to rush at them again; but the six juniors lined up ready for him, and he thought better of it.

"Pway wethire, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "You have caused us enough twouble and bothah already, you know, and we weally do not want to hurt you unless you pwovoke us."

"Travel!" said Tom Merry. "Emigrate before you get damaged."

Knox gritted his teeth and strode along the passage.

"Finished with him," said Tom Merry, turning back into the study. "We couldn't venture to handle any other prefect like that, but Knox is such a bully that Railton wouldn't be likely to take notice of anything he said. It's his own fault. Doesn't he kick up a row in his study sometimes? You remember the night Mr. Railton was away, and Knox and some of his set were singing comic songs at the top of their voices, and we couldn't get our preparation done. Like his cheek to complain of a little harmless noise in our study."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on," said Blake; "let's get going again. There's still some furniture left to break."

The juniors lost no time in restarting the game. They were soon diaboling again for all they were worth, with as much noise as before, or rather more as they grew more excited.

But they were not yet done with Knox, the prefect, as they fondly imagined. He had only retired to arm himself for the fray, so to speak, and a couple of minutes later he burst into the study again, and this time he had a long, thick cane in his hand.

"Hallo, here's that Jack-in-the-box again!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He's always popping up. Knox, old fellow, you are looking for trouble."

"And you'll find it if you don't get out!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Why don't you run away and play, like a good little prefect?"

The exasperated Knox made no reply. He dashed into the room, slashing right and left with the cane. There was a general jumping and scampering to avoid the savage strokes.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry. "Knox, you beast, are you off your rocker? Stop it!"

But Knox did not stop it. The cane was strong and flexible, and the prefect's arm was muscular. He slashed right and left. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy got a cut behind that made him leap into the air with a yell, and Manners got one across the shoulders. Blake yelled as the cane stung across his calves, and then Herries got it in the neck. Knox seemed too enraged to care where he was hitting.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed with anger.

"We're not going to stand this!" he exclaimed. "Go for him, chaps, and we'll give him a taste of his own medicine!"

The juniors rushed desperately at the prefect. He met them with a perfect shower of blows. Tom Merry received the cane right across his face, and it left a long red mark where it fell, and the boy's features contracted with the pain of the brutal blow.

"You cowardly brute!" shouted Monty Lowther. "Down him, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah. Thwash him!"

The cane was a terrible weapon in an unscrupulous hand, but the juniors were too exasperated to care for the blows they received. They collared Knox and dragged him down by their united force, and swarmed over him on the floor.

He struggled savagely, but they had the advantage now. Lowther wrenched away the cane, and Herries plumped himself on top of the prefect, jamming him on the carpet.

"Turn him over," said Blake.

"Righto! Over with him!"

Knox knew what that meant, and he made a tremendous effort to break away; but he did not succeed. They dragged him over with his face to the carpet, and two of them sat on his legs and took on his shoulder, while another gripped his wrists. Blake took the cane in hand.

"Now, Knox, say when!" he said sedately.

The cane rose and fell with telling force upon the portion of the prefect's person exposed to the attack. Thwack! thwack! The dust rose from Knox's trousers in a little cloud.

Thwack! thwack! thwack!

"Let me get up, you young demons! Stop it! Hold on! Stop it, I say!"

"Pway continue, Blake," said D'Arcy. "Knox keeps his twousahs in a most careless way, or they would not be so awfully beastly dusty. It is weally an act of kindness to dust his twousahs for him."

It was an act of kindness that Knox did not seem to be grateful for. He struggled and squirmed and yelled. But he was pinned down, and he was powerless.

"Now, then," said Blake, stopping to take breath, "have you had enough, Knox? I told you to say when, you know. I'll be the death of you."

"Have you had enough?" asked Blake, administering another cut.

"I—I—you—yes! Yes, yes!"

"Good! Are you sorry you came into this study, Knoxy?"

"No—yes—certainly—yes!"

"Will you come in again if you are let go?"

"Yes, I will!" yelled the writhing prefect. "I'll come in again and break every beastly bone in your body! That's what I'll do!"

Blake scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"In that case, I don't see how we can let you go," he remarked. "Naturally, we aren't looking forward to having every beastly bone in our bodies broken."

"Give him some more," suggested Manners. "He's been asking for it a long time, and now he's not satisfied. He wants more! Give it him till he promises, honour bright, to let us alone."

"That's rather a good idea. Will you make it pax, Knox, if we let you go?"

"No!" roared the enraged senior; "I won't!"

Thwack! thwack! thwack!

"Will you make it pax now?"

Knox did not reply; he was choking with rage. But it was evident that "pax" was as far from his thoughts as ever. It would be too humiliating for a prefect to make "pax" with a set of juniors, and even Knox could not stand it.

"H'm! Never met such an obstinate brute," said Blake, "I think he's had enough." He tossed the cane into the fire. "But if he's going for us as soon as we let him get up, we can't let him get up, that's certain."

"We can't sit on him all night," said Manners.

"I didn't say we could. Gussy, old chap, tie up his wrists with your necktie."

The swell of St. Jim's fixed a withering glance upon Blake.

"I refuse to do anything of the sort, Blake. I regard the suggestion as an insult to me!"

"To your necktie!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Here you are, Blake; here's a whipcord."

"Good! that will do the trick!" Blake took the whipcord, and fastened the prefect's wrists together behind his back, in spite of Knox's ineffectual writhings. "Is that all right, Knox, or shall I give it another twist?"

Knox gave an inarticulate grunt.

"Now for his hoofs!" said Blake cheerfully. "Lemme see! your blind-cord will do. Keep your hoofs still, Knox! Sit on his legs there!"

And the prefect's ankles were tied together with the blind-cord. Then the juniors rose and left him alone, and the prefect rolled over and glared up at them with speechless fury.

CHAPTER 5.

Kildare Takes a Hand.

TOM MERRY rubbed his cheek with a grimace of pain. The slash of the cane had left a red mark that was not likely to disappear for some time, and it hurt. Tom Merry was not the boy to make a fuss about a little pain, however, and he said not a word.

"Now we've tied him up," said Blake, with a puzzled look at the writhing prefect, "the question is, what on earth are we going to do with him? We can't have that rubbish lying about here. It will be in the way."

"Let me loose, you young demons!" spluttered the prefect.

"Will you make it pax, honour bright, if we do?"

"No!" roared Knox. "I'll—I'll half-kill you!"

"Ahem! Is the inducement sufficiently great, chaps, for us to release him?" asked Blake, looking round.

"Hardly," said Tom Merry. "But we can't have him here. We should keep on falling over him. Where can we shove the brute for safety?"

"Take him down into the coal cellah," suggested Arthur Augustus. "We could lock the beastly boundah in the coal cellah, deah boys."

"And do you think a dozen people wouldn't see us taking him there?" growled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, I forgot that. Suppose we took him up and shoved him out on the woof?"

"Gussy, old kid, don't you make any more suggestions. You worry me. I say, kids, why not shove the bounder into his own study, and lock him in there? It's just below this, and so we shouldn't have to take him far."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed three or four voices.

"Go and scout first, Herries, and see if the coast is clear"

"Righto," said Herries, and he left the study. He came back in a couple of minutes.

"It's all right," he said. "The coast's clear, and I've turned out the gas on the stairs, so we shall be safe, anyway."

"Good! Bring the brute along, kids!"

They lifted Knox from the floor, three at his head and three at his feet. The prefect wriggled furiously, and they promptly

let go. Knox went down on the carpet with a bump. He gasped with the shock.

"Perhaps you'll keep still next time!" said Blake, with a grin.

They picked him up again. This time, sure enough, Knox kept still, and submitted to his fate. They bore him out of the study. As soon as he was in the passage he opened his mouth to yell; but Blake was on the watch, and he thrust a cake of soap into it. The prefect sputtered and gasped, but the yell was never uttered.

They carried him rapidly down the dark stairs, and into his own study. There they plumped him on the floor, and left him without a word, changing the key to the outside of the door and locking it after them.

"We're well rid of that bounder," said Blake. "Light the gas again, Herries. Now let's get back to the diablo. It's hard lines that nice quiet chaps like us can't be left to the enjoyment of a nice peaceful game without interference from ill-tempered prefects."

The juniors recommenced the game in Tom Merry's study. But Tom Merry suddenly paused. He raised his sticks as a signal to listen.

"I say, do you hear that beast?" he exclaimed.

Faintly from the room below could be heard the voice of Knox the prefect.

"Help!"

"The brute," growled Blake. "He's got that chunk of soap out of his mouth. There's two-pennyworth of soap wasted. He'll raise the house if he goes on like that."

"Let's go down and shut him up!"

