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A GRAND TALE OF
TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



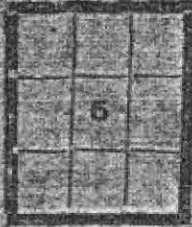
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NO. 46.

VOL. 2.

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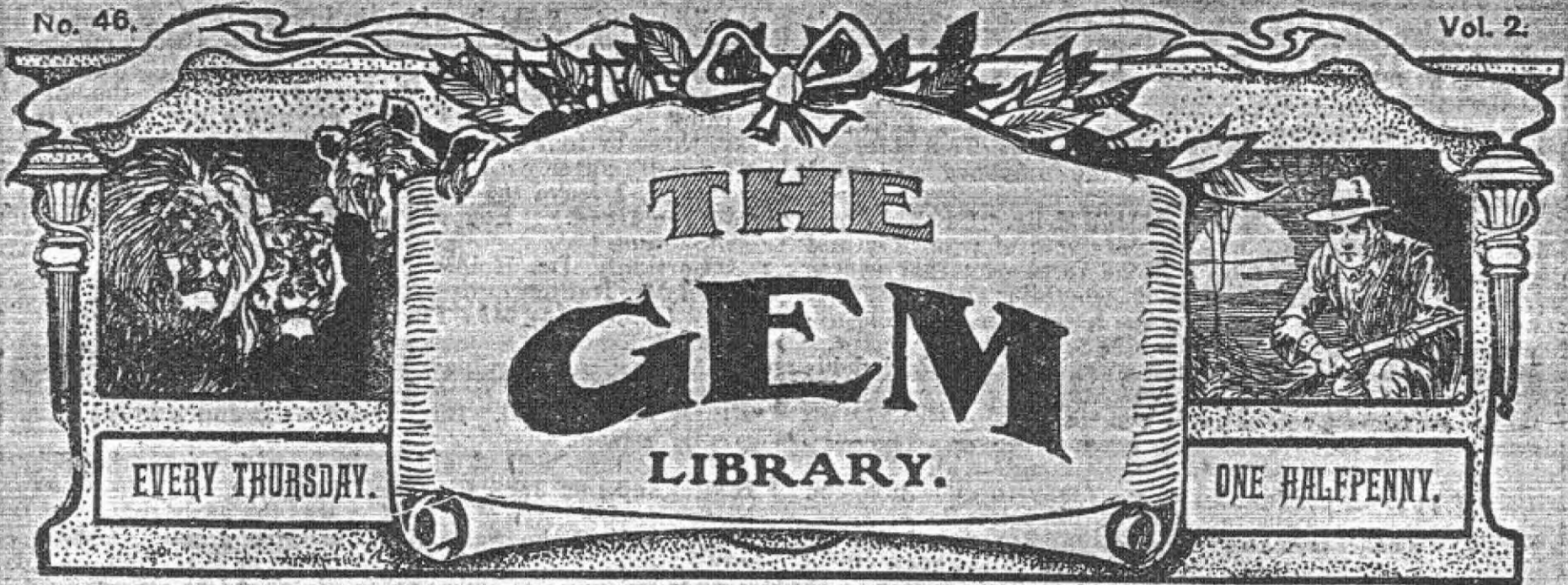
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"TOM MERRY'S GUEST."

A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

No. 46.

Vol. 2.



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

Danger Ahead!



A SPLENDID TALE OF TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.
 By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

An Amazing Letter—And a Holiday for Tom Merry.

DEAR me! I wonder what this can possibly mean?"

The Head of St. Jim's wore a puzzled look. He was sitting in his study at St. Jim's, and he had a letter in his hand. He had read it through once with an expression of surprise. Then he adjusted his pince-nez, and read it through again, his surprise deepening to absolute amazement.

"Dear me! I wonder— Ah, Mr. Railton, I am glad

to see you! Will you kindly glance through this letter, and tell me if you can understand what it means?"

Mr. Railton, the big, athletic master of the School House at St. Jim's, entered the Head's study.

"Certainly, sir!"

He took the letter and glanced at it.

"It is from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess," the Head explained. "Miss Fawcett's letters are never exactly—never exactly—er—commonplace, but really I never read anything so extraordinary as this in my life before."

Mr. Railton's face was growing as amazed as the doctor's as he read.

"Can you make anything of it, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head, as the housemaster lowered the letter.

"It certainly seems a little—a little incoherent," said Mr. Railton, with a smile. "I imagine that Tom Merry's governess wrote this letter under the influence of great agitation."

"So I should think," said the Head drily. "If I did not know that Miss Fawcett was the very soul of propriety and decorum, I might really be inclined to suspect that it was written under the influence of—of something else. That, of course, is impossible; but really the letter is most incomprehensible."

Mr. Railton looked at the letter again, and wrinkled his brows thoughtfully over it.

"Perhaps if you read it out," suggested the Head, "we may be able to unravel the meaning between us. They say that two heads are better than one, though really I think half a dozen heads would not be too many to undertake the task of disentangling the meaning of that letter."

Mr. Railton nodded assent, and began to read the letter of Miss Priscilla Fawcett aloud in his deep, clear voice:

"Dear Dr. Holmes,—I hope that you will find it possible to accede to the request I am going to make. They have been seen in the neighbourhood, and I am convinced that it is the lace my brother sent me from India that they are after. I dare say you will think I am very nervous, but I have reason to be; and it would be a great comfort to me to have Tom at home until my brother arrives."

"My dearest boy was not looking at all well when I saw him last. His cheeks were very red, and his eyes very bright, and I am afraid that these are symptoms of a feverish state. I should be glad to have him under my own care for a time; and he is of so studious a disposition that I am assured that his education will not suffer. If two or three of his friends could come home with him, it would give me a greater feeling of security. What could I say to my brother if they succeeded in purloining the lace, which is worth thousands of rupees?"

"You will probably consider me nervous and foolish, but I know perfectly well that it is the lace they want. I saw a strange man looking into my garden to-day, and, though he only begged for some bread, I am certain that he was one of them in disguise. He had a wicked look in his eyes."

"I am anxious about his health, too. Under my own care he would soon become quite strong again, and could return to St. James's Collegiate School quite a new boy. He has never met my brother since he was quite a child, and will not remember him, and so the meeting will be a great pleasure to both. I shall take every precaution to prevent them from stealing the lace, but I do not feel secure."

"Please let Tom come home for a few days till my brother arrives, and let some of his friends come with him. It would not be safe for him to come alone, as they might not be afraid of one. I hope you will accede to my request."

Mr. Railton looked up from the letter.

"It is certainly amazing," he said; "but it seems clear that Miss Fawcett is in a state of fright about something."

"Yes, certainly; but—but why should she think that the man who looked into her garden was one of Tom Merry's friends in disguise?"

Mr. Railton laughed.

"I do not think she means that, Dr. Holmes, though the words would certainly seem to bear that construction."

"Then, she says definitely that she is afraid that her brother and Tom Merry will purloin her valuable lace; and later she fears that Tom Merry's chums will take it. It is really most incomprehensible."

"Ha, ha! I do not think she means exactly that, either."

"I suppose not; but what does she mean?"

"Ah, that is not so easy to decide! It is possible that bad characters have been seen in the neighbourhood of Huckleberry Heath of late, and that Miss Fawcett has been thrown into a state of terror by their appearance."

The doctor nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, that may be the explanation."

"She would naturally feel, under such circumstances, more secure with her ward in the house, and some of his friends with him," the housemaster remarked. "It is rather an unusual request to make, I am aware."

"Yet, if Mr. Fawcett is returning in a few days from India, the boys could then come back to the school," Dr. Holmes remarked. "Tom Merry, naturally, would go home to see Mr. Francis Fawcett. The others—"

"It depends upon whom Tom Merry selects to go with him," said Mr. Railton. "I know the lads he usually chums with, and some of them would not lose by a few days' rest; while others, I think, should not be taken from their studies."

The Head passed his hand thoughtfully over his chin.

"I must, of course, accede to Miss Fawcett's request if I

can," he said. "She is evidently in a great state of nervousness, and she is such a good soul that it is always my desire to oblige her if possible. I cannot forget, either, how liberally she subscribed to the fund for restoring the chapel. I think we may let Tom Merry go, and allow him to take, say, three or four others with him."

"I quite agree with you, sir."

"Then, I leave the matter in your hands, Mr. Railton," said the Head. "You will decide which boys shall be his companions."

"Certainly, Dr. Holmes."

And Mr. Railton quitted the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes put Miss Fawcett's letter in a pigeon-hole in his desk.

"A most extraordinary letter," he murmured—"most extraordinary. But in many circumstances Miss Fawcett is a little—er—unusual. But a good soul, and a lady whom I greatly esteem."

Mr. Railton walked along the corridor into the School House, and met Jack Blake, of Study No. 6, in the passage. Morning school was over, and so was the early dinner of the Saints, and Blake was going out with a pair of diabolo-sticks under his arm, and a bobbin in his hand. Mr. Railton beckoned to him.

"Do you know where Tom Merry is, Blake?"

"In his study, sir. Manners has caught a cold, and is staying in, and Tom Merry and Lowther are with him."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was with Blake. "He is twyin' to persuade Mannahs to take some of Miss Fawcett's medicine for colds, but Mannahs isn't takin' any, you know."

Mr. Railton smiled, and went upstairs to the study occupied by the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther.

The door was open, and the housemaster heard the voices of the chums of the Shell as he came up the passage.

"Gr-r-r—atchoo—atchoo—atchoo-oo-ooo!"

"Sneezing again, Manners?"

"It's that beastly cold in my nose."

"You ought to lay up for it."

"Rats! I'm not going to lay up for a cold in the nose."

"Then, take some medicine."

"Gr-r-r-r—atchoo—atchoo!"

"I've got a nice assortment here," went on Tom Merry, the scamp of the Shell. "You know, my old governess sends me a lot of medicine, and I never take any, so I've got quite an accumulation. Here's some of Dr. Bones's Purple Pilules for Pinking, Peaky Patients. You take fifteen before every meal—"

"Oh, go and bury 'em!"

"Well, here's Dr. Bones's specials—a really good line in pills—and you have to take only six daily—"

"Rats!"

"And here's cod-liver oil by the gallon. You take a deep, steady drink, and it sets you up wonderfully."

"Drink it yourself."

"I'm not ill. If I were ill, I'd drink it like a thirsty horse—I don't think! I must say that you are hard to please, Manners, old man. But I haven't come to the end of my assortment yet. Here are the Terra-cotta Tablets for Tiny Tots—"

"Am I a tiny tot, fathead?"

"Well, you were once, you know. You've only grown. And here are—"

Tom Merry's cheerful voice ceased, and there was a terrific crash in the study. Mr. Railton advanced more quickly to the door. He could not suppress a smile as he looked in.

Manners, with a nose looking a great deal like a beet-root, was standing amid the wreck of a heap of medicine-bottles, of which the contents ran in streams all over the study carpet.

He had evidently had enough of Miss Fawcett's valuable medicine, and had made a sudden onslaught upon them, and strewed the floor with them.

Monty Lowther was giggling, and Tom Merry scratched his curly head as he looked at the ruin of all those valuable remedies.

"Well, my hat!" he exclaimed. "There's a lot of valuable medicine gone to rack and ruin! Think of all the pining invalids who would have been put out of their pain by using those medicines, Manners."

"Put out of their pain?" grinned Manners. "Yes, that's right. But I don't want to be put out of my pain, thanks!"

"But really— Mr. Railton. Please come in, sir," broke off Tom Merry, as he caught sight of the housemaster standing in the doorway.

Mr. Railton advanced into the study with a smile.