They hurried out of the study. Tom Merry looked over the banisters into the corridor below and shook his head.

"Too late! There's Kildare coming!"

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was striding along the passage towards Knox's study. The juniors would never have dreamed of insubordination towards Kildare, who was the most popular fellow in the School House, and the hero of the youngsters.

The captain of St. Jim's reached Knox's study and knocked at the door.

"What's the matter here?" he called out.

"Help!" came from within. "Can't you come in? The key's on the outside. I'm tied up and locked in."

Kildare gave a whistle of amazement. He found the key and turned it, and opened the door of the study. He saw the figure of the prefect lying on the floor, and he stared at it in blank astonishment.

"What on earth's the meaning of this, Knox?"

"Can't you set me loose first?" growled the prefect savagely.

Kildare silently bent and unfastened the prisoner. Knox staggered to his feet. He rubbed his chafed wrists savagely.

"Now tell me what this means, Knox," said the captain of St. Jim's, and there was something of sternness in his tone.

"You'd better ask Tom Merry."

"Do you mean to say that you let a junior tie you up like this?"

"How was I to help it, when there were six of them?" howled Knox.

"That's not the way to speak to me, Knox. You had better control your temper, or there will be trouble."

The prefect bit his lip. He could be valiant with the juniors, but he had no desire to quarrel with the stalwart captain of St. Jim's.

"Well, I couldn't help myself," he said. "They were making a frightful row in Tom Merry's study, and when I went up to stop them, they set on me and tied me up like this, and brought me here. The young scoundrels were playing diablo."

"I think you might be a bit more patient, Knox, considering that diablo has only just reached the school, and has taken such a hold of the youngsters," said Kildare. "Why, you were playing it in the common-room yourself, and you wouldn't leave off, though you were asked to by half the fellows there."

"That's different. I suppose a junior is bound to obey a prefect."

"Well, yes, but the fact is, if you don't play the game, you can't expect to be respected. Diablo has come, and it's going to be a trouble to a great many people, I expect, but if you bother others with it, you can't grumble at being bothered yourself."

"So you think I ought to put up with this without saying a word?" sneered Knox. "Well, I tell you that if you don't take this up, Kildare, I shall go straight to the house-master about it, so you can take your choice."

"I didn't say I wasn't going to take it up," said the captain of St. Jim's quietly. "There is no excuse for the youngsters tying up a prefect, and discipline must be kept. I am going up to Tom Merry's study now, and you had better come."

And Kildare strode up the stairs. Knox followed him, an evil grin on his face. He felt that the captain, whatever his own wishes, could not fail to visit condign punishment upon the rebellious juniors, for the sake of the discipline of the house.

Tom Merry & Co. were in the study when Kildare came up, looking very meek. The captain entered with a clouded brow.

"Merry, is it true that you tied up Knox in the way I found him?" he asked abruptly.

"We all did it," said Blake, answering before Tom could speak. "There wasn't one of us that didn't have a hand in it."

"Yaas, wathah! We were all equally to blame, Kildare, deah boy, if there is any blame attached to the pwoceeding. But with your kind permish I will explain the circes—"

"Oh, rats," growled Blake. "Shut up, Gussy."

"I wefuse to shut up. A pwopah explanation of the circes does not come undah the head of sneakin', or else, as a gentleman, I should nevah have thought of givin' it," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "I think Kildare is entitled to an explanation, as I can see that he is in a fearful tempah."

Kildare could not help smiling.

"I am not in a fearful temper," he said, "but this is a serious matter, and if it were any prefect except Knox, I should think somebody would be expelled for it—"

"Which is the same as saying that I was to blame," sneered Knox. "You are always backing up these insolent brats against proper authority."

"You had better hold your tongue, Knox," said Kildare quietly.

"Yaas, wathah! You had much bettah hold your tongue, Knox, deah boy."

"Now, Tom Merry, I—" Kildare broke off as he caught sight of the red mark on Tom Merry's face. "Where did you get that mark, Merry?" he asked quickly.

Tom coloured and did not reply.

Kildare looked at him hard, and then his glance wandered to the half-burnt cane in the grate. Then he looked at Knox.

"Did you strike Merry that blow, Knox?"

"Suppose I did?" snarled Knox. "What was I to do, with half-a-dozen of them piling on me, and—"

Kildare smiled contemptuously.

"If you struck Merry like that, I am quite prepared to believe that you had already provoked retaliation by acting like a bully and a ruffian," he said. "Nothing could excuse such a blow. Get out of the study."

"Do you mean to say that the matter is to go no further—"

"I mean to say that if you do not get out I shall throw you out."

Knox precipitately left the room. He halted in the passage and glared back at the captain of St. Jim's.

"I shall go straight to the house-master," he hissed. "We will see what Mr. Railton has to say about your backing up the juniors in an assault upon a prefect."

"Do so," said Kildare contemptuously. "When Mr. Railton sees that mark on Tom Merry's face, it won't take him long to decide whether you ought to remain a prefect or not."

Knox started; he had not looked at it in that light.

"Come on," said Kildare grimly. "Mr. Railton is in his study, and we'll go to see him together. Merry had better come along too."

"I—I don't want the matter to go any further. I—"

"I thought you wouldn't," said the captain of St. Jim's scornfully. "You had better mind your conduct in the future, Knox. You are a bully, and if Mr. Railton knew you as I do, he wouldn't let you remain a prefect another hour. Mind, the juniors have the Head's permission to play diablo in their studies. It has been forbidden in the passages and the common room, and they must play somewhere. If they make a noise, it can't be helped. You don't show so much consideration for others that you have any right to complain. All the same, you kids, you might draw it mild, you know."

Knox strode away scowling blackly.

"I say, Kildare, we won't play any more, if you like," said Tom Merry eagerly. "Knox is a bully, and we don't care for him, but if you wanted us to stop it—"

Kildare laughed good-humouredly.

"Not at all. They're playing diablo over my room and making a fearful row, and the fellows in the studies on both sides are playing it, and they've been keeping it up all the evening. I haven't grumbled yet, though it's getting on my nerves. Knox hasn't had half as much as that to put up with; besides, he's caused more bother with his devil than anybody else in the house. You can play as much as you like."

And with a cheery nod the captain of St. Jim's left the study. The door had hardly closed on him ere the diablo was in full swing again.

CHAPTER 6.

Mrs. Mimms on the War-Path!

"A H! ahem! Mrs. Mimms! Yes, ahem!"

Dr. Holmes made those rather incoherent remarks. The steady eye of the house-dame was fixed upon him like a gimlet. Mrs. Mimms was on the war-path.

"About those devils, sir—"

"Yes, certainly," said the doctor, "about those devils, Mrs.

Mimms. Now, you came to see me this afternoon on this matter—"

"Yes, sir. And you said that the devils should not be allowed in the house, sir."

Dr. Holmes coloured deeply. He had, indeed, said that, under the impression that Mrs. Mimms had been indulging too freely in the glass that cheers, and that it was his best policy to humour a lady in that condition. But he had since learned the facts, as we know, and so he was placed rather in a difficulty. The interview with Mrs. Mimms was not likely to be a satisfactory one. The Head would gladly have avoided it if it had been possible. But it wasn't possible. Mrs. Mimms saw to that.

"Ahem! yes! You are quite right, Mrs. Mimms," murmured the Head. "I did, indeed say that, but it was under a total misapprehension of the true state of the case, Mrs. Mimms."

"I don't understand, sir. I told you how the devils broke everything in the house—"

"Yes, yes, but I did not then know what I now know about the—er—the game of diablo," said the Doctor. "I did not know what sort of devil you were alluding to. You did not explain."

"I thought you knew, sir, when everybody in the house—"

"Yes, yes, of course. But I did not. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Mimms, I thought that you must be—must be suffering from a hallucination, my dear madam."

The house-dame's face did not relax.

"But all the same, sir, those devils—"

"My dear good soul, I have prohibited the boys from playing diablo in the passages, and near the windows of the school," said the Head. "To stop them altogether would be too drastic a step. I could not be so hard upon an innocent amusement."

"Innocent amusement!" gasped Mrs. Mimms. "Why, sir, they're broke half the kitchen windows, and there were seven plates broken in the dining-hall at tea. They've smashed the glass of the thermometer in the hall. They've broken the fanlight over the door of my room, sir. They've spoiled my best bonnet, sir. They've frightened Julius out of his life—"

"Julius—who—er—is Julius?"

"My cat, sir. My dear Persian. He dare not venture out of the kitchen now, for fear of the devils falling on him. My poor dear Julius. There are three jugs broken in the Shell dormitory, sir, and a pane of glass gone from the window."

"Dear me! Dear me!"