"I have to speak to you, Merry. Dr. Holmes received a letter this morning from your governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. She wishes you to go home for a few days."

"Hurrah!"

"Miss Fawcett seems to be in a state of apprehension

about something, as bad characters have, I think, been seen in the vicinity of Laurel Villa," said the housemaster.

Tom Merry became grave at once.

"Therefore, she wishes you to go home for a few days. Her brother is returning from India this week, and you will stay until Mr. Francis Fawcett arrives."

"Yes, sir; but—but—"

"Well, Merry?" said Mr. Railton.

"Can I take anybody with me, sir?"

"Miss Fawcett makes that request also, and I have decided that you may take, if you please, four companions."

"Thank you, sir. Lowther and Manners and—"

The housemaster held up his hand.

"Manners is not in a state to travel, as he has a cold," he said. "You may take Lowther, if you wish."

"It's all right," said Manners, with a grimace. "I couldn't come with this rotten cold, Tom. Never mind!"

"I shall have to supervise your selection, Merry," said Mr. Railton, "so please tell me whom you would like to take."

Tom Merry reflected.

"The three chaps in Study No. 6, sir—Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy."

"Very well; that will make the four."

"I—I don't want to look greedy, sir," said Tom, hesitating, "but—but could I take a chap from the New House, too?"

"Well, that would depend upon Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House," said Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry's face fell.

"Well, I should like to take Figgins," he said, "but I know that Mr. Ratcliff would not give him permission."

"I will speak to the Head about it," said the housemaster. "Figgins is perfectly proficient in his studies, I believe, and there is no reason why he should not go. If Dr. Holmes agrees with me, he will speak to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject, and there will be no difficulty."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry gratefully; and the housemaster quitted the study of the Terrible Three.

"I'm sorry you can't come, Manners," said Tom Merry. "You're not fit, I know, but—well, it can't be helped."

"It's rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Manners. "If I did come, your dear old governess would fill me up with medicines to cure my cold, and I might never come back to St. Jim's alive. You fellows go and speak to Study No. 6, and I'll snuggle over the fire."

And Manners snuggled over the fire, and buried himself in the latest number of "Pluck," while Tom Merry and Manners went forth in search of the chums of the Fourth Form.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry's Invitations.

"WEFUSE—I distinctly wefuse!"

Tom Merry grinned as he came up the passage towards Study No. 6, and heard the well-known tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House.

"Now, Gussy, don't be an ass!" said Blake's voice.

"I object to bein' called an ass! I—"

"Are you going to blow up that fire?"

"No, certainly not. I should pwobably covah my face with blacks, and spoil my collah. Let Hewwies do it."

"What about my face and my collar?" demanded Herries.

"That is not of so much importance, dear boy."

"Isn't it? You image—"

"I wefuse to be called an image. I distinctly wefuse to blow up the fiah. I wegard such a pwoceedin' as dewogatory to my dig. It is quite imposs."

"Now, look here, Gussy, I've peeled the potatoes, and Herries has fetched the bacon from the shop, and you've got to do your little bit."

"I am perfectly willin' to do anythin' consistent with my dig., Blake. But I wefuse to wun the wisk of sooting my face and collah."

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther entered the study at this moment.

The chums of No. 6 were all looking rather excited, and there would probably have been warfare in the room, but for the opportune arrival of the Terrible Two.

"Peace, my children," said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand. "Let dogs delight to bark at night, it is their nature to, but youngsters like you should—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Blake, with a sniff. "Keep that for the next number of the 'Weekly.' What are you bounders shoving yourselves into a respectable study for?"

"Yaas, wathah! What do you wottahs want?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"They've come in at the door, and they want to go out by the window," said Herries. "Collar them!"

"Yaas, wathah! Collah the wottahs!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Pax! Pax! Don't get your wool off. We've come on a peaceful errand."

"Well, what is it?" asked Blake suspiciously. He was always suspicious of the chums of the Shell, especially when they were all smiles. He feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands, so to speak.

"I've been thinking," said Tom Merry, with a considerate air, "that you kids have been working very hard lately, and I know that work doesn't agree with the constitutions of Fourth-Form fags."

"Does a thick ear or a black eye agree with your constitution?" asked Blake. "If not, your constitution had better look out."

"And, therefore," said Tom Merry, unheeding, "having turned the matter over in my mind, I have come to the conclusion—"

"Thank goodness for that, at least. Get out, then, if you've come to the conclusion. I was afraid you were never coming to it."

"I've come to the conclusion—"

"Then shut up."

"I've come to the conclusion—"

"Yaas, wathah, you've told us that before, deah boy. Pway shut up, now that you have come to the beastly conclusion, you know, and twavel."

"I've come to the conclusion," said Tom Merry obstinately, "that a holiday will do you good, and after consulting with Railton I have decided—"

"Eh?" said three voices, in unison.

"After consulting with Railton, I have decided to let you three fellows have a few days off."

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you are rotting—"

"Yaas, wathah! If you are wottin', Tom Mewwy, we shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"I'm not rotting," said Tom Merry. "The fact is, I'm going home for a few days, and I have permission to take you bounders with me. Of course, if you don't want a holiday—"

Tom Merry was interrupted.

Three Fourth-Formers rushed at him simultaneously and hugged him, even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy forgetting his placid calm, and throwing to the winds the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, in his delight at the joyous prospect.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Moderate your giddy transports. Give a chap a chance to breathe!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Blake, slapping Tom Merry on the back.

"Hurrah!" shouted Herries, thumping him wildly on the chest, in his excitement.

"Hip, pip!" shrieked D'Arcy, pounding on the shoulders of Tom Merry. "Hip, pip! This is weally what I should chawactahwise as wippin'."

Tom Merry tore himself away, gasping.

"You howling lunatics!" he exclaimed. "Keep off! I shall hit out, I warn you, if you thump me again! Do you think I'm made of indiarubber?"

"Jolly good news!" said Blake. "Work is a good thing, you know, but it sometimes strikes me that it's a jolly good thing to get away from. So you're going home?"

"Yes. Miss Fawcett is nervous about something, and she wants me home till her brother comes from India. He's coming in a few days. She's asked the Head to let me take a few friends, and I've selected you."

"Well, I always said you were a chap of really good taste, Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You couldn't have made a better selection," went on Blake. "We'll do you proud. Do you remember what a ripping time we had at Laurel Villa at Christmas? We'll wake up Huckleberry Heath again. My hat! This is glorious!"

"Righto!" said Herries. "When do we go?"

"To-day."

"Then I will immediately pwoceed to pack my twunks," exclaimed D'Arcy; "as it will be only for a few days, I shall not need more than thwee twunks."

"Ha, ha, ha! And how many hat-boxes?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Only thwee. Of course, if there are to be any special celebvatians, I should like to go pwepared."

"Ha, ha! There's nothing special on, unless it's a burglary," said Tom Merry. "Do you wear a special suit of clothes for that?"

"That is a fwivolous wemark, Tom Mewwy. I should not like to twavel in a wig-out inconsistent with my dig. It would be quite imposs. If you will excuse me, deah boys, I will go and see to my twunks at once."

"With pleasure!" said Blake politely. And the swell of

St. Jim's hurried off in a state of great excitement. "Anybody else coming?" asked Blake.

"Figgins, I think. The Head is going to speak to Mr. Ratcliff, and get him off. Hallo, here he is!"

There was a pattering of feet upon the stairs, and the long-legged Figgins, the chief of the juniors of the New House, rushed into the study.

Figgins & Co. might be at war with the School House juniors, but under the outward rivalry there was a real good fellowship, as Tom Merry had shown in thinking of Figgy as soon as there was a prospect of a holiday.

Figgins rushed straight at Tom Merry, clasped him round the neck, and waltzed him round the study, in spite of his frantic wriggles.

The study was small, and Figgins was large, and the waltz was not accomplished without disaster.

The table went flying, and books and inkpots mixed themselves on the floor, and the clock was swept from the mantelpiece, and the paper screen went down, and Figgins's foot went through it. Then Tom Merry tore himself loose, and the New House chief sank gasping into a chair, and grinned at the wreck he had made.

"Thanks!" he gasped. "I hear from Ratty that I'm to come with you for a little run down to Huckleberry Heath, and I thought I'd run over and thank you."

"I wish you'd do it a bit more gently, then," growled Blake. "Look at the muck you've made of our study."

"Rats! Who thinks of such trifles at a time like this? We're going on a holiday. Buck up and look cheerful. I wish the Co. were coming."

"So do I," said Tom Merry. "But it's imposs, as Gussy says. I can't take more than five, so there you are! Kerr and Wynn can kill the fatted calf when you return." The hero of the Shell looked at his watch. "What do you say to catching the four train at Wayland? Then we shall be at Huckleberry Heath comfortably in the evening."

"Good enough!"

And the juniors were soon in a hurry of packing for the holiday.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy is Hurried.

"ARE you ready?"

"Yes, quite."

"Almost weady, deah boy. I find that my necktie is a little cwooked, and I must tie it over again," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking round from the looking-glass, as Tom Merry put his head into Study No. 6 in the School House.

The hero of the Shell laughed.

"Well, buck up, Gussy, the hack has come from the station, and Taggles is putting our bags on it."

"Wighto, Tom Mewwy! I sha'n't be more than thwee or four minutes."

"You won't be more than twenty seconds," remarked Blake. "Will he, Herries?"

"Not much," said Herries. "Count the seconds, Tom Merry, and we'll run him out on his neck if he isn't ready."

Tom Merry took out his watch to count.

"I wefuse to be hurwied," said D'Arcy. "It is extwemely undig. to huwwy, and I always find huwwyin' so beastly exhaustin', you know."

"You'll find it more exhausting to go downstairs on the back of your head," said Blake warningly. "How much time gone, Tom Merry?"

"Thirteen seconds."

"You hear that, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to pay any wegard to such a widiculous thing," said D'Arcy, his fingers idle while he talked. "It is most ungentlemanly to huwwy."

"Do you think we're going to lose the train while you tie your blessed necktie over and over again?" demanded Monty Lowther from the doorway.

"We could have a special twain if necessawy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "I like the idea of a special train so that Gussie can have time to tie his necktie! Isn't time up, Tom Merry?"

"Just up," said Tom, closing his watch with a snap.

"You hear, Gussy? Are you ready?"

"No, wathah not! I have not even commenced to tie my necktie yet. You have only delayed me by your widiculous conversation!"

Blake made a sign to Herries, and they seized the swell of the School House by the shoulders.

"Welease me!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I cannot possibly go without tyin' my necktie! It would look such shockin' bad form!"

"Ha, ha! Bundle him along!"

Tom Merry and Lowther politely made way, and the swell of the School House was rushed downstairs. He dared not

struggle very strenuously, for if he had done so his fancy waistcoat would have been ruffled, his coat creased, and his silk hat would probably have fallen off and been trampled underfoot.

D'Arcy, still feebly protesting, was rushed out of the School House into the station hack, the roof of which was loaded with bags and portmanteaux. The swell of the school collapsed into a corner seat, and Herries plumped down beside him to hold him there.

A crowd of juniors had collected to see the popular chief of the Shell off. Kerr and Wynn came up with Figgins, and Figgins threw his bag on the roof, and shook hands with the "Co." Manners leaned out of the study window with a shawl round his head, and sneezed out a hearty good-bye.

The chums tumbled into the ancient vehicle, finding none too much room there. The hack rolled away, and a cheer followed them to the gates.

"My word," said Tom Merry, "I wish they were all coming! Especially Manners, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn! Never mind, we shall all be together again in a few days' time! The weather seems going to be fine, and I hope we shall have a ripping holiday!"