"Nearly all the globes in the upper corridor are gone, sir. Half the glasses in the studies are smashed."

"It is very sad, but—calm yourself, my dear madam. I will—will further consider the matter. Pray let it stand over for the present," said the Head feebly.

Mrs. Mimms sniffed indignantly as she quitted the presence of the Head.

She was a kindly old soul, but the new craze that had swept over St. Jim's like an epidemic had driven her to distraction.

The ruin caused by the reckless learners of the gentle art of diablo was indeed great, and the worries of the house-dame many. As Mrs. Mimms confided to her favourite maid, men never knew what a trouble it was to keep a house in order, all that bother falling upon the shoulders of women, who never received the least consideration. And the favourite maid agreed that it was so, and that it was a shame.

But Mrs. Mimms' mind was made up. She would never get satisfaction from the Head or from the house-master. But she was a determined lady, and she could depend upon herself. And a plan was already forming in her mind.

It was past the bedtime of the juniors, and the Shell were supposed to be fast asleep in their beds, but as a matter of fact mysterious sounds might have been heard, as a novelist would say, proceeding from the Shell dormitory.

Had anyone looked into that room, he would have seen, by the light of a dozen candles-ends and bicycle lamps, a crowd of eager youngsters playing diablo in their pyjamas.

Sleep was not to be thought of in the first flush of the diablo craze. The youngsters had taken the sticks and devils up to bed with them, and hardly had the prefect whose duty it was to see lights out departed, than the Shell were out of bed again.

Tom Merry was the first to have his devil spinning. Then the rest followed suit, in pyjamas and night-shirts, careless of the cold of the winter night. In fact the exercise made them warm enough.

Their bare feet did not make much sound on the floor, but the excited exclamations, and the crashing of breakages, sounded far beyond the limits of the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, awfully sorry, Merry!" exclaimed Gore, as his devil dropped fairly upon Tom Merry's head. "Quite an accident."

Tom Merry gave a yell.

"You clumsy ass!"

"Oh, don't make a fuss about nothing. If you make a row like that you'll have the prefects on the scene. Shut up!"

Bi! Monty Lowther's devil caught Gore on the side of the head, and he shrieked, and clapped his hand to his ear, and danced up and down.



Then, as silently as she came, the house-dame quitted the dormitory. Tom Merry and Co. slept on, unconscious of the raid!

"You howling idiot," he yelled.

"Ha, ha, sorry," quoth Monty Lowther. "Quite an accident, Gore, as much as yours was an accident just now."

"Don't make a fuss about nothing, Gore!" grinned Manners. Crash! crash!

Tom Merry's devil had spun right up to the ceiling, and it came down upon the washstand beside his bed, and smashed the jug in the basin.

"My hat!" gasped Tom. "Look at that! I—"

"Cave!" gasped Manners.

But it was too late. Some of the boys made a rush for the beds as the door of the dormitory opened, some stood still, and some went on playing diabolito, too engrossed by it to even notice that Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was staring wrathfully into the room.

"Boys! How dare you! You—you young rascals—oh! ow!"

It was sheer ill-luck that made Mr. Linton stride into the dormitory in the path of a devil that had slid off Gore's string at a wrong angle. He gave a fiendish yell as the devil plumped upon his nose, and in the shock of the surprise he sat down on the floor.

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

Mr. Linton certainly looked comical as he rubbed his nose, sitting there on the floor. The juniors tumbled into bed in hot haste. The form-master jumped up, black with wrath.

"Gore, you will take a thousand lines."

"If you please, sir—"

"Two thousand lines! Merry, you will take five hundred lines for laughing."

"I—I couldn't help it, sir. You—you looked so funny sir—"

"A thousand lines," roared Mr. Linton. "Every other boy in the form will take five hundred lines, and stay in on Saturday afternoon to write them out. Not a word! If any boy gets out of bed again to-night, I shall cane him in addition."

And the form-master stamped out of the dormitory.

The heroes of the Shell sat up and looked at one another in dismay.

"Nice!" growled Gore. "It was your idea to play diabolito in the dormitory, Tom Merry."

"It was your idea to biff Linton on the nose," said Tom; "shut up, Gore. What's the good of grousing? We've got to stick it. Better put the lights out and get off to sleep."

Mr. Linton had overlooked the lights in his wrath. Tom Merry jumped out of bed and extinguished them, and then silence and soon slumber reigned in the Shell dormitory.

The master of the Shell did not go back to his room. He proceeded straight to the Fourth Form dormitory, and a crash of china warned him that his suspicions were well-founded. He threw open the door suddenly, and found the whole of the Fourth—that is to say, the portion of the Form that boarded in the School House—playing diabolito with deadly zest.

"Boys!" thundered Mr. Linton, taking care this time not to get into the way of any stray devils. "Boys!"

The Fourth-Formers tumbled into bed, leaving sticks and devils where they fell. The master of the Shell watched them grimly.

"I shall report this to your form-master," he said, "I shall

listen for another sound to-night, and if I hear any from this dormitory, look out."

And he turned out the gas, which Blake had lighted, and left the room.

"Beast!" said Blake, grumpily.

There was nothing to do but to go to sleep, and that the juniors proceeded to do. They were soon secure in the arms of Morpheus.

Silence fell upon the School House.

Seniors went to bed, and then masters, and the house was slumbering, or at least supposed to be slumbering. But there was at least one person widely wakeful.

Eleven strokes had boomed out from the clock tower when a door opened cautiously, and a figure with a shawl draped over its head emerged.

The figure stole on tiptoe towards the door of the Shell room. It reached the door, and turned the handle cautiously. The interior was dark, save for the glimmer of moonbeams from the window, and silent, excepting for the more or less musical snores of the Shell boys.

There was a faint scratch, and a match glimmered out. The mysterious shawled figure lighted a candle, and then advanced into the dormitory.

Now the secret was out, if any of the Shell fellows had been awake to see. For the gleam of the candle revealed the features of Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame, peering out from the thick shawl that enveloped her head.

Mrs. Mimms was on the war-path.

She glanced along the row of white beds. All the boys were fast asleep. The house-dame smiled triumphantly, and went along the dormitory, gathering up the sticks and devils belonging to the sleepers. Every boy in the Form had at least one set, and so by the time the house-dame had finished, she had a bundle of sticks under her arm, and an apron nearly full of devils.

Then, as silently as she came, the house-dame quitted the dormitory, and closed the door noiselessly behind her. The Shell slept on, unconscious of the raid!

Mrs. Mimms returned to her room, and deposited her prizes there. Then she hastened to the Fourth-form Dormitory. The Fourth-Formers were sound asleep, and without waking one of them the house-dame went through the dormitory, and collected up the apparatus of the new game.

These also she carried off to her room. There she smiled a gleeful smile. There would be no more diabolos in the School House for some time, at all events!

If there had been anyone in the quadrangle at that late hour, he could have seen the play of dancing firelight on the blind of the house-dame's window.

There was a blazing and crackling in the grate, and Mrs. Mimms fed the fire with tireless persistence, till every diabolos stick in the collection had been consumed.

The devils were not to be disposed of so easily, but after some reflection, the house-dame tied them up in an apron, and put them behind a cabinet in her sitting-room.

And the juniors slept on all unconscious of the work of destruction!

CHAPTER 7.

On the Wrong Track.

TOM MERRY sat up in bed. The early gleams of a wintry sun were penetrating into the frosty windows of the dormitory. The rising-bell had not yet gone, but Tom glanced at his watch, and saw that it was soon due. He jumped out of bed.

Diabolos was running in his mind, as it had run in his dreams. He meant to get in a little more practice before the morning wash, instead of his usual exercises. He looked for his sticks and devil, but failed to see them.

"The dickens!" murmured Tom, "I'll vow I put them down beside my bed! Never mind, I suppose I was mistaken—Lowther's will do."

But Lowther's apparatus were not to be found.

And when Tom, in bewilderment, looked further, he found that there was not a single pair of sticks to be found in the whole dormitory.

He looked at the faces of the boys. Was it a practical joke of one of them? But they were all asleep! What had become of the diabolos sets?

"Wake up, kids!" Tom Merry shook Manners and Lowther. "Somebody has been here and collared the sticks in the night." The chums of the Shell jumped up instantly at the alarm.

"Collared the sticks!"

"My hat! Who was it?"

The whole dormitory was soon awake. It was pretty evident that the trick had not been played by anybody belonging to the form. The raider had come from outside. Who was it?

"Blake!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Blake for a duet!"

Those horrid bouncers from Study No. Six have played this little jape on us."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Very likely. It's just like one of Blake's little jokes, that's certain."