"Not much doubt about that," said Figgins. "It's awfully jolly at Laurel Villa! I say, what's the matter with Gussy?"

"There is nothin' the matter with me, Figgins," said D'Arcy; "I'm only feelin' extwemely indig., that is all. I have been tweated with gweat diswespect."

"Awful!" said Figgins solemnly. "Shocking! Unspeakable!"

"Oh, don't wot!" said D'Arcy. "I feel quite cwoss! I have been huwwied off without time to tie my necktie pwopahly, and I feel it vevy much!"

"Well, tie it now!"

"It is impossible for me to tie it to my satisfaction without a lookin' glass."

"Behold!" said Figgins, producing a pocket-mirror. "There you are!"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"Thank you vevy much, Figgins! You are a shockin' boundah sometimes, but now you are weally and twuly a fwiend in need. Hold it up, will you?"

"Certainly!" grinned Figgins.

And the New House junior solemnly held up the pocket-mirror while the swell of the School House tied his necktie. D'Arcy beamed upon his companions when this important task was accomplished.

"Now I feel bettah," he said. "It is so extwemely ungentlemanly to be at all slovenly or careless in one's personal appeawance, you know. And you must wemembah that we are goin' to see Miss Pwiscilla Fawcett, a lady whom we all respect vevy highly."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rylcombe!" said Tom Merry, looking out of the window as the hack rolled into the ancient High Street. "We're in good time."

The hack rolled into the station-yard, and the juniors alighted.

"Shove those bags into the train for Wayland," said Tom Merry to the porter who came bustling out. "Get them labelled for Huckleberry Heath."

"Yaas, wathah, and be vevy careful with my twunks and hat-boxes," said D'Arcy, walking on into the station.

There were a couple of minutes to wait for the train. The luggage made its appearance on a trolley, and D'Arcy glanced at it. There was no sign of the trunks or the hat-boxes. The train came snorting in.

"Wayland train!"

"Where is the west?" asked D'Arcy excitedly, tapping the porter on the arm.

The man stared at him.

"Beg pardon, sir!"

"Where is the west?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. He meant the rest of the luggage, but the station-porter could not be expected to understand D'Arcy's beautiful accent. He looked simply bewildered.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir! Wayland train!"

"Where is the west?" yelled D'Arcy.

"There, sir, I suppose," said the porter, pointing to the further end of the platform.

That was certainly the west, geographically, but that was not exactly what the swell of St. Jim's was inquiring.

D'Arcy stared up the platform, which was quite unoccupied at the end the porter was pointing to.

"It is not there!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "You must have left the west on the hack!"

The porter staggered back.

"He's mad!" he gasped—"stark, staring, raving mad!"

"The wascal is dwunk!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly.

"The twain is goin', and the west of our luggage is no here!"

"Mad as a 'atter!"

"Dwunk as anythin'! Where is the west?" shrieked

D'Arcy, almost frantic at the thought of going without his trunks and hat-boxes. The juniors were taking their seats in the train.

"What's the matter here?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The guard's put the luggage in, Gussy. It's all right!"

"E's mad!" spluttered the porter. "He asks me, he does, where's the west, and I points to the west, and then he sez, I've left it on the 'ack, he sez. 'E's mad!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He means the rest—the rest of the luggage!"

"There ain't no more!"

"My twunks!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "My hat-boxes!"

"There wasn't any!"

"There were thwee twunks and thwee hat-boxes!"

"I brought in all the luggage on the trolley, sir," said the porter, considerably calmed by a shilling which Tom Merry slipped into his hand. "You must have forgotten the rest at the school, sir."

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Blake! Hewwies! You feahful wottahs! My twunks and my hat-boxes have been left behind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries. "I never thought a word about them! Why didn't you look after your giddy luggage yourself?"

"He was too busy tying his blessed necktie!" grinned Blake. "I'm sorry, Gussy, but it can't be helped now!"

"That's so, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry comfortingly. "We're all pretty well provided, and we'll have a whip round to rig you out, Gussy, so——"

D'Arcy gave him a withering look.

"If you think I can dwees in clothes not made for me, Tom Mewwy——"

"All aboard!" sang out Figgins. "You'll be left behind, as well as your twunks, Gussy, if you don't get a move on!"

"I am extwemely sowwy, Tom Mewwy, that I cannot, atfah all, accept your genewous invitation," said D'Arcy, drawing back. "I could not possibly appear on a visit extendin' ovah days in a single suit of clothes, and sleep in bowwowed night-garments. I am sowwy——"

"Urry up, there!"

"Get in, you ass!"

"I am extwemely wegwetful——"

"Collar him!" yelled Blake.

Figgins jumped out of the train again, and lent Tom Merry a hand. D'Arcy, gripped by either arm, was projected into the train. He disappeared among a forest of legs, and Figgins and Tom Merry followed him in.

Only just in time! The whistle screamed, and the engine puffed, and the porter slammed the carriage-door behind them as the train moved out of the station.

D'Arcy sat among the feet of the juniors.

"I wegard your conduct as vewy wuff, Tom Mewwy!" he said.

"My dear Gussy, you see we couldn't part with you. You shouldn't be so charming," said Tom Merry. "If we left you behind, you see, it wouldn't be like a holiday. Better anything than that!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet with a beaming smile.

"If you put it like that, Tom Mewwy, of course——"

"Of course I put it like that," said Tom Merry. "Where would the fun be without Gussy? What should we have to make us laugh?"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy——"

But the protests of the swell of St. Jim's were lost in the laughter of the juniors. D'Arcy was booked for the journey now, and while the train rushed on through the wide countryside, the three trunks and the three hat-boxes remained in solitary state in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

In Danger!

"HUCKLEBERRY HEATH!"

"Here we are!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The long journey was over at last. Tom Merry threw open the carriage-door and jumped out, and the juniors followed him, glad that the journey was over. The little station was lighted by a couple of dim lamps, which served to make the darkness visible. Night had long fallen.

"Here, portfah!" said Arthur Augustus. "My word, where are all the portfahs, Tom Mewwy?"

"They're all at the other end of the platform, and he's coming," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "You see, there's only one of them—or him."

"Oh, weally! Pway tell him to call a cab. We had better have a four-wheelah, I think, as we could not all get into a beastly taxi, you know."

Tom Merry roared.

"Do you think taxi-cabs have penetrated as far as Huckleberry Heath?" he asked. "Oh, Adolphus!"

"Then, a four-wheelah, or a couple of hansoms."

"Hansoms, my dear kid, are off. The natives of Huckleberry Heath have never even seen a hansom cab. They would not know one if they saw it. There is certainly a four-wheeled contrivance to be had, if we could find the driver and wake him up, and then he could wake up his horse, and then his horse felt strong enough to move after being woke up, and——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I would have wired for a conveyance," said Tom Merry, "only a telegram at Laurel Villa has the same effect as an earthquake anywhere else. So we shall have to walk. Lucky you forgot your luggage, Gussy. We can all carry a bag apiece, but I don't see how any of us could have negotiated thwee twunks and thwee hat-boxes."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"We should have had to leave them to be sent on. However, as you were so thoughtful as to forget them, why——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Blake. "I like that! Well, here's your bags. I'll carry yours, Herries, if you like, and you can carry mine—it's smaller."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Thanks! Why, you boulder, your bag is twice as heavy as mine!"

"Yes; you see it's packed closer," said Blake, walking off with Herries' bag. "Come on, we've got a long way to go!"

"I did not weally forget my twunks," said D'Arcy. It was Blake and Hewwies wushin' me off in that wude mannah that caused them to be overlooked, you know. I suppose there are places in Huckleberry Heath where a fellow can do some shoppin'?"

"Oh, rather!" said Tom Merry, with a wink at the others. "You can do as much shopping as you like to-morrow."

Somewhat comforted by this information, Arthur Augustus, who had nothing to carry, walked beside the laden juniors from the station. They emerged into the quaint old High Street of Huckleberry Heath, but soon left its lights behind for the shadowy lane.

The lane ran over the dim heath towards Laurel Villa, which stood at a considerable distance from the village. It was very dark, but Tom Merry knew the way from childhood, and he led on without a fault. Big dark trees overshadowed the lane, and shut out what little light came from the stars in the wide expanse of the dark heavens.

"I say, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy, breaking silence after some minutes. "It has just stwuck me——"

"What has? Who has stwuck D'Arcy?"

"I mean, a thought has just stwuck me——"

"How beastly wude of it!"

"Oh, don't wot, Tom Mewwy! It has just stwuck me——"

"Did it hurt?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"I weally wish you would not intewwupt me."

"Go hon! Expound the valuable thought which has just stwuck you," said Figgins. "Great thoughts can never die——"

"Pway dwy up while I speak! It has just stwuck me that if there are bad chawactahs lurkin' in the neighbourhood of Lauwel Villah, we may possibly wun into them in this beastly dark lane, you know."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Monty Lowther. "Have you got your cornet with you, Herries?"

"No," said Herries. "Why?"

"You might have started playing it, and scared them off. Still, it would be a bit rough on the cattle on the heath, too."

"Look here, Monty Lowther——"

"Can't, it's too dark. But I say, there's something in that, you know, although it's Gussy who thought of it. Six well-dressed and distinguished-looking young fellows like us would be a valuable prize for a giddy highwayman——"

"Stop there!"

It was a hoarse voice from the darkness.

"Rats!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "You can't take us in with a transparent trick like that, Tom Merry! I know your voice, you see."

"Stop, I say!"

"I tell you the wheeze won't work, Tom! I—— Great Christopher Columbus!" Monty Lowther broke off in surprise and alarm as a burly figure in a fur cap, pulled down over his eyes, loomed up before him in the dimness of the shadowy lane.

"Don't try to git away!" went on the rough voice. "There's nigh on a dozen of us 'ere, and you'll get smashed up, so I warn yer!"

The juniors halted. The ruffian had a huge bludgeon in his hand, and a second figure loomed up behind him in the gloom. How many more of them there might be the juniors could not guess, though they did not believe for a moment that there were really a dozen.

"What do you want?" exclaimed Tom Merry sharply.

"How dare you stop us?"

The big ruffian chuckled.

"That's good, ain't it, Micky?" he grinned; and his

companion chuckled, too. "We wants your spare cash, young gents. Likewise your watches. Likewise your tie-pins, and any odd vallybles you has about you. We ain't pertickler. Are we, Micky?"

"No, we ain't, Bilker."
"And the things hover!" went on the owner of the hoarse voice. "We don't want to 'urt you. But we'll brain you all round if you don't 'and 'em hover! Won't we, Micky?"

"That we will, Bilker!"
"You hear me!"
"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "Allow me to point out that this is highway robbery, and that you will get sent to prison—"

"He, he, he! Funny young gent, ain't he, Micky?"
"He, he, he! He are, Bilker!"
"And hover them bags to start with, then the rest of the loot, and sharp!"

Tom Merry set his teeth. He believed that these two were all the foes that they had to contend with, as no others had shown themselves or spoken. For six St. Jim's fellows to allow themselves to be despoiled by a couple of tramps was impossible. The bludgeons looked dangerous, but the juniors were plucky.

"Now, then—"
"Weally, my dear fellows," said Arthur Augustus, "we must wefuse to comply with your most unweasonable request! I must twouble you to stand out of the path while I pwoceed on my way."

"If you don't 'and over— Oh!"
There was a sudden "biff!" Tom Merry had handed over his bag, but not in the way exactly that the footpad wanted it. The hero of the Shell suddenly swung it into the air, and sent it hurling into the ruffian's face, and before he could avoid it, it smote him heavily right on his rugged features.