"Oh, it was that lot right enough," exclaimed Manners. "Let's get dressed, and go and snatch them, bald-headed. There won't be any masters about till rising-bell. Come on, and we will give the Fourth the kybosh, and collar their diabolos sets into the bargain."

"Right you are! Buck up, kids."

The whole dormitory was up now, wrathful and eager for the fray. Tom Merry led the way as soon as they were ready, and he marched straight on for the Fourth Form dormitory. Some of the Shell had thoughtfully provided themselves with pillows and bolsters and stuffed stockings.

Tom Merry threw open the door of the Fourth Form dormitory. Rising-bell would not ring for nearly a quarter of an hour, and there were no early risers in the Fourth, apparently. Only one boy was awake, and he looked sleepily at the intruders.

"Hallo, what do you fellows want? Wake up, kids!" shouted Mellish.

That shout was enough. The Fourth Form wakened to a boy. They jumped up at the sight of the warlike array pouring in at the door, but they had no time to get ready for the fray.

"Sock it to 'em!" shouted Tom Merry.

And the Shell rushed to the attack. They simply overwhelmed the Fourth with that rush. Numbers were on the side of the lower form, but the surprise was a great advantage. The Fourth-Formers were knocked right and left by pillows and bolsters, swung in determined hands.

"Go for 'em!" roared Manners, smiting D'Arcy with a mighty smite that sent him flying off his bed.

"Weally!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled to his feet. "Weally, I do not compwehend what all this bothah is about! What have you—ow!"

Monty Lowther interrupted him with a biff that laid him on the floor again. The swell of St. Jim's jumped up in hot wrath, and seized a pillow, and went for Monty Lowther. Lowther was sent reeling, but he came up to the scratch again, and gave Gussy as good as he sent. Blake and Herries were soon in the midst of the fray, and the Fourth-Formers, recovering somewhat from the surprise, backed them up gallantly.

"Go for 'em!" roared Blake. "Give 'em socks!"

"Yaas, watah! Give the howhid wuffians beastly socks, deah boys! Go for the wuff boundahs, and give them a fearful thwashin'!"

The fight raged furiously. But the Fourth-Formers were driven back, and they had to dodge among the beds. Blake closed with Tom Merry, and they struggled.

"You bouncer!" gasped Blake. "What do you mean by this? I—"

"What do you mean by collaring our diabolos sets?"

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said! We're going to lick you, and—"

"We haven't collared your diabolos sets. What are you talking about?"

Blake's astonishment was so evidently genuine that Tom Merry realised that a mistake had been made. The Terrible Three had jumped to a conclusion too quickly, and jumped to the wrong one.

Tom released Blake. The chief of Study No. 6 seemed inclined to come on again; but Tom Merry held up his hands in sign of amity.

"Hold on, Blake. It looks like a mistake. Didn't some of you raid our dormitory last night, and collar our diabolos sets?"

"Of course we didn't! I say, hold on, you fellows! It's a mistake!"

The struggling died away. There was a sudden yell from Arthur Augustus.

"Where's my beastly devil, deah boys? Where's my sticks? Somebody has taken them."

"And mine!" howled Herries.

"And mine!" "And mine!" "And mine!"

The exclamations came from all sides. Tom Merry looked round him in amazement, and then burst into a laugh.

"My hat! You've been raided, too, it seems. We thought you had collared our things—"

"I dare say we should have put our loss down to you," said Blake, with a grin. "So that's all right, and that little row has made us warm, anyway, this cold morning. But I say, who has played that trick on us? It's impossible for Figgins & Co. to have come over from the New House—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It was somebody in the School House," he said. "Somebody who doesn't mean us to play diabolos again if he can help it. Why, of course, it's—"

"Knox! Knox, the prefect!"

"That's what I was going to say."

There was not the slightest doubt about it in the minds of

the six juniors who had tied up the ill-tempered prefect in his study the previous night. This was the revenge of the prefect, they did not doubt for an instant.

"Knox, of course!" exclaimed Lowther. "We were asses not to think of that at once. What are we going to do about it?"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"Not much doubt on that point," he exclaimed. "We're going to interview Knox, and have our things back."

"Right!" said Herries. "We're all in this, you know. Come along, kids, and let's have Knox out before the other seniors get up."

It was a good idea, and it was acted upon at once. A crowd of Fourth Form and Shell boys hurried out, and made their way to the room of Knox the prefect. Tom Merry, who was of course the leader, opened the door and looked in. The first thing that caught his eye was a diabolos set on the table. It belonged to Knox, as it happened; but it looked like a proof of guilt to the already convinced juniors.

They swarmed into the room. Knox started up in bed in amazement. The juniors crowded round the alarmed prefect.

"Where are they?"

"Hand them over!"

"Give them up, you cad!"

"Hand them over before we wallop you!"

Knox stared at the angry juniors in absolute bewilderment. He could only think that the Fourth Form and the Shell had suddenly developed dangerous lunacy. He shrank back from the hands outstretched towards him.

"What do you mean? Get out of my room. I——"

"Hand them over."

"Give them up, you beast!"

"What—whither—who——"

"Look here!" said Tom Merry savagely. "Prefect or no prefect, we'll have you out of bed and lick you, unless you give them up!"

"Where are they?" yelled Blake.

Knox had not the faintest idea of what "they" might be. But on second thoughts he observed that the juniors were not lunatics, but only angry; and he grew angry, too.

"Get out of my room!" he roared.

"Are you going to give them up?"

"Give what up? What do you mean?"

"We have come here for them, and we're not going without them. Where are they?"

"They—what? I don't know what——"

"You don't know what you've done with them? That won't wash."

"I don't know what you——"

"Are you going to hand them over?" shouted Blake, losing all patience. "Very well, then, out you come, you rotten, prowling bounder!"

A dozen pairs of hands grasped Knox in various parts of his person, and he was yanked out of bed with most of the bed-clothes. Blake seized a slipper from the bedside.

"Now, Knox, where are they?"

"I don't—I won't—I—I——"

"Hold him! I'll make the brute speak. I shouldn't wonder if he's destroyed them."

The juniors gave a howl of rage at the thought. They slammed the prefect down upon the floor, and Blake brought the slipper into play.

Thwack! thwack! thwack!

"Now, Knox, what have you done with them? Have you destroyed them? By Jove, if you have, they'll want a new prefect in this house! We won't leave enough of you to crawl about. What have you done with them?"

"I don't know——"

"Liar!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "As if a chap could go through two dormitories, and collect them all up—a good thirty at least, and not know what he had done with them. That's altogether too thin, Knox."

"I should say so," said Gore. "The beast has destroyed them, that's the truth of it. Give him some more slipper, and make him tell the truth, anyway. If he's destroyed them we'll wreck the study and bury him under the ruins."

"Ha, ha! rather." Blake made rapid play with the slipper. He had had some practice with the cane the previous evening, as we know, and so he had got his hand in, as it were. "Now Knox, I don't like giving you these knocks; but I shall give you some more knocks, Knox, if you don't stop your obnoxious conduct, Knox."

"Ha, ha! Give him beans! Where are they, Knox?"

The prefect was yelling and writhing. But the room was crammed with juniors, and they were all anxious to lend a hand, and he was simply helpless. Blake used the slipper with telling effect.

"Knox, if you choose to tell us what you have done with them——"

"I—I tell you I don't know what you——"

"In goodness' name, what does this fearful noise mean?"

exclaimed Kildare, throwing open the door. "Merry! Blake! Lowther! What are you doing here? What does this mean?"

"We are administahin' a slight cownction to Knox," said D'Arcy. "He has come like a giddy thief in the night and collahed our diabolos sets, and he won't tell us where they are."

"I haven't!" yelled the unfortunate Knox. "I haven't done anything of the kind. You can search my room if you like. I tell you I don't know anything about it."

The prefect's voice had the ring of truth. The juniors, looking rather sheepish, released him, and he staggered to his feet, and collapsed upon the bed, too exhausted and breathless to think of even vengeance just then.

"Why couldn't you tell us that before, Knox?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You didn't ask me—you——"

"Why, we all asked you the moment we came into the room. We asked you what you had done with them. Didn't we, kids?"

"Of course we did!" exclaimed Blake. "And he wouldn't tell us a word——"

"How was I to know what you were talking about?" yelled Knox. "I didn't know your rotten diabolos things had been taken, you young scoundrels!"

"I'm afraid we've been rather hasty, Kildare," said Tom Merry penitently. "We're very sorry, Knox. But after what happened last night we could only conclude——"

"You young scoundrels, you shall all be——"

"Do you mean to say that your diabolos sets have been really taken, Merry?" asked Kildare, in surprise.

"Every one, Kildare, from both dormitories," said Tom. "We naturally thought——"

"You had better think twice, next time, before you attack a prefect in his own room," said Kildare severely. "Knox has himself to thank for the mistake to some extent, but you have done very wrong. I shall have to report this to Mr. Railton, and you must expect a caning all round; and serve you right. Now go back to your rooms."

Kildare walked away. And the juniors, feeling extremely uncomfortable, left Knox's room, leaving the prefect gasping with pain and rage.

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Linton Sees a Horrible Vision!

TOM MERRY and his followers stopped in the passage. Some of the juniors returned to their dormitories, but the more determined members of both Forms remained with the hero of the Shell. They had made one mistake, but they were not daunted. They intended to have their diabolos sets back again or know the reason why.

"Who can have taken them!" exclaimed Tom Merry, running his fingers through his curly hair. "The rising-bell's nearly due now. The whole place will be up soon. Can anybody suggest the name of the bounder who has collared our things?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Whom have you thought of, Gussy?" asked several voices.

"Your beastly form-mastah, Tom Mewwy. He came into our dormitory last night——"

"And he came into ours," exclaimed Lowther, "and showered lines upon us like the giddy leaves in Vallombrosa! It was Linton as sure as a gun."

"Linton! Of course it was!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

Tom Merry looked grave.

Coming to think of it, it was very probable that the form-master had done it. He had been savage at the assault made upon his nose by Gore's devil, and Mr. Linton was not a good-natured man. It was quite like him to take away all the diabolos sets and leave the juniors forlorn—very much like him. Knox was the likeliest person, it is true, but it had been proved that the delinquent was not Knox. Undoubtedly it was the master of the Shell.

"But I say," muttered Blake, "it's pretty strong going for a prefect; but a form-master—— We should be expelled."

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"We have the Head's permission to play diabolos," he said, "and that conveys the permission to keep the sets for our use, doesn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah! The Head's permmiss is good enough for us, deah boys."

"Consequently, Mr. Linton has acted against the Head's authority by confiscating our things," said Tom Merry.

"Good! Let's go and complain to the Head," suggested Gore.

"No; that would be rather sneaking, I think. We're

entitled to get our property back, I mean. Who's game to come to Mr. Linton's room?"

There was a very general hesitation.

Tom Merry was in deadly earnest, and his chums would have followed him anywhere. Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were not to be outdone by the Terrible Three; but the rest showed a decided hesitation. Gore started off towards the Shell dormitory.

"I'm not going to have a hand in it for one," he remarked.

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"Well, I fancy we can manage it alone," he said. "Six of us are enough, and if we're all six in it, they can't expel a whole batch of us. You other fellows get off; you ain't wanted, and you might be in the way. Only keep mum."

And the six were soon left alone in the passage.

"Now what's the wheeze?" said Blake. "We're willing to back you up, Tom Merry, but it's no good running one's nose against a stone wall, you know."

"Look here! If Mr. Linton's taken the diablo things——"

"We know he has. Go on."

"Well he has, then," said Tom. "He must have taken them to his room, and will probably take them down with him when he goes, and will dispose of them. We've got to get them back first. We've got to search his room."

"But he——"

"Very likely he'll be asleep. If he's awake, we shall either have to slog him or hook it. I don't advocate going to the length of slogging a form-master," grinned Tom Merry. "That would be a little bit too thick even for us. But——"

"But he'll recognise us, and——"

"No, he won't! For one thing, he never rises before the bell, you know; and for another thing, we shall be masked."

"We shall be whatted?"

"Masked. You know those Guy Fawkes masks we had left from the Fifth of November—they'll do the trick right down to the ground."

Blake slapped the hero of the Shell on the back.

"My hat, Tom Merry, you're a giddy genius! Let's lose no time. Come on!"

Tom Merry cut down to his study, and speedily returned with the six masks. They were hideous-looking objects, but they served the purpose admirably.

The juniors did not don them at once. As Blake said, it might attract attention if they met anybody while they were wearing the masks.

They made their way to Mr. Linton's door, and having looked pu and down the corridor, Tom Merry motioned to his companions to don the Guy Fawkes masks.

Tom opened the door quietly. There was the sound of a snore from within. Mr. Linton was evidently still sleeping the sleep of the just.

"Come in," whispered Tom Merry.

The six filed silently in. Tom Merry glanced at the form-master. He was lying on his side, with his face half-hidden in the pillow, breathing steadily. He was evidently safe till the rising-bell went, at least. Unfortunately, it was now very close upon the time for the rising-bell, and as none of the juniors, in their hurry, had put on a watch, none of them knew exactly when the bell would begin ringing.

"Look round," whispered Tom Merry. And like six hideous gnomes the masked juniors commenced looking round the room for the missing diablo sets.

They were not to be found.

The form-master had evidently hidden them well, or else he had not brought them to the room at all.

Tom Merry paused, compressing his lips under the mask.

"I say, might they be under the bed?" murmured Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, that's just where the brute might put them."

The juniors hesitated to look. The coverlet was hanging down over the side of the bed. The other side of the bed was against a wall. There was danger of disturbing Mr. Linton in approaching too near, and then—— The six juniors stood staring at the bed in perplexity.

Clang, clang, clang! Clang, clang, clang!

It was the rising-bell. Mr. Linton started, and awoke.

The form-master's eyes opened, and for a moment he thought he must be still in a dream. Six hideous gnomelike faces were looking at him in the dimness of the winter morning.

"What—ah—how—who—what——" The master of the Shell gasped for breath.

"Hook it!" murmured Tom Merry.

The juniors did not need bidding. They were already streaking for the door, and they passed through it like champion sprinters; and Tom Merry, the last to go, slammed the door after him.

They dashed down the corridor, and dragged the masks off as they ran.

"My hat," gasped Blake, "that was a narrow squeak! He couldn't have recognised us."

"I don't know about you," said Monty Lowther. "There isn't really much difference between that mask and your face; but the rest of us——"

"We haven't got the diablo sets," grumbled Herries. "Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "Let's get down. We shall have to prove a strong alibi for this, I expect."

Meanwhile, Mr. Linton was sitting up in bed, gazing straight before him in blank bewilderment.

"Amazing!" he murmured. "It must have been the cheese last night. I know that it is reckless to eat toasted cheese for supper, but really—really my stomach must be terribly out of order. I could almost swear that it was not imagination, and that I really heard the doorslam! Amazing!"

A little later, when the chums of the Shell went in to breakfast, Mr. Linton was standing near the door of the dining-hall, in conversation with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth; and they caught a sentence as they passed.

"I never saw anything so realistic in my life," said Mr. Linton. "It was amazing! I woke up suddenly, and saw six gigantic figures bending over me, and each of them had a face of the most appalling hideousness, and blue flames were proceeding from their eyes and ears. Of course, it was imagination. I am not a superstitious man, but if I were, Mr. Lathom, I should believe that I had had a terrible visitation from the other world—the world of demons and goblins."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. Lathom, who was of a spiritualistic turn of mind—"I don't know, Mr. Linton. You say you saw these horrible figures plainly?"

"As plainly as I see you, Mr. Lathom. I could have held out my hands and touched the nearest one of them."

"Then who shall say that the vision was unreal?" said the master of the Fourth, adjusting his spectacles. "There are more things in the heavens and the earth, Mr. Linton, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. It is an old belief—and who shall say it is not a true one?—that a visitation from the other world is a warning of one's own death——"

"Ugh!" said Mr. Linton.

"Or of some terrible misfortune."

"Oh!"

"I shall watch with interest to see whether the prediction is fulfilled," said Mr. Lathom enthusiastically. "If we should have the misfortune to lose you, Mr. Linton, it will be a striking demonstration of the reality of—— Dear me, he is gone! That is rather rude of Mr. Linton to walk away while I was speaking, and on such an exceedingly interesting subject, too."

And Mr. Lathom, with an indignant wag of the head, went to take his place at the head of the Fourth Form table.

The chums of the Shell, who had heard most of what was said, were red in the face with suppressed laughter as they made their way to the Shell table. Lowther giggled aloud as he sat down, and brought Mr. Linton's severe eye upon him.

"If we should have the misfortune to lose him, Tom," he murmured, "I think I could stand it, don't you? But it would be a remarkable demonstration of the reality——"

"You are talking, Lowther. Fifty lines!"

And Monty Lowther said no more.

CHAPTER 9.

Tom Merry Rises to the Occasion—Diablo for Ever!

WHETHER Mr. Linton had had the diablo sets or not, they were gone, and the loss fell heavily upon the juniors. There were glum faces during morning school, and when the boys were dismissed there was much discussion.

"I suppose we sha'n't get them back," Blake remarked. "We can't get any new ones in Rylcombe—that's the worst of it."