The rascal was bowled over like a ninepin, and went with a crash on his back into the hard road. The other scoundrel, swearing savagely, sprang forward slashing with his weapon; but Figgins, with great quickness, caught the blow on his bag, and stopped it, and Blake swung round the bag he was carrying and smote the rascal on the side of the head with it. There was a yell from Micky, and he measured his length in the road.

Tom Merry sprang to his bag and picked it up again. Bilker was just staggering to his feet. Tom swung the bag round and caught him under the chin with it, and sent him fairly flying, feeling as if every tooth in his head had been loosened.

A bludgeon, as it was dropped, fell upon the foot of D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a howl. He picked up the weapon, and lashed out with it at the footpad, and the unfortunate Bilker gave a yelp and squirmed away into the darkness. There was a sound of running feet.

"Huwway!" shouted D'Arcy, forgetting the pain in his toe in his triumph. "Huwway! I have put the feahful wuffian to flight! He is wunnin' like anythin'! Let me get at that othah wascal!"

And D'Arcy rushed at the man Micky, who had risen to his feet, looking very dazed, and delivered a terrific blow, in his excitement, which would probably have brained the rascal if it had taken effect.

But Micky did not wait for it. He dodged through the hedge and disappeared across the heath, running as fast as his legs could carry him.

The bludgeon, meeting with no resistance, crashed down, and D'Arcy had a narrow escape of reducing his own toes to pulp.

"Huwway!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "He's wunnin', too!"

"Bravo" cried Blake. "It was D'Arcy did it—he did it with the terror of his glance—"

"Or the horror of his chivvy!" said Lowther.

"Lowthah, I wegard that as a wude wemark. I have defeated these wuffians, who would othahwise have wobbed us, and I weally think—"

"Oh, get along!" said Figgins. "There may be a gang

of them in the vicinity. And suppose they come back in force!"

The suggestion was enough to make the juniors lose no time in getting on their way. They had had a lucky escape, but if Bilker and Micky returned with a gang of scoundrels to aid them, a different tale would be told.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry; and the party strode on at a rapid pace.

They did not exactly run, as that would not have been dignified, but they kept up a good pace, and nothing more had been seen of the ruffians when they arrived at Laurel Villa.

Tom Merry paused as he reached the gate.
"I say, you chaps," he said slowly, "if you don't mind, we won't say anything about that little adventure. It will alarm Miss Fawcett."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "It won't do any harm to keep mum, excepting that it will deprive Gussy of his glory as the heroic deliverer."

"Oh, weally, Figgins—"
"It's understood," said Blake. "But while we're here, Tom, we'll have a look for the rotters, and lay them by the heels before we go back to St. Jim's."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Mum's the word!"
They marched up the garden path to the house, and Tom Merry knocked a thundering knock at the door.

CHAPTER 5.

At Laurel Villa—A Dangerous Ruffian.

"TOMMY!"
The door flew open, as if by magic, almost before Tom Merry had let go the knocker; which seemed to indicate that Miss Priscilla Fawcett had been watching from the window, and had seen the juniors coming up the garden path.

It was Hannah, Miss Fawcett's favourite maid, who opened the door; but Miss Fawcett was immediately behind her.

"Tommy—dearest Tommy!"
Miss Fawcett rushed at Tom and clasped him to her heart.
"Dearest Tommy! I am so relieved—so glad you have come! I have been so—so terrified! You have come to save me!"

"Ye-e-es!" grunted Tom, trying to extricate himself; but very gently, for fear of appearing unaffectionate.

He had a real and deep regard for his old governess, who had been kindness itself to him since he was a tiny tot, but he had never fully appreciated public demonstrations of affection, especially as Miss Priscilla, with feminine obstinacy, persisted in regarding him as a little boy after he had reached the ripe age of fifteen.

"Darling Tommy! How good of Dr. Holmes to let you come—and how good of you to come! You came because I was in danger—"

"Exactly!"
"I have been so frightened! You will stay till my brother comes, dear Tommy—you and your friends?"

"Rather!"
"Yaas, wathah, Miss Fawcett! We have come down to see you thwough this dangah," said D'Arcy. "Pway be weliaved at once of all your tewwors."

"Dear Tommy! But it is such cold weather for travelling! You are sure you have not caught cold in the train?"

"Quite!"
"You put on your special chest-protector before starting?"

"I—I—I—"
"And you took six of those green pills I sent you, to be taken with a glass of hot water immediately before starting on a journey?"

"Er—you see—I—"

"And you are quite sure you kept your feet dry?"
"I say, the chaps are waiting in the cold—"

"Oh, how very, very thoughtless of me!"
Recalled to hospitable duties, the anxious old lady made immediate amends. She greeted the juniors of St. Jim's with a heartfelt cordiality that went right to their hearts at once.

Dinner was over at Laurel Villa, but in anticipation of the possible arrival of Tom Merry that evening, a goodly supply of tempting viands had been kept warm for the party. But the cook of Laurel Villa would willingly have cooked a dinner in the middle of the night, if need had been, for Tom Merry. He was the idol of the household at home, as he was of the Form at St. Jim's. His sunny nature made him a favourite wherever he went.

After the long, cold journey, the juniors were in a humour to do the late dinner full justice.



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"Girls' Friend."

PRICE ONE PENNY.

Miss Priscilla beamed on her guests from the head of the table, and saw to it that everyone had what he required; and, in fact, more than he required.

The old lady had evidently been in a state of nervousness, from which the arrival of her ward and his chums had relieved her.

When Tom Merry inquired into the nature of the terrible peril that hung over Laurel Villa, Miss Fawcett gave him a graphic description of the cause of her fears.

In a small village like Huckleberry Heath, the presence of any strangers was naturally noted and commented upon; and the fact that several rough characters had been seen in the neighbourhood had alarmed all the old ladies for miles round.

Hannah had detected a roughly-dressed man looking over the wall into the kitchen-garden, and on another occasion a tramp had begged for a crust at the gate. These circumstances were quite sufficient to terribly alarm Miss Fawcett.

"They want my lace," explained the old lady, with a nod of conviction. "You know, the valuable lace my brother sent me from India, Tom. Your friends shall see it tomorrow. It is wonderful lace, a century old at least, and has been worn by princesses in the Court at Delhi. Francis sent it home to me as a present, and it is worth a fabulous sum. I am convinced that the thieves have heard of it—"

"But how could they hear of it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, these horrible people have ways and means of finding out anything," said Miss Fawcett. "I have been informed that they can always discover when a house contains valuables, and my old lace is worth hundreds of pounds."

"But you are taking great care of it, of course?"

"Oh, yes. It is safely locked up in a chest, hidden away in a cupboard," the old lady said triumphantly. "They won't find it very easy to discover it when they break into Laurel Villa."

"I should think they're more likely to come after the silver," said Monty Lowther, with a glance at the sideboard.

Miss Fawcett's silver was very old and massive and valuable, but she had evidently hardly given it a thought. She shook her head at Lowther's remark.

"Ah, no, it is the lace they are after. But they will not dare to come, I think, now that Tom is home with you dear boys," said Miss Priscilla. "You will stay until my Brother Frank is here, and all will be safe."

The boys went to bed early that night, and were up correspondingly early the following morning. Arthur Augustus was first out of bed, in the big room where the six slept, as in the dormitory at St. Jim's, in a row of beds.

"Hallo, Gussy! Wherefore this early rising?" asked Figgins, looking at the swell of St. Jim's as he hopped out of bed. D'Arcy looked very baggy in a suit of Tom Merry's pyjamas.

"You forget that I have some shoppin' to do," said D'Arcy. "I wish to get into the village as soon as the shops open, you know."

"Ha, ha! We'd better all go with Gussy, kids, and see that he does his shopping in proper style."

"Yaas, wathah! I think I had better get a new silk hat while I am on the business, you know, as well as some clothes. I should like your opinion on it, deah boys."

"Good!" grinned Tom Merry. "You won't find Huckleberry Heath exactly Bond Street, but there's no doubt you can get a silk hat—if you like the style."

The juniors were prompt to time for breakfast. Miss Priscilla was beaming, as usual, in the breakfast-room, into the wide windows of which the early sunshine fell cheerily.

"Good-morning, nurse!" said Tom Merry, kissing her on the cheek. "We've scared off the desperadoes already, you see. There was no alarm in the night."

Miss Priscilla shook her head.

"I hear someone moving outside the house at midnight," she said.

"Perhaps it was the dog."

"No, I am convinced it was someone after the lace; but he did not attempt to break in."

"Well, that was lucky for him. We should have been on his neck in no time."

"Yaas, wathah! I say, chaps, while we're shoppin' today in the town, you know, I weally think we had better buy a wevolvah apiece—"

"A what?" shrieked Miss Fawcett.

"A wevolvah," said D'Arcy. "I cannot shoot vewy stwaight, but if I got vewy close to the burglah, and put the muzzle of the wevolvah close to his head, I am certain I could blow his bwains out, you know."

"Oh dear!" gasped Miss Priscilla.

"Of course, it would make a feahful mess about the place," said D'Arcy; "but it would be a lesson to him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughin' matter, Figgins, especially for the burglah, if I blow his bwains out. Mind you don't forget to get the wevolvahs, that's all."

"You must not do anything of the kind," almost shrieked Miss Fawcett. "Dear me! I should never sleep again if I thought there were firearms in the house!"

"But, you see, my deah Miss Fawcett, we should be able to give the wottahs a feahful lesson if we have a wevolvah apiece."

"No, no, no, no, no, no!"

"If we blew out the bwains of two or thwee of them, the othahs would give the house a wide berth, you know, and it—"

"No, no, no! I—I would rather lose my lace than any such dreadful thing should happen. Besides, you might shoot the wrong person."

"I think that's very likely, if Gussy starts monkeying with a revolver," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Fawcett," said Figgins. "We won't let him get any firearms. He isn't really half so bloodthirsty as he sounds. He has never really killed anybody yet."

"Oh, weally, Figgins—"

"We'll watch him," said Monty Lowther. "Besides, I don't suppose you can buy revolvers in Huckleberry Heath."

"No, that is very true."

"Of course, I should be extwemely sowwy to do anythin' that would alarm a lady, and that lady our esteemed hostess," said D'Arcy, with a bow. "We will give up the ideah of the wevolvahs. Aftah all, it would be quite simple to bwain a burglah with a pokah if you get to close quartahs with him."

"You—you cannibal!" said Tom Merry, rising from the table. "Come and buy a silk hat, that's more in your line."

And, breakfast over, the six juniors sallied forth. The morning sun was shining on the wide heath, and the lane that led down to the village. The juniors, stepping out cheerfully, passed the scene of the previous night's encounter. A dirty fur-cap was lying under one of the hedges—sole memento of the conflict.

Monty Lowther stirred it with his foot, and kicked it out into the lane.

"I say, Gussy, it won't be necessary for you to buy that silk hat!" he exclaimed. "This cap will suit you down to the ground."

D'Arcy turned his head.

"What is that, Lowthah?"

"Catch! Look out in goal!"

Lowther lifted the cap neatly with a running kick, and it flew towards D'Arcy, but the swell of St. Jim's was just adjusting his eyeglass, and was not looking out in goal.

Biff! The elegant scion of the house of D'Arcy gave a shriek as the cap biffed on his nose and dropped to the ground at his feet.

"Goal!" shouted Herries.

D'Arcy looked at the cap, and looked at Lowther. Then he made a wild rush for Tom Merry's chum. Blake caught him by the shoulder and swung him round, grinning.

"Steady, Adolphus!"

"Welease me, Blake! I insist upon your weleasin' me immediately, while I give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Run for your life, Monty!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Welease me! He has kicked that howwid wag in my features, and I will give him such a feahful thwashin'!"