"I'm going down to the village to wire for some more," said Tom Merry, turning away towards the bicycle shed. "That's the best we can do, I think. And we'll keep a sharper eye on the next lot."

Tom's example was followed by a good many others. Wires flew off in all directions from Rylcombe post-office; and a fresh crop of postal-orders were wanted by the youths who had not the necessary credit to enable them to wire for what they wanted. The chums returned to St. Jim's with the comforting assurance that the diablo sets would be at the school that evening or on the morrow.

But meanwhile what was to be done?

Blake suggested raiding the New House and capturing the sticks and devils belonging to Figgins & Co. and the other New House juniors. But as soon as Figgins & Co. learned of the School House loss they were very much on their guard; and the juniors had no chance.

It was necessary to set their inventive genius at work. During afternoon school Tom Merry thought it over, giving far more attention to the subject of diablo than to his lessons. And the moment school was dismissed he was busily at work supplying the deficiency.

"We can get sticks ourselves, and cord," he said. "Collar all the sticks in the house—cricket-stumps, walking-sticks, umbrella handles—everything of the sort you can find. Then get all the string you can—blind cords and whip lashes will do."

"What about the devils?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry scratched his curly head.

"Well, that will be harder, I know. The devils are not easily made—not good ones. But Figgins made one out of a pair of peg-tops jammed together, you know. It answered the purpose, though I can't say it was a thing of beauty. Then, we ought to be able to carve some wooden ones, which will do till we get the real things down. We've got to play the game somehow."

"That's so," said Manners. "We've got to play it somehow, if only to show that we don't care. But I wish I knew who the bouncer was who took our things."

"I suppose it's no good trying to find that out now, unless it was Linton. I expect the sticks have been destroyed, but the devils would be got rid of so easily. If we knew who the bouncer was I daresay we could get the devils back, if not the sticks."

But the chums of the Shell had to give it up. They could not guess who the delinquent was. They left the study in quest of new diablo materials, and encountered Blake & Co. on the same quest.

Blake grinned as he met them.

"Hullo, where are you off to?"

"I'm going to the box-room to get the cricket stumps," said Tom Merry. "There are a lot there, and we can borrow them easily enough."

"Good! Get them all. I'm going to the house-dame's room to borrow some string. Mrs. Mimms has lots of it, and she'll give it to me like a shot."

So spoke Blake, in the innocence of his heart. He tapped at the door of the house-dame's sitting-room, and Mrs. Mimms' voice told him to come in.

There was an unusually grim expression on the face of the house-dame as she looked at the chums of the Fourth.

"Please, Mrs. Mimms, would you mind giving me a ball of string?" asked Blake.

"That depends on what you want it for," said the house-dame.

"It's to make some new diablo sets. Hallo, what's the matter?"

Mrs. Mimms had risen from her chair, her brow like thunder.

"You—you young rascal!"

Blake stared at her in amazement.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Mimms? Oh, I know. You don't like diablo. But I say, you know. Some beast has collared all our sets last night, and—"

"Yaas, wathah! Some beastly howwid boundah went through the dormitoway and collahed all the things," said D'Arcy. "It was awfully mean!"

"Mean isn't the word," said Herries. "It was downright dishonest, that's what I call it."

"So it was," said Blake, "wasn't it, Mrs. Mimms? Some dirty sneak came creeping into the dormitory, you know, while we were sleeping the sleep of innocent childhood—"

"Yaas, wathah, Blake! That's quite touchin', the way you put it. But I am sure Mrs. Mimms sympathises with us for the howwid misfortune, and will help us to make some new diablo sets, won't you, Mrs. Mimms?"

"Leave my room!"

"Eh?" said Blake. "Won't you let us have the string, Mrs. Mimms?"

"No, I will not," said the house-dame, her face crimsoned with wrath. "If I can help it, there shall not be another game of diablo played in the School House, you young wretches. Go away at once!"

Blake stared at her, and a light dawned upon his mind.

"My hat! It was the old lady herself!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Herries. "Mrs. Mimms! Oh, Mimmy, Mimmy! How could you?"

"Yaas, weally, how could you, madam? It was cwuel, not to say mean and caddish," said D'Arcy. "If you were a man, Mrs. Mimms, I should administrah a feahful thwashin' on the spot. As you are a lady, I can only say—"

"Go away at once!"

"Oh, come on," said Blake. "No good arguing with a woman. Come on, kids. But, I say, Mrs. Mimms, what did you do with the things?"

"I've burnt them," said the house-dame triumphantly.

"Ow! How beastly! But you couldn't burn the devils."

The house-dame's glance involuntarily went to the cabinet behind which the apron-full of devils were hidden.

Blake saw that glance, and the quick-witted junior at once understood what it meant. But he did not give any sign of his knowledge. Blake was too good a strategist for that. Mrs. Mimms would have to be dealt with with great skill and caution if anything was to be done. An appeal for the restoration of the devils would be useless.

"You'll never see any of them again," declared the house-dame. "Now leave the room, or I shall get vexed, and box your ears."

"Come on, kids," said Blake.

The chums of the Fourth left the house-dame's room. They found the Terrible Three in the box-room sorting over the cricket things, and they imparted to them the information they had unexpectedly gained.

Tom Merry gave an expressive whistle.

"So it was Mrs. Mimms after all!" he exclaimed. "My only pyjama hat! We might have guessed it, though."

"Yes, we might, but we didn't. But now we know for certain, what are we going to do? She has burnt the sticks and strings, but the devils are all right if we can only recover them."

"Sure of that?" asked Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Certain. She gave it away. I'd be willing to swear—"

"Don't, you'd shock our innocent ears, and—"

"Rats! I say I'd be willing to swear that the devils are hidden behind the cabinet in the house-dame's room, if we could only get at them. Her look gave it away," said Blake, with confidence.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.

"The devils are the most important, of course," he remarked. "We can replace the sticks, and it will be easy enough to get lots of string. But the devils can't be replaced properly. They're what we want."

"And what we're going to get. How are we to get them back? If we were dealing with a man we could rush the room. But we can't rush Mrs. Mimms."

"No, that's a fact. Can't hurt a lady, and besides, she's a good old soul. And she can't help being unreasonable, I suppose, if she was born so."

"That is a vewy twue remark, Tom Mewwy. I would wathah nevah play diablo again, than be guilty of any wuffness towards a lady, even such an extwemely unweasonable old lady as Mrs. Mimms," said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis.

"That's so," said Monty Lowther. "As we can't rush the place, the only thing is to use stratagem. How are we to get Mrs. Mimms out of her room while we get the devils back?"

"That's the question. She's got to be deluded away somehow. You didn't let on to her that you knew the devils were there, Blake?"

"What do you take me for, Tom Merry? Of course not."

"Then she won't be expecting anything of the kind," said Tom, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "Now, let's put our heads together, and see what's to be done. She's got to be got out of her room—"

"Suppose we were to set fire to the house," was D'Arcy's brilliant suggestion. "Mrs. Mimms would run out like anything."

"Choke him, somebody! Suppose we took her a message from the Head," suggested Monty Lowther. "She'd go to his study—"

"She'd smell a giddy rat, you mean," said Blake. "No good trying to take in Mimmy like that. She's too keen an old bird."

"We could make a smash up in the kitchen, and she'd go down to see what was the matter," Manners remarked. "How would that do?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The maids would have something to say about that, I fancy, to say nothing of the cook. We're not popular below stairs since we started diablo. It's wrong of them, I know, but they don't love us as they used."

"Ha, ha! They don't. But look here, unless we're going to give up the idea of getting the devils back we must think of some plan."

"I think I have one," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

The juniors were all eager at once.

"Get it off your chest, then!"

"Out with it!"

"Buck up!"

"Blake must have a fit."

Jack Blake stared.

"I—I must have a what?"

"A fit," said Tom Merry calmly. "You know that Mrs. Mimms is great on doctoring people, and she's nearly as great a terror at it as my old governess, Miss Fawcett. You know how they chummed up over it the time I was supposed to be ill. If Mrs. Mimms thought Blake had a fit she'd be in her element. She'd forget diablo and all its work, and remember only that she had a medicine-chest, and that there was a helpless victim to be doctored."

"Ha, ha, ha! A jolly good idea!" exclaimed Herries. "Good!"

Blake was the only one of the party who looked dubious.

"That's all very well," he remarked; "but I'm not going

ANSWERS

to take any beastly medicines, you know. I bar that. You understand that I bar it."

"Rot!" said Lowther warmly. "I don't see why you can't take your medicine for the good of the cause, Blake. Don't be a funk."

"Who's a funk? If you're so jolly fond of medicine, Lowther, you can have the fit. I'm not hankering after it."

"Oh, no," said Lowther immediately. "You'd—you'd do it ever so much better than I should, Blake. I wouldn't cut you out for anything."

"It won't be necessary to take any medicine, Blake," said Tom Merry. "We only want to get Mrs. Mimms out of her room. As soon as she starts on you you can recover."

"I didn't think of that. I'm game, then."

The plan was certainly a feasible one. The juniors proceeded at once to carry it out. While they had been planning they had not had their fingers idle, and many of the stumps were already strung, ready for business as soon as the missing devils should be recaptured.

Ten minutes later Tom Merry was pounding at the house-dame's door.

"Mrs. Mimms! Mrs. Mimms! Mrs. Mimms!"

The house-dame opened the door in alarm.

"Whatever is the matter? Is it you, Master Merry? What has happened?"

"Blake!" gasped Tom Merry breathlessly. "It's Blake! Poor old Blake!"

"Whatever has happened?"

"Oh, Mrs. Mimms, you were very cruel to Blake a little while ago. I punched his head myself this morning. Ow! We shall both be awfully sorry now!"

"What has happened?"

"Ow! Poor old Blake! If you could only see him! Ow! Horrible! Oh!"

The excited house-dame grasped him by the arm and shook him.

"What has happened, Merry? Where is Blake? Tell me what is the matter with him instantly. Speak! Tell me at once?"

"I—I—how should I know?" gasped Tom Merry. "He's squirming on the floor, and foaming at the mouth—oh, I can't bear it!"

And Tom Merry covered his face with his hands, as if to shut out the horrible sight.

Mrs. Mimms shook him violently.

"Where is he?" she almost screamed. "Tell me where he is?"

"He's lying in the upper corridor. He's wriggling and foaming and—"

But the house-dame did not wait for Tom Merry to finish. She started off as fast as she could go, and tore up the stairs with a speed surprising in one of her years. She was so alarmed that she did not stop to get any of her beloved medicines for the sufferer.

The moment she had disappeared Tom Merry's horror and grief vanished as if by magic, and a broad grin came over his face.

"Righto, kids!" he called out.

Manners and Lowther came out of an alcove where they had been concealed, and joined him. They were grinning, too. The Terrible Three rushed in at the open door of the house-dame's cosy little sitting-room.

Tom Merry glanced round the room quickly. He knew that the house-dame would discover the hoax in a few minutes, and there was no time to waste.

"There's the cabinet!" he exclaimed. "That's where Blake thought they were. Let's look there first, anyway."

"Give us a hand with the thing, then!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. And the three heroes of the Shell grasped the cabinet and jerked it away from the corner.

"Blake was right. Look there!" In a moment Tom Merry had hold of the apronful of devils, and was gathering it up at the corners. "He was right, kids! Hurrah! Here they are! Collar them, kids!"

Several of the devils fell from the apron as Tom hurriedly gathered it up. Manners and Lowther picked them up and pocketed them. Then the cabinet was shoved back in its place by the gleeful juniors.

"We've done the trick!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come on! We don't want the house-dame to catch us here. Can't check a woman, you know; so we'd better give her a wide berth."

The chums of the Shell hurriedly quitted the room.

A dozen fellows of the Fourth and the Shell were already in the corridor, having got an inkling of what was going forward. Many of them had improvised diablo sticks, and only wanted devils to be able to play again. There was a rush for the devils.

"Here you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry, handing them out.

"Here you are, plenty for all! This is where we smile. Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors smiled at the top of their voices.

Meanwhile, the house-dame had flown upstairs, and she found Blake in the upper corridor just as Tom Merry had described him. Tom Merry never departed from the truth. And really Blake played his part most realistically.

He was writhing and wriggling on the floor, and foaming at the mouth, the foam being made by lathering some soap. His friends Herries and D'Arcy stood by him, looking deeply distressed, and a number of other juniors had gathered round.

"Blake! Poor old chap, buck up!" said Herries. "Here comes Mrs. Mimms, and she'll see you through, old fellow."

"Yaas, wathah! Blake, dear boy, our respected house-dame is flyin' to the wescue. Buck up, old fellow; buck up!"

"G-r-r-r-h-h-h-r-r-r-h-h-h-r-r-r!" said Blake.

The house-dame reached the spot, gasping with her unaccustomed exertions. She pushed Herries and D'Arcy aside, and knelt beside Blake.

"My poor boy! Blake, what is the matter?"

Blake sat up.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "I don't think anything's the matter, Mrs. Mimms."

"You were in a fit—"

"Was I? If I was, it's gone now. I feel quite fit—I mean, I feel quite well. It's awfully good of you to come to my aid like this, Mrs. Mimms."

"My dear lad, let me help you to my room. I have some medicine that will do you worlds of good, so—"

"Thanks!" said Blake hurriedly. "I—I'm perfectly well now, Mrs. Mimms, thank you. I really never felt so awfully well in my life."

"Nonsense! You must be ill—you are foaming at the mouth! Why, bless my soul, it is soap lather on your face!"

"Is it?" said Blake curiously. "Who's been soaping my face?"

Nobody admitted having done so. Blake rose to his feet, and cast an indignant glance round at the grinning juniors.

"To take advantage of a fellow in a fit to soap his face is mean," he said. "Don't you think so, Mrs. Mimms?"

The house-dame was looking undecided. It was dawning upon her that the junior had recovered with remarkable celerity from the fit, and the grins upon the faces round her seemed to hint that the whole thing had been humbug.

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy; "it was howwidly mean. Did you soap Blake's face, Hewwies?"

"Certainly not? Did you, Gore?"

"I? Oh, no; I know how painful it is to any of you Fourth-Form kids to have soap on your faces! And I'm too humane," declared Gore.

"Hallo, what's that!" exclaimed Blake.

"I say that I—"

But Gore was interrupted. Monty Lowther came up the stairs, and waved his hand to the group in the passage, and called out to Blake.

"It's all sereno!"

The juniors bolted off the next moment, and went with a scrambling rush down the stairs. In a moment they had joined the Terrible Three in the hall of the School House, and were in possession of the recaptured devils.

Mrs. Mimms, utterly amazed and bewildered, descended the stairs more slowly. Her doubts about the genuineness of Blake's fit were growing stronger, but as yet she did not understand.

But when she had passed down the stairs the truth dawned upon her mind. The passage was full of juniors playing diablo. It is true that the instruments they used were of the most varied and peculiar description. Cricket stumps connected by blind-cords, walking-canes with twine between, umbrella-sticks and whipcord fastened to them—all sorts and conditions of sticks and strings had been pressed into the service.

But there were plenty of devils. Devils to right of them, devils to left of them, to borrow a poetic description. Devils in the air, and devils crashing on the floor and the walls. And Mrs. Mimms knew where those devils must have come from, and she knew why Blake had had a fit in the upper corridor.

"The limbs!" exclaimed Mrs. Mimms. "The young limbs! All my trouble for nothing! The young limbs!"

"Play up!"

"Clumsy!"

"Keep out of the way!"

"Mind the glass there!"

"Oh, rats; blow the glass! Play up!"

Mrs. Mimms had to run a regular gauntlet of flying and spinning devils to get back to her room. She slammed the door shut when she went in. It was of no use bothering the Head, who would certainly have been down upon her drastic proceeding of the previous night. It was of no use to interfere with two score of juniors playing diablo for all they were

worth. Mrs. Mirams gave it up. She concluded that she had to grin and bear it, and when she had once made up her mind, she found that it was not so hard to bear after all.


And on the morrow came down the fresh consignment of diablo sets, and if Mrs. Mimms had cherished a hope of effecting a new raid, she gave it up now. The new game continued in full swing, and Mrs. Mimms was not the only one who had to

grin and bear it. The opposition had been crushed in fact, and victory remained with the diabolists!

THE END.

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READ THIS FIRST!

Tempest Headland is a large school standing in an exposed position of Britain's coast. It contains some six hundred odd boys. Some of them, as will presently be seen, were very odd.

A fearful storm is raging outside, when Cyril Conway tells Herr Ludvig, who is taking the class for German, that he can see from the window a ship being driven ashore. Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, Herr Ludvig, and the boys immediately make their way to the cliff, but in reaching there they find that the ship has sunk. However, the Head is instrumental in saving a little black boy. He is taken to the school, and money to the amount of £1,000, with a request that it may be used for his up-bringing, is found on him. A medical man examines the nigger, and he finds the boy has had such a shock to his system as to affect all memory of the past. He does not even remember his name, so the Head leaves it to the boys to re-christen him. After a lengthy discussion, Billy Barnes and Cyril decide on naming their new schoolmate Snowy White Adonis Venus.