"Rats! Steady on!"

"I refuse to steady on! I distinctly refuse to do anythin' of the kind! I am not angwy, but it is impos. for me to forget what is due to my dig. I have no alternative but to inflict a thwashin' upon Lowthah!"

"Hold him while I escape!" gasped Monty Lowther.

And he started down the lane at a wild run. Blake released D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's started in hot pursuit. The chums followed, laughing too much to be able to keep pace.

"Lowthah, stop! I insist upon your stoppin' immediately. I am wunnin' myself quite out of bweath!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" floated back from Monty Lowther; and the race went on right into the village street.

Monty Lowther dodged into the little station, and the swell of St. Jim's followed him breathlessly. There was a sudden yell as D'Arcy went into the little doorway of the station at full speed.

A little gentleman, with a face as brown as a berry and a travelling-bag in his hand, was just coming out, and D'Arcy sat down in the doorway and gasped. Lowther, almost convulsed with laughter, ran to the assistance of the foreign-looking gentleman, and caught him and saved him from falling.

"My word!" gasped D'Arcy. "Sir, I must weally say that it was careless of you to come out of the station without lookin' where you were goin'. You have given me a feahful shock to the system."

"You impertinent young rascal!" roared the little gentleman; and, brandishing his umbrella, he made a rush at D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's made an effort to dodge, but too late. The umbrella came down on his silk-hat, and smashed it into a concertina shape at one fell swoop, and the brim looped over D'Arcy's eyes.

"Ow!" yelled the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's. "Ow! My hat! The howwid wuffian has wuined my hat!"

"There!" exclaimed the little brown gentleman, dancing round the junior, who sat in the doorway with his ruined hat about his ears, overwhelmed by this calamity. "There! Impertinent young rascal! Hah! Yes, young villain, that will teach you. Hah!"

And the little man marched out of the station, travelling-bag in one hand and umbrella in the other, looking very triumphant.

Tom Merry & Co. came up at a run, and passed the stranger, and poured into the station to see what had become of Lowther and D'Arcy.

They found Lowther hanging to the rail in front of the booking-office, helpless with laughter, and D'Arcy sitting on the floor, with his ruined hat in his hands, looking at it in unspeakable woe.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "Hear me smile!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet.

"Did you see a dangewous-looking wuffian pass you, Tom Mewwy?" he asked excitedly.

"No, I didn't notice one," said Tom. "What was he like?"

"A little dwied-up-lookin' chap, with eyes like black beads, and a face the colah of—of bwown leathah, with a bag and an umbwellah."

"Oh, yes; he passed us," said Blake.

"He stwuck me with the umbwellah," said Arthur Augustus. "He wan into me in the most clumsy way, and then stwuck me on the hat with his beastly umbwellah. He has wuined my hat. It has just stwuck me—"

"What has? The hat?"

"Pway don't wot! I am on the twack."

"On the track of what—whom—which?"

"That dangerous wuffian is one of the gang who are twyin' to wob Miss Fawcet!" said D'Arcy, with conviction.

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry. "I didn't look at him; but he has really treated D'Arcy's hat in a beastly rude manner, and a man who is capable of damaging a silk hat, is capable of robbing his own grandfather of ninepence."

"I wish you would be sewious, Tom Mewwy. I am convinced that I am on the twack, and I weally think we ought to keep that wascally wuffian in sight."

Herries looked out of the station.

"He's gone," he said—"disappeared."

"That is extwemely unfortunate. We might have capchahed him. I know perfectly well that he is a leadah of the wuffians, pwobably the wingleadah. Pewwaps we shall fall in with him again."

"Let's hope so," grinned Tom Merry. "Now we'll go and do the shopping."

"I have not yet thwashed Monty Lowthah."

"Gussy, I'm surprised at you! How can you be so discourteous?"

"Eh?" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, touched in his tenderest spot. "I weally hope you do not considah me capable of wudeness, Tom Mewwy?"

"You want to thwash one of my guests."

"Weally, deah boy, I did not look at it in that light. I will leave the thwashin' till we get back to St. Jim's, Lowthah."

"Thanks, Gussy," said Lowther, with becoming humility.

"I will make my will as soon as we get to the school again, and give a last feed in the study, and then I shall be ready.

You will shed a few tears over my grave, won't you, chaps?"

"We will, we will," said Blake; and he sobbed in anticipation. "It will be a relief to hear no more of your puns, and those things you call jokes; but we shall m-m miss you, you know."

Arthur Augustus turned away in haughty disdain.

"Come along," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get home to lunch at one, and you know what a time it takes Gussy to do his shopping."

"Let us go to the hattah's first," said Arthur Augustus.

"I cannot wear this thing any more. I am vevy unfortunate with my hats. I had two silk hats wuined on our twip to town the othah day, you know. It is wathah wotten."

Tom Merry knew Huckleberry Heath inside out. He led the way to a little shop in the ancient High Street, which was a clothier's, hatter's, outfitter's, and stationer's, and also a post-office. Besides fulfilling these various functions, the shop had pork-pies and diablo sets for sale.

D'Arcy looked at the place rather disapprovingly.

"Is this the best place in this feahful hole, Tom Mewwy?" he asked.

"Quite the best," said Tom Merry blandly. "This is where the fashionable folk of Huckleberry Heath do their shopping, you know."

D'Arcy still looked dubious, but as there was evidently no choice in the matter, he followed Tom Merry into the shop.

CHAPTER 6.

D'Arcy Does Not Buy a Hat.

THE shop was small, and crowded with goods. There was just about enough room for the six juniors to crowd into it. Tom Merry rapped on the counter, and then gave the foremost place to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

A stout gentleman with a very red face came out of the little parlour behind the shop after the juniors had been waiting some minutes.

"What can Oi do for 'e?" he inquired politely.

"I want a new hat," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose you have a silk hat? My hat has been wuined by a blow fwom an umbwellah, and I must have a new toppah."

"Cert'nly, sir."

The shopkeeper, with the slow and deliberate movements natural to a native of Huckleberry Heath, dived down behind the counter, and produced a box. From the box he unrolled several wrappings of paper, and then he disclosed a hat. It was a silk hat, of a date about fifteen years back, and the shopkeeper laid it on the counter with an air of pride.

"There you are, sir," he said.

D'Arcy surveyed the hat with a decidedly disparaging glance.

"That doesn't look my size," he said.

"Try it on, sir," said the obliging shopkeeper. "You never know what's the fit of a 'at till you try it on."

D'Arcy tried it on. It was a couple of sizes too large, and looked about fit for his grandfather to wear when he had got it on. The juniors nearly choked in their endeavours to keep solemn as they stood round D'Arcy to give advice.

"Is it too small, sir?" asked Mr. Slocum. "I can easy stretch it a little."

"It's too large, vevy much too large."

"Then I can easy pad it under the band inside, sir."

"Are you sure that is the latest fashion, my deah fellow? It looks a bit diffewent fwom the hats I have been wearin'."

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"It was not a very dangerous weapon," remarked Mr. Fawcett, holding it up for inspection. "A pipe!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "My word! Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as extremely funny."

"Latest fashion!" repeated Mr. Slocum. "I should say so, sir! Why, that 'at hasn't been in my shop more'n two years."

D'Arcy gave a sort of gasp.

"Haven't you any others?"

"Never keep more than one in stock, sir," said Mr. Slocum. "There ain't much demand for 'igh 'ats in 'Uckleberry 'Eath, sir."

"I suppose not," said D'Arcy. "But do you weally mean to say sewiously that you call yourself a hattah, and have only that one antiquated toppah in your shop?"

"The latest thing, sir! That 'at hasn't been in the shop more than two years and a half, and I assure you—"

"Have you got a looking-glass so that I can see it?"

The man scratched his head.

"No, sir, I'm afraid not; but if you walked down the street to the Huckleberry Arms, I'm sure the landlord would let you look in his big glass, if you mentioned my name."

Arthur Augustus gave a sniff.

At the thought of the swell of St. Jim's walking down the street in that hat, the chums could no longer restrain themselves. They burst into a simultaneous yell, which made Mr. Slocum jump, and awoke every echo in the little shop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy looked round at the convulsed faces, and then handed the hat back to the owner.

"I'm afwaid that hat won't suit me," he said. "I'll take a cap, if you've got any, to last me till I can buy a hat."

D'Arcy found a cap which he thought he could possibly wear for a few hours. Then he turned to Tom Merry.

"Pway lead the way to the outfittah's," he said.

"Here you are," said Tom Merry.

"What, you mean to say that—"

"Same place, old kid."

"I can supply anything, sir," said Mr. Slocum, rubbing his fat hands. "Anything in the line of Eton suits—fashionable overcoats—"

"Where are the fashionable overcoats?"

"There's some 'anging up behind you, sir."

D'Arcy turned round and surveyed the overcoats.

"Do you mean those wags?" he asked.

"Rags! They're the—"

"Wats! Tom Mewwy, surely there is a shop in this town where I can buy some wespectable clothes?"

"I'm afraid this is the only one," grinned Tom Merry.

"Mr. Slocum supplies all the inhabitants of Huckleberry Heath with clothes, and they're satisfied. Fashions never change here. But if you want something really smart in smock frocks—"

"Oh, don't wot! This is a sewious situation, with all my beastly luggage left at St. Jim's, and no place to do any shoppin'."

"Why don't you buy that hat? It gives you a nice venerable appearance."

"Pway be sewious! I wegard this as a beastly pwactical joke, to bwing me to a place where I cannot even purchase a beastly necktie."

"Lots of neckties, sir," said the obliging Mr. Slocum. "I can show you a great variety of neckties, sir. I've had a new ones in this year."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Show us the neckties."

Mr. Slocum showed the neckties. They were terrible-looking things, with nearly every colour in the rainbow worked into them, and of huge dimensions. D'Arcy looked at them, and looked at Tom Merry, and was silent. Words failed him.

"Take this nice one with red and yellow spots," urged Figgins. "It will match your waistcoat, and if you don't like it as a necktie, you can use it for a cummerbund in the summer, kid."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Then there's this beautiful thing with pink stripes on a green ground, and bars of crimson and yellow," said Blake, "warranted to kill at forty yards—I mean, a very striking article, gentlemen! Do have that one, Gussy!"

"If you cannot be sewious, Blake, pway be silent."

"But you can't worry Mr. Slocum for half an hour without buying anything," said Monty Lowther. "Fair play's a jewel. You must have the hat or the neckties."

"Oh, I don't mind the tin, you know," said D'Arcy, laying a sovereign on the counter; "but I should not like to be around with those neckties about me. Suppose anybody thought me capable of wearin' one of them?"

"Awful! But, I say, they will do to tie up the burglars if we capture them," Figgins suggested. "It would serve 'em the rascals right to have those neckties round them."

"Yaas, wathah! I never thought of that. I will take all the neckties, my good man, but about the hat, I should weally advise you to take it away and buy it."

"A very good hat," said Mr. Slocum, restoring the valuable tile to its box, and wrapping it up in paper. "The latest thing! I haven't had that hat in my possession more than three years or so."

Tom Merry looked at his watch. "I say, it's time we were off. We've wasted a lot of time, and we shall have to buck up to be back for lunch. Miss Fawcett is awfully punctual."

The neckties were wrapped up, and paid for, and D'Arcy put the bundle under his arm, and they turned to the door.

"Anything more I can do for you, gentlemen?" said the obliging Mr. Slocum. "I can show you some of my new stock of gloves that came down last year."

But Arthur Augustus did not stay to look at the new stock of gloves that had come down last year. The juniors poured out of the shop. D'Arcy's face was very thoughtful as he walked down the street with his companions. Some idea was evidently working in his mind.

"Penny for your thoughts, old kid," said Tom Merry.

"I was just thinkin', Tom Mewwy, whethah you could possibly excuse me to Miss Fawcett if I did not weturn to lunch."

"Why, where do you want to lunch, then, image?"

"It is impewatively necessawy for me to have a new hat. Some occasion might arise upon which I shall wequire a tappah, and you can imagine how I should feel if I actually was without one at the time."

"Yes, rather! You would feel an awful ass."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But that oughtn't to worry you, as you are one, you know."

"Pway be sewious. I think I must take the twain to the town and buy a silk hat, and weturn to Lauwel Villa in time for tea."

"Do as you like, old boy, but don't miss your lunch. You can get a fine lunch here at the Hucklebury Arms for ninepence—boiled bacon and cabbage and—"

"Ow!" said D'Arcy, with a shudder. "I will lunch in the town—Southminster, I think it is called. Then I will go and catch my twain, and wejoin you latah. You will be sure to make my excuses to Miss Pwiscillah."

"Oh, certainly!" grinned Tom Merry.

"I say, old kid, you can have my topper if you like," said Figgins.

"Thank you vewy much, Figgins, but I weally could not wear that dweadful-lookin' thing you call a toppah," said D'Arcy. "I don't want to appeah ungwateful, of course, but I ask you sewiously, could I wear a toppah that only cost seven-and-sixpence in the first place, and has had the wear and tear of a month since?"

"You won't get the offer a second time, you horrid image," said Figgins wrathfully. "It's a jolly good topper, I can tell you. I've had it only a month, and it's stood a lot."

"Yaas, wathah, it looks as if it has."

"Look here, if you're going to catch the train to Southminster, Gussy, you'd better buzz off," said Tom Merry.

"There's only one train in an afternoon, and it goes in five minutes!"

"Weally! Pway excuse me, deah boys; I must wun like ythin'!"

And D'Arcy dashed off to the station, and the juniors, sighing, took the road to Laurel Villa.

CHAPTER 7.

A Slight Mistake.

TOM MERRY uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hallo, look there!"

The juniors had made good pace, and they were close to Laurel Villa when Tom Merry pointed out a figure in the lane in advance of them, just stopping at the gate of the long garden.

"The dangerous ruffian!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I say; he's going in!" said Blake. "Is it possible that D'Arcy was right? He's usually a giddy ass, you know, but he may have been right for once!"

Tom Merry looked serious.

"Well, the old chap looked a bit fierce, though I only

caught a glimpse of him," he said. "You saw more than I did, Lowther; what did you think of him?"

"Peppery sort of customer, I thought," said Lowther; "he bashed D'Arcy's topper a treat! Had a foreign look about him."

"Some foreigner, looking out for what he can lay his hands on," said Herries. "He's certainly gone into the garden. Come on, and let's see what he's up to, anyway!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors ran on swiftly. It did not seem likely that a burglar would make any attempt upon Laurel Villa in the broad daylight, yet the situation was a lonely one, and there was no man in the house but a wheezy old gardener. Daylight robberies had been perpetrated before, and would be again.

The juniors arrived in a moment or two at the gate. Tom Merry looked across it, and the figure of the stranger came into view again.

The dining-room windows, looking out on the lawn, were wide open. They were French windows, and gave easy access to the house. The stranger had left the path up to the door, and was walking towards the open windows.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"You see him, kids?"

"Come on," muttered Blake; "he's plainly one of them and he knows there are only women in the place—quick!"

"He's one of the gang," muttered Lowther. "See, he's stopped, and he's looking in, to see if anyone is about!"

It was true.

The stranger had paused at the French windows of the dining-room, and was looking in, as if in doubt whether to enter.

"It's the silver he's after," said Herries. "He's got that bag to carry it away in, of course."

"I'll wager it's the silver more than the lace," said Blake. "Look, he's gone in! Come on, and we shall nab him in the very act!"

It seemed impossible to doubt longer. If the man had been an accustomed visitor of Miss Fawcett, Tom Merry would, of course, have known him by sight. For a stranger to enter the house unannounced by the French windows, looked like a proof of dishonest intentions.

The juniors crossed the lawn at a rapid run. Tom Merry held up his hand as a sign of caution as they drew near the French windows.

He looked in silently. The stranger was standing in the room, looking about him with an air of coolness that got Tom's back up at once. His glance came towards the window, and he saw Tom Merry.

Tom Merry waited for no more. It was useless to give the villain time to draw a revolver, or a concealed bludgeon. The hero of the Shell simply hurled himself in, and was on the stranger's neck in a moment.

Taken by surprise, the man went backwards and thumped on the floor, and Tom Merry sprawled over him, pinning him down.

"Come on!" he yelled. "Buck up, St. Jim's!"

The juniors hardly needed the call. They were already pouring in, and they swamped the stranger, as he struggled and attempted to throw Tom Merry off.

With Tom astride of his chest, and Figgins kneeling on one arm and Herries on the other, Lowther sitting on his legs, and Blake with his fingers in his collar, the stranger was quite helpless.

"Don't resist, my man," said Tom Merry; "we've got you!"

"You—you young rascals!"

"Oh, ring off! Shut up, and take it calmly!"

"Great Juggernaut! You young villains!"

"No nonsense, now! You're fairly caught, and you may as well own up! I wonder how much plunder he's got in that bag?" said Figgins.

"Let me get up!"

"Rats! Where are those neckties? Oh, dear, that ass D'Arcy ran off with them under his arm! Take off your braces to bind the beast with, Figgy!"

"Likely," said Figgins; "here's Miss Fawcett coming!"

"Let me get up!"

"Not this time! I say, we'd better 'phone for the police!"

"Are you mad? I am—"

"Are you really?"

"I am—"

"Whatever is it?" cried Miss Priscilla, who had, of course, been alarmed by the uproar. "My dear—dear boys, whatever has happened?"

"Don't be alarmed, dear—"

"Whatever—whatever is it?"

"Pray, don't be alarmed! It's a burglar, but we've got him safe!"

"A burglar? Oh, help—help!"

"Calm yourself, Miss Fawcett," said Lowther; "we've

got him tight, and if you'll give us a blind-cord, or something, we'll bind him hand and foot!"

"Yes, yes, yes; at once!"

"Let me get up!" roared the prisoner. "Have I got into a private lunatic asylum by mistake? Cannot a man enter his own sister's house without being taken for a burglar?"

"Francis!" shrieked Miss Fawcett.

The juniors were electrified. They rolled off their prisoner as quickly as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

"Francis!" shrieked Miss Priscilla again, staring at the stranger.

"Priscilla!" exclaimed the little gentleman, staggering to his feet. "Who—what—how— Is this the greeting I receive when I return home after twenty years in India? Ha! Juggernaut! You set of rascally budmashes, what are you doing in this house?"

"Francis!"

"One moment, madam, while I drive these young scoundrels out of the house!" exclaimed Mr. Francis Fawcett, brandishing his umbrella.

"Francis," screamed Miss Fawcett, "it is Tom Merry!"

"Tom Merry! My old friend General Merry's nephew?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

Mr. Fawcett threw down his umbrella.

"My word! Hah! And that is how you greet your old nurse's brother, is it, Thomas Merry?"

Tom's face was crimson.

"I—I—I am awfully sorry, sir," he said. "I—we—as—that is, we—we took you for a burglar, sir!"

"Hah! A burglar! Pah! Bah! Hah!"

Mr. Fawcett's ejaculations were expressive of the most profound contempt. But Tom Merry's penitent look softened him.

"You see, sir, I didn't know you by sight," said Tom Merry; "and I saw you walk into the house by the French windows—"

"Ha, ha! Yes, I suppose it would look rather strange, when I come to think of it! I expected to find my sister here. Why, you young rascal, that is how I used to come into the house thirty years ago; before you were born!"

"You see, sir, we—we knew there were dangerous characters hanging round the house, and when we saw you sneaking in—I mean going in—"

Mr. Fawcett laughed. He certainly had a peppery temper, but his storms were like those of the tropical land he came from—furious, but brief. He was soon all smiles.

"Well, if you took me for a burglar, it was plucky of you to tackle me!" he said. "Are you not the boys I saw at the station?"

"Yes, sir; we didn't know you then."

"And the boy who ran into me?"

"He's coming in later. You bashed in his hat, and he's gone to Southminster to buy a new one!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Hah, I'm sorry! Ha, ha; it was very funny, though! Well, I forgive you! I am glad to see you, Tom. Priscilla, my dear sister, you have not kissed me yet! Now introduce all your young friends, Tom!"

Tom Merry presented the juniors of St. Jim's, and Mr. Fawcett gave them a hearty handshake all round. The Anglo-Indian was a wiry little man, with a great power of grip, and his hand-shake made some facial contortions among the juniors. It was possible that he knew the strength of his fingers, and put on a little extra grip to repay the scramble on the floor, in which he had got decidedly the worst of it.

"I hope I am in time for lunch?" said Mr. Fawcett. And Tom Merry smiled at the idea of a man coming home from India after twenty years' absence, and asking whether he was in time for lunch.

"Certainly, Brother Frank," said Miss Priscilla; "I will show you to your rooms at once myself! They are all ready; though I did not know you were coming to-day for certain."

"Steamer made extra good time," said Brother Frank; "got into Southampton this morning, and I caught the first train on."

"Where is your luggage?"

"Here," said Brother Frank, picking up his bag.

"But—but—"

"I am an old globe-trotter, Sister Priscilla; I have crossed half the world with precisely this amount of luggage. I shall be glad to see my rooms."

And Mr. Francis Fawcett followed Miss Priscilla from the room. The juniors looked at one another.

"Well, that was a ghastly bloomer, and no mistake!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; but he's taken it very well."

"He's a good old sort!" said Herries. "Lots of men would have lost their tempers and borne a grudge for the handling we gave him!"

"That's so," agreed Figgins. "But, I say, after that

tussle I want a brush up, and you look as if you want the same. Follow the man from Cook's!"

And the juniors trooped up to their own quarters. They came down in time for lunch, and found Brother Frank already at the table. Lunch was served to the exact minute—as it always was, and as everything else was, at Laurel Villa. And the only one absent of the party was Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 8.

A Narrow Escape for Arthur Augustus!

BROTHER FRANK proved to be an entertaining little gentleman. The sun of India had dried up his skin, but not his heart, and he had a kindly, though rather dry nature. His little black eyes twinkled sometimes very humorously, looking like black beads in the brown on his sunburned face.

The juniors rather took to him from the start. His abrupt way of speaking was a thing to grow accustomed to, that was all; and before lunch was over Tom Merry was calling him Uncle Frank—though, as a matter of fact, Miss Fawcett and her brother were the most distant relations of the hero of St. Jim's.

And "Uncle Frank" he soon became to all the juniors. His little brown face wrinkled up seriously at the story of the burglars, for one of whom the juniors had mistaken him. He smiled in his dry way when Miss Priscilla stated her firm conviction that the rascals were after her lace, and not after any more substantial valuables.

"My dear sister," said Mr. Fawcett, "they are after your silver, if they are after anything."

"But my beautiful lace—"

"Nonsense! They are after the silver!"

"I have taken every precaution," said Miss Fawcett, unheeding. "I have wrapped up the lace carefully, and placed it in an old chest, double-locked, and hidden it away under a heap of things in a cupboard, and—"

Uncle Frank grunted. He had a very expressive grunt, which could mean almost anything, and on the present occasion it seemed to mean that he considered Miss Fawcett's elaborate precautions quite unnecessary, and wide of the mark.

"They are after the silver, sister, if they are after anything," he said.