On the first night Venus and Cyril play a trick on Snigg, a bully, by fastening a raw piece of meat on his nose. In the morning his appearance terrifies the dormitory.

(Now go on with the story.)

Preparations for a Cold Water Bath.

"Oh!" gasped Cyril.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" gasped every other boy in the dormitory.

"This is awful! Oh, Venus, how did you do it when you smacked his face last night? Oh, I pity you—but not so much as I pity him! Look at your nose, Snigg!"

Snigg did, as well as he could, then he touched it, and, uttering a wild yell as he felt its cold clamminess, leapt out of bed.

"Your nose has got leprosy!" observed Cyril. "Oh, it is too shocking!"

Snigg leapt out of bed, gave one glance at his nose in the glass, then rushed from the room, yelling at the top of his voice.

He met no one. The masters were all in the great hall, and the doctor had commenced to call the roll. He had just got through the B's when Snigg rushed into the hall in his night-shirt, shrieking at the top of his voice. He was followed by all the boys in his dormitory, who kept up a chorus of 'Oh's!'

"Woo-hoo!" howled Snigg. "Look at my nose! I have been maimed by that vile nigger! Look at my nose! What shall I do? I'll tell my father."

"He will notice it without your telling him!" shouted Cyril.

"My nose! Oh, my nose!" howled the distracted Snigg, leaping about in his wild excitement.

Dr. Buchanan took off his nose-stickers, placed one glass between his teeth, and, in his blank surprise, bit it so hard

that he smashed the glass. Snigg's nose certainly looked very awful. He had got a pair of black eyes as well; but the nose was the striking part about him.

"Be calm, Snigg!" exclaimed the doctor.

"How can I be calm when my nose is smashed to a pulp?" howled Snigg. "Oh, how can I go through life with a nose like that?"

"How did you damage it in that—that frightful manner, my poor lad?"

"Oh, it's too awful! I can't bear the agony! I shall die—I know I shall!"

"That is the most probable thing on the face of this earth," observed Cyril. "I'll bet my braces you die; though how and when is another matter. You have got inflammation of the nasal organ, and what you need is a new nose, and a doctor to take off the old one."

"Silence, boy!" commanded the doctor. "How dare you joke about such a dreadful thing? Come here, my lad. Let me examine it."

"No, no! Don't touch it! It's too awful! Oh, my suffering is greater than I can bear!"

"If the mouse won't go to the mountain, the mountain must go to the mouse!" cried Cyril; and the doctor approached the howling lad. "Here, I'll hold him for you, sir."

Then Cyril caught Snigg by the backs of his arms, and held him tight, while the doctor approached.

"Why, this—this—"

"Don't touch it, sir! I can't bear it touched!" howled Snigg.

"Why, you stupid, senseless boy, it's—it—"

"It has come off, Snigg!" cried Cyril. "You've lost your nasal organ."

And so he had, for the doctor wrenched off that beefy nose, and held it between his thumb and finger, while he gazed at Snigg with withering contempt. Snigg clapped his hand to his nose. It was rather painful to the touch, and slightly swollen to the sight; but there was not much the matter with it.

The doctor was speaking, but no one heard his voice above the howls of laughter which arose. The doctor gazed at the piece of raw beef, then dropped it, and wiped his hands on his handkerchief; then he gazed at Snigg, who quailed before the contemptuous look, as he stood shivering in his night-shirt.

"Silence!" commanded the doctor, raising his arm.

"Silence!"

He got it, after some moments.

"Go and dress," he sighed, turning to Snigg. "Get dressed, you simple boy. How dare you tell me that you were suffering agony? Go away! It is really too absurd."

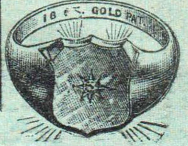
Then Snigg slunk off, and once more the roars of laughter burst forth as he went.

"Do you know anything about the stupid practical joke, Conway?" demanded the doctor.

"Well, sir, I certainly do know something concerning the little joke, but if you do not mind I would rather say



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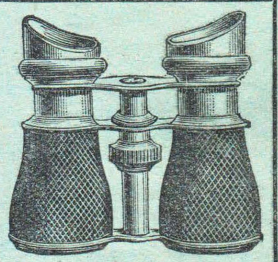
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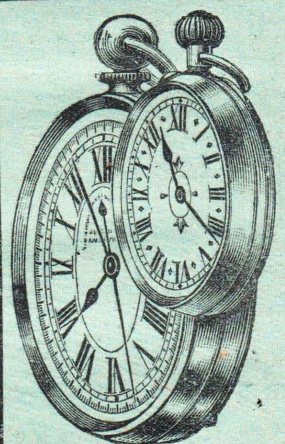
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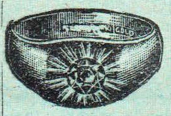
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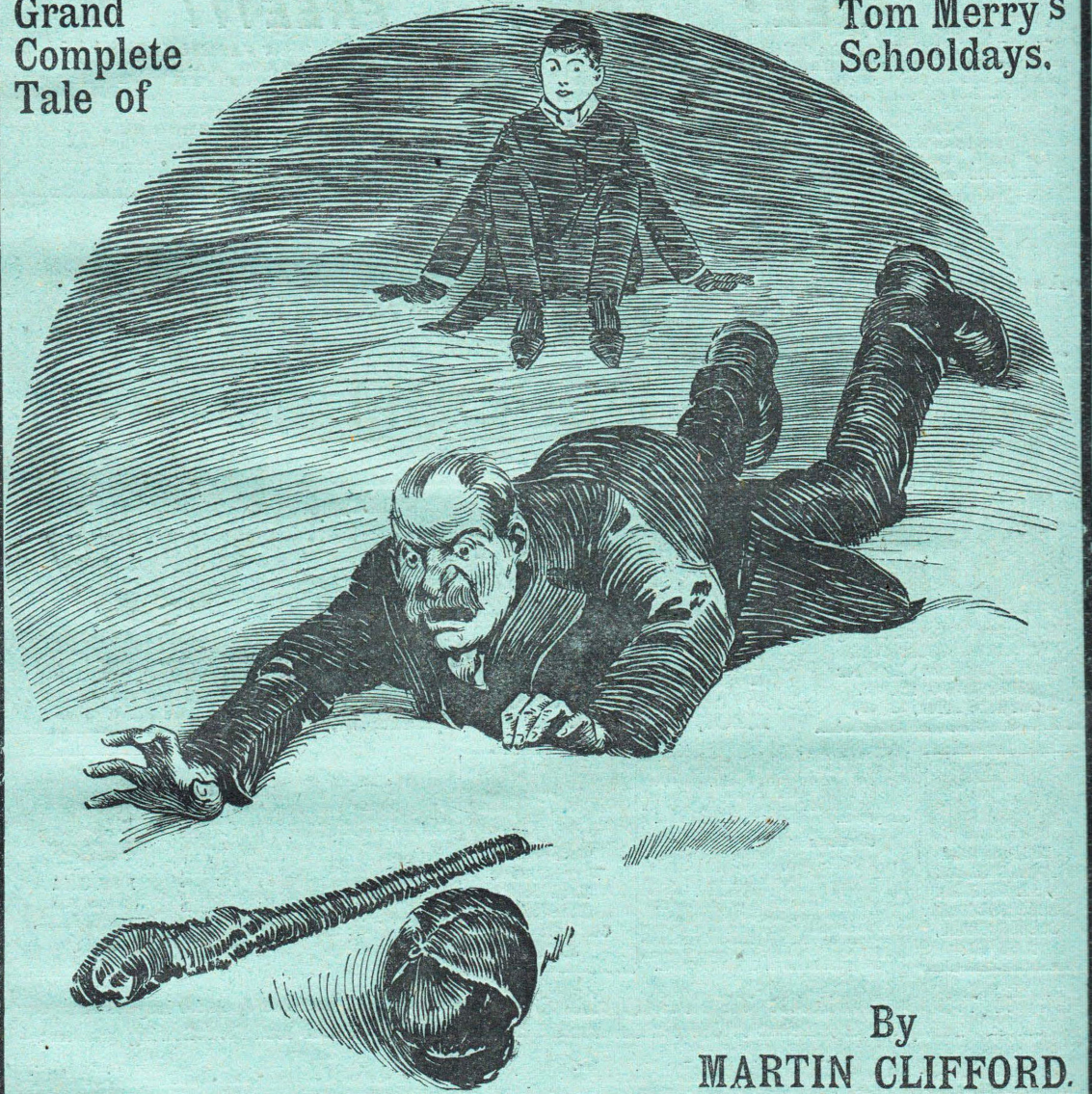
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