"I am sure that—"

"My dear girl," said Uncle Frank, apparently having forgotten the two decades which had elapsed since last he had seen Priscilla. "My dear girl, I tell you I know better; they are after the silver!"

"Oh, very well, Brother Frank!" said the old lady, giving in at last.

"But they shan't have the silver," said Uncle Frank, flourishing his fork, "not while I am here, sister."

"I feel so safe, now that you are home, Frank!"

"You are safe, indeed, my dear. I should like to see the burglar that would break into the house where I was!" said Uncle Frank, looking very warlike.

After lunch, the Anglo-Indian had a number of Oriental curiosities to show the boys, in which they were keenly interested.

There was one article especially among the curios Mr. Fawcett produced from his bag that attracted their attention.

It was a little idol, not more than six inches in length, but well-executed, and apparently made of solid gold.

The countenance was hideously repulsive, and a bizarre effect was imparted to it by the two eyes formed of glittering rubies, real or imitation.

"Ugly little beggar!" said Lowther, examining the idol. "I suppose this is worth a lot of money, Mr. Fawcett."

"I have been offered a thousand rupees for it!" replied Uncle Frank, with a smile.

"My hat! Really!"

"Yes, and by a great collector of curios, whom I met on the steamer. He was so taken with the little god that I really thought he would steal it. In fact, an attempt was made, and I was almost certain that the delinquent was Mr. Solomonson. But I could not be sure, and, as you see, I have the idol safe."

"Where did it come from?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

"I can only tell you the tale that was told me by the Hindoo I bought it of," said Mr. Fawcett. "The same tale I told the collector on the steamer. It was stolen, according to his account, from the great Temple of Benares, and the Hindoo priests have been hunting for it ever since it was taken. That is why he was willing to part with it for a small sum."

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla. "With so many valuables in the house—"

Crash!

It was a tremendous crash of the knocker at the door. Miss Priscilla gave a slight shriek, and the boys started.

"The burglars!" gasped Miss Priscilla faintly.

"Ah," said Uncle Frank, "nonsense! Burglars don't usually come with a loud double knock, unless manners and customs have greatly changed since I was last in England."

Night had fallen, and the lamps were alight in Laurel Villa. Hannah was heard going to the door, and there was another loud knock before she could get it open.

"Thank you vewy much!" gasped a voice. "I have been wunnin' like anythin'!"

"Gussy!" exclaimed the juniors; and they rushed out into the hall to see what was the matter with the swell of St. Jim's. Mr. Fawcett did not go out. He only grunted.

"Hallo, Adolphus!" exclaimed Figgins. "Wherefore this thushness?"

"Oh, pway don't wot!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "They are aftah me!"

"Who are?"

"Those feahful wuffians we met last night—Bilkah and Micky they called each other. I was comin' along the lane with my hat-box, when they suddenly spwang upon me, and I wushed off like anything. I came near dwoppin' my hat-box, but fortunately I had the pwesence of mind to save it."

And the swell of St. Jim's set a hat-box, evidently containing a silk topper, down on the floor, and gasped again.

"Bravo!" said Tom Merry. "You've saved the topper, and, after all, that was the most important. I suppose that was what they were after?"

"Certainly not! What would be the use of a silk toppah to those wuffians? They were aftah my watch and chain, you know, and my tin, and weally it would have been a gweat pwize to them, as I have a fivah in my waistcoat pocket, you know. They went aftah me like anythin', and followed me wight up to the gate!"

"I suppose they're gone now," said Figgins, looking warlike. "I'd like to—"

"Yaas, wathah! The scoundwels! I wecognised their voices, you know, and they were the same two feahful wuffians. But I believe that wascal we met at the station to-day belongs to the same gang."

"I say, Gussy," said Tom Merry, hastily, aware that Mr. Fawcett was within hearing.

"You wemembah the wotter," said D'Arcy, unheeding. "He wan into me, and then bashed in my toppah in the most wuffianly way. I wegarded him as a dangerous wuffian fwom the moment I saw him—"

"Gussy!"

"He had a wicked old face, and his eyes were those of a burglah or a murdewah," went on D'Arcy. "I never saw a more shockin' countenance in my life!"

"Gussy, you ass, he's in this room—"

"I am here," said Mr. Fawcett, appearing in the doorway. "I am very glad to hear such a flattering description from Master D'Arcy! Ah!"

D'Arcy stared at the Anglo-Indian in amazement.

"That is the wuffian!" he gasped.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry. "That is Uncle Frank—Miss Fawcett's brother."

"What! That same bwown-colahed wascal—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Uncle Frank. "I am sorry I damaged your hat, D'Arcy, and I will buy you a new one, or you must allow me to pay the seven-and-six."

D'Arcy drew himself up to his fullest height.

"I pwesume that you are jokin'!" he said.

"Not a bit of it!" said Mr. Fawcett heartily. "I mean it—every word. I spoiled your hat, and I'll pay for another, just as good."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins.

But D'Arcy did not laugh. He fixed his monocle in his right eye, and seemed to be trying to paralyse the Indian with a glance.

"If you think, sir, that I ever wore a seven-and-sixpenny hat, you are labouwin' undah a gweat mistake," he said. "I always give a guinea and a half for my toppahs!"

"Do you?" said Mr. Fawcett; and he grunted. "Ah! Then you are an ass, sir—yes, an ass! Understand me—I say an ass!"

D'Arcy looked round through his monocle.

"I suppose this is a little jape," he said languidly.

"Whethah this is a burglah, or not, I am convinced that this wude person is not the bwothah of our amiable and extwemely esteemed hostess, Miss Pwiscillah."

"Yes, I am, sir!" roared the Anglo-Indian. "And I regard you as a young ass!"

"And I wegard you as an extwemely wude person."

"Frank! D'Arcy!" said the distressed Miss Priscilla.

Blake and Herries had seized D'Arcy by the shoulders, and were fiercely muttering in his ears; but, between the two, the swell of St. Jim's could not comprehend.

"Don't be a silly ass—"

"It's Mr. Fawcett—"

"You must apologise—"

"Stop acting the giddy ox—"

"Chuck it—"

"Don't you understand—"

Arthur Augustus jerked his head free.

"I weally wish that you would not muttah in my ears!" he said loudly. "I cannot understand a word you say, eithah of you!"

Blake and Herries could have wiped up the floor with him. Tom Merry and Figgins were laughing too much to be able to speak. Lowther gripped D'Arcy by the arm.

"Ass!" he exclaimed. "Don't you understand—"

"I object to bein' called an ass!"

"You owe Mr. Fawcett an apology. You are frightening Miss Priscilla."

That was enough for D'Arcy. The politeness of Arthur Augustus was never known to fail him, in the most difficult situations.

"Weally, I am extwemely sowwy!" he exclaimed. "Miss Fawcett, I hope you will overlook any wemarks made in the huwwy of the moment, and I hope you will do the same, Mr. Fawcett, if you are weally our esteemed hostess's bwothah. I am extwemely wegwetful of havin' said anythin' that might give offence—"

The Anglo-Indian grinned.

"Say no more!" he exclaimed. "Let bygones be bygones, and you shall pay for the hat yourself, to show that there is no ill-feeling."

D'Arcy looked rather puzzled. He did not quite see how that was made out; but he assented at once.

"Give us your fist!" went on Uncle Frank, with a malicious gleam in his eye; and he held out his hand.

"With gweat pleasuah, sir!" said D'Arcy.

He shook hands with Uncle Frank. The wiry fingers of the Anglo-Indian closed on his hand with a grip like steel. Arthur Augustus gave a wriggle, but after the warm words that had passed, he did not like to try to withdraw his hand. The grip on it closed tighter and tighter, and D'Arcy's face became wryer and wryer.

"Ow!" he exclaimed at last, involuntarily.

"My dear lad, there is nothing I like in a boy so much as a hearty grip of the hand!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcett, apparently not noticing D'Arcy's writhings. "It shows strength of muscle and a warm heart."

"Ow!"

"Another grip? Certainly! With all my heart!"

"O-o-o-o-ow!"

Mr. Fawcett released D'Arcy's hand at last. It was time, for the swell of St. Jim's seemed to be trying to tie himself up in a knot.

"I am sure we shall be friends," said Uncle Frank, beaming. And he led the way into the room again. The juniors followed, nearly suffocated with laughter. D'Arcy was rubbing his right hand tenderly with his left, and making all sorts and varieties of contortions with his face.

"I—I considah that that was a beastly pwactical joke, Howwies," he whispered. "If I were not a guest in this respected establishment, I should be stwongly inclined to chawactawise the action as wude. I weally feel vewy pained!"

"Go hon!" said Herries, grinning.

D'Arcy kept a suspicious eye on Mr. Fawcett after that. Come what might, the swell of St. Jim's was fully determined not to shake hands with Uncle Frank any more.

CHAPTER 9.

Indian Magic.

It was a merry evening at Laurel Villa. After dinner, which was very lively, Uncle Frank, having revealed himself as possessed of a considerable fund of dry humour, the little party prepared to enjoy themselves till bed-time came round.

Tom Merry had telephoned to the police-station at Huckleberry Heath, concerning the attack made upon D'Arcy in the lane, it being useless to think of longer concealing the proximity of the ruffians from Miss Fawcett, of course, after the attack. The inspector replied through the 'phone that the rascals were being searched for, and that the police expected to lay them by the heels before morning. When Uncle Frank heard that, he grunted—a most expressive grunt.

During the evening, Uncle Frank gave a little exhibition of Indian magic, and performed some really clever conjuring tricks. Miss Priscilla trembled when he had made flames play round her curtains, and produced a snake from a china vase, but breathed freely again when no harm came of it.

Uncle Frank next asked for a hat, with the proviso that it

must be a silk hat, and quite new; and Herries kindly obliged by fetching in D'Arcy's brand-new topper.

"I say, Hewwies," whispered D'Arcy, as his chum came in with the hat-box, "what are you going to do with that hat, you know?"

"Give it to Mr. Fawcett, for his magic."

"But, I say, you know, that's my beastly new hat, you know!"

"Well, I don't suppose he'll hurt it."

"Yaas; but he might, you know, and——"

"Hand over the hat," said Uncle Frank. And D'Arcy subsided with a groan, and the new topper was passed to the conjurer.

Mr. Fawcett took it, apparently oblivious of D'Arcy's ill-concealed anxiety. D'Arcy prided himself upon his politeness, which could really bear a great strain, but it was put to a severe test now as Uncle Frank took the hat out of the box.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Uncle Frank, "I shall now produce flame and smoke from this hat, and you will see it slowly crumble to pieces and be utterly destroyed while I hold it at the end of a pair of tongs."

"Oh, my word!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Then I shall restore it to its owner, none the worse for having been destroyed," said Uncle Frank blandly.

"Good!" said Figgins. "I should like to see that done."

"But I must be assured that the owner of the hat has no objection, in case anything should go wrong," said Uncle Frank, fixing his gimlet eyes on D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus made a great effort, and smiled.

"I weally have no objection in the world, you know," he said.

"You are quite sure of that?" asked Mr. Fawcett.

"Yaa-aa-aas! Wathah!"

"Then I will proceed with the trick."

The Anglo-Indian was certainly very clever in the conjuring line. The juniors could have sworn that it was the same hat that he held up by the brim with a pair of fire-tongs. Smoke and flame issued from it, for some time appearing to cause no damage to the hat, and D'Arcy breathed again. But his hope was shattered.

The flame gradually caught upon the material, and burned it away, and with a flare the hat shot into flame, and then died down in smoke.

Only a blackened cinder still hung in the grip of the fire-tongs in the hand of Uncle Frank. D'Arcy's hopes sank to zero.

"You see, ladies and gentlemen, that the hat is utterly destroyed," said Uncle Frank, holding up the incinerated wreck.

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry.

"Rather," said Figgins; "and if you're able to give D'Arcy back his tile, sir, I shall be astonished."

"Of course, there is always something going wrong in these tricks of magic," said Uncle Frank, staring intently at the hat. "I—I am afraid——"

He paused, and looked at D'Arcy with an expression of great distress.

Arthur Augustus gave him a stony glare through his eye-glass.

"You have destroyed my hat!" he exclaimed.

"I am glad that I had your full permission to use it for the trick," said Mr. Fawcett. "And if you are not satisfied with the hat as I restore it to you, I will gladly provide three-and-ninepence for a new one."

Arthur Augustus did not reply. If he had been insulted by the offer of seven-and-sixpence for a new topper, he was outraged by the mere suggestion of three-and-ninepence. Words were unequal to the occasion.

"It is really too bad," said Uncle Frank, still staring at the wrecked hat; "but it gives D'Arcy an opportunity to show the real fortitude of his nature."

"Yaa-aa-aas! Wathah!" faltered D'Arcy. "I—I—I don't mind in the least."

"Well said!" exclaimed Uncle Frank heartily. "I admire you for that, D'Arcy. I really believe that your courtesy would stand any strain."

"I hope so, sir," said D'Arcy, in his most stately manner.

"And if I asked you for something else for another trick——"

D'Arcy changed colour.

"You would hand it over without a murmur, I am sure."

"Yaa-aa-aas. Wathah!"

"Then, may I trouble you for your watch?"

"M-m-m-m-my w-w-w-w-watch!" stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, your watch. I am going to shatter it to fragments."

"You are goin' to shattah my watch to—to—to——"

"Yes, and then restore it to you quite unharmed."

Every eye was fixed upon D'Arcy.

Tom Merry felt certain, by the twinkle in Uncle Frank's

little black eyes, that he was only "japing" the swell of St. Jim's, and would do no harm to his watch. But Gussy was feeling extremely uneasy.

"If D'Arcy objects," said Mr. Fawcett, "I will use my own watch."

"Not at all, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, as Blake and Herries nudged him. "Not in the least, deah boy! Here's my beastly watch!"

He unfastened it from the chain, and handed it to the Anglo-Indian. Mr. Fawcett received it, and hurled it upon the table—or, at least, appeared to do so. If the watch slid up his sleeve, and another was hurled on the table in its place, it was done so neatly and quickly that not a single eye detected it.

A shudder ran through Arthur Augustus.

The watch crashed on the table, and the glass smashed in, and then Mr. Fawcett gave it a terrific crack with a poker, which settled the works. Then he threw it down on the floor, and kicked it about a little, and stamped on it; and finally he picked it up again. Then a very distressed look came over his mahogany face.

"Great Juggernaut!" he was heard to mutter. "How the dickens does this trick go? D'Arcy, would you be very much pained to hear that I could not possibly restore this watch to its original condition?"

"Not at all, sir," said D'Arcy, with a ghastly smile.

Mr. Fawcett slipped the ruined watch into his pocket.

"Well, I am sorry," he said. "That is two tricks that have gone wrong. But, you see, I am only an amateur, and picked up my knowledge from the Indian jugglers for a few rupees, and so I cannot be expected to be absolutely successful every time."

"Yaas, wathah!" said poor Gussy. "That's all wight."

"You don't mind in the least?"

"Not at all. I—I wathah enjoy it, you know."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Then, there is nothing to complain about. Now for the last trick. You see this little golden idol, which Mr. Solomonson offered me one thousand rupees for? It possesses magic properties, and can be changed into a serpent."

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake. "That's rather steep."

"You will see. I shall light a fire on the table——"

Miss Priscilla shuddered.

"The table will not be harmed by the kind of fire I shall light," grinned Uncle Frank. "You need not be at all nervous, my dear sister."

He produced a little rosewood box, and placed it on the table, and then spread some aromatic powders upon it. Then he placed the little idol in the box, performed some passes with his hands, and muttered some sort of incantation in Hindustanee. The boys watched him eagerly.

Without any visible agency, smoke began to rise from the box, and then blue tongues of flame appeared. The aromatic powders sent a strange, penetrating smell through the room, and the rosewood box was completely enveloped by thick smoke.

Figgins gave a sudden yell.

From the smoke a hideous form writhed suddenly—a snake, about two feet long, with a beautifully-marked skin, and eyes that glittered like precious stones.

The juniors sprang away from the table, and Miss Priscilla shrieked, as the snake squirmed away, dropped to the floor, and disappeared in a twinkling behind the window curtains.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

Uncle Frank, with a solemn and serious face, went on muttering and making passes with his hands. The smoke cleared away, leaving nothing in the room of its vapour—only a slight, lingering scent. The boys looked into the rosewood box, but it was empty. The little idol had disappeared.

"My word!" said Blake.

"But—but—but the snake!" said Miss Priscilla, in shaking accents. "You will not allow it to remain in the house, Francis?"

Uncle Frank laughed.

"The snake has already undergone a second metamorphosis," he said blandly. "Master D'Arcy will you kindly go behind the curtain, and hand out what you find there?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Take care," said Miss Priscilla faintly. "The dreadful thing may bite you."

"There is not the least danger," said Uncle Frank reassuringly. "D'Arcy will be quite pleased by what he finds there."

Arthur Augustus drew the curtain back. Then he gave a yell.

ANSWERS

Tom Merry sprang to his side in a moment. But it was not danger. The swell of St. Jim's was staring blankly at a silk hat, in which reposed a gold watch.

"My toppah! My watch!

"My only pyjama hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

D'Arcy picked up the hat and the watch. Mr. Fawcett was watching him with a dry smile. The articles were passed round for inspection.

It was certainly the new silk topper D'Arcy had bought that afternoon in Southminster. It was certainly the gold watch he had received as a birthday present from his pater. They had evidently not been destroyed, after all.

The general exclamations of wonder were probably very gratifying to the conjurer. D'Arcy put his watch on the chain, with a great deal of satisfaction.

"That was weally vevy clevah," he said—"it was weally, you know. You gave me a gweat fwight, you know; but it was weally vevy clevah. Yaas! wathah!"

"I hope I gave you a lesson, too," said Uncle Frank drily.

"But all's well that ends well; and now it is bedtime."

"He is weally a vevy funnay boundah," D'Arcy confided to Tom Merry, as the boys went up to bed. "He gave me a feahful fwight ovah my hat, you know, and my beastly watch; and I thought he was an awful ass, you know."

"Thank you!" said a voice.

D'Arcy gave a violent start.

It was the voice of Uncle Frank, but the Anglo-Indian was nowhere to be seen. Arthur Augustus was looking quite startled as he went into the bed-room.

Tom Merry was looking surprised, too.

"I say, there's somethin' uncanny about that chap," said D'Arcy. "I distinctly heard him speak in the passage, and he wasn't there. Eithah he is a beastly ventriloquist, you know, or else he's a beastly demon."

"Odds on the ventriloquist," said Figgins. "Well, I vote him a jolly old boy, and I think we shall have a good time while we stay here."

CHAPTER 10.

The Burglars.

CREAK!

Tom Merry gave a start. He had been dreaming of India and Indian magic, and a tiger and a snake had been chasing him through his nightmare, and they had suddenly become transformed into a silk hat and a gold watch, when he awoke. He awoke in a cold shiver, and then the sound in the silence of the night fell upon him.

Creak!

Tom Merry was wakeful at once. He knew that there was a loose board in the passage outside his door, and that it always creaked like that when it was trodden on. The old house was full of slight sounds in the midnight stillness, but that particular sound was well known to Tom Merry.

He lay in the darkness, wondering what the time was, and quite certain in his mind that someone had just passed his door.

Loud and clear through the silent night came the chime from the village church across the heath.

Tom listened anxiously as the hour struck. Three strokes! It was three o'clock in the morning! It was impossible for any dweller in Laurel Villa to be up at that hour! Who had passed his door and made the board creak?

Tom's faculties were all fully on the alert now.

He remembered the ruffians of the lane, and the attack on D'Arcy. Miss Priscilla's lace was safely hidden away, but there was enough valuable old silver in the house to make the fortune of a gang of burglars.

There was little doubt as to what had happened. The house-breakers had made their attempt at last.

Doubtless they were quite in ignorance of the fact that Uncle Frank had returned from India. They knew that the boys were in the house; that was all. Tom Merry slipped quietly out of bed and hurried his clothes on. The night was very cold, but he hardly noticed it in his excitement.

Figgins put his head sleepily out.

"Hallo, what's the trouble? Who's that getting up?"

"Hush, Figgy!"

"Righto! But what's the matter?"

"They've come at last."

"Who've come?"

"The burglars."

"My word! Are you sure?"

"Someone has just passed the door. They got in by the window over the outhouse at the end of the passage, I think. They're in the house."

"Lucky we're here," said Figgins, in a low voice. "Let's wake the chaps, and we'll go down in a gang and nab 'em."

"That's the wheeze."

The juniors were soon awakened. Each was wakened with a hand over his mouth, to keep him quiet, and it was neces-

sary in D'Arcy's case, for the swell of St. Jim's insisted upon asking questions.

"Wh-wh-wh-w-w-w-w-what——" he mumbled, under the choking hand.

"Burglars!" whispered Tom Merry, "Quiet!"

"Wighto!" said D'Arcy.

And he rose silently and dressed. Tom Merry picked up the poker out of the grate. Figgins took the tongs. Blake had a cricket-stump, which he had thoughtfully placed by his bedside. Lowther grasped a walking-stick, and Herries the lid of a soap-dish.

"We'll go to Uncle Frank's room first," said Tom Merry.

"The thieves are bound to be in the dining-room. Stay! You fellows wait here while I go and wake up Mr. Fawcett. Quiet!"

"Wighto, deah boy!"

Tom Merry left the room silently, and stole cautiously along the passage. He heard a faint sound below the staircase, and knew that the burglars had descended to the ground floor. He reached Mr. Fawcett's room, and passed in. A faint light streamed in at the open window.

"Uncle Frank!"

Twenty years on the frontiers of the Empire had taught Francis Fawcett to be a light sleeper, to wake at a sound and with all his wits about him.

In a moment a whisper came back from the darkness of the bed.

"Yes? Is that you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, sir. There are burglars in the house."

"Hah!"

"They're in the dining-room, sir. We're all awake and ready to go for them, but I thought I ought to call you first."

"Hah! Quite right, Tom! Quite right!"

"They're after the silver, of course, sir. We——"

"I'll be with you in one minute."

Tom Merry silently rejoined his chums.

"Is he coming?" murmured Figgins.

"Yes; he'll be along in a minute."

In deep silence they waited, and Uncle Frank came along the passage in dressing-gown and slippers, with something in his hand.

"Ready, sir?" whispered Tom Merry. "We ought to collar them as quietly as possible, sir, so as not to alarm——"

"Quite right, Tom. I hope my sister will not hear anything about it till the morning," said Mr. Fawcett. "Follow me."

He led the way down the stairs in his slippers.

The dining-room door was partly open, and a faint gleam of light came from within.

Mr. Fawcett looked in, and caught a glimpse of two dim forms.

Tom Merry was beside him, and he caught a glimpse, too, and there was something familiar in the figures that acquainted him with their identity at once.

"Bilker and Micky!" he murmured. "The roughs who attacked us in the lane."

Mr. Fawcett made a sign for silence.

He made no attempt to enter the room, but appeared to be examining something in his hand which he had brought from his bed-room.

Suddenly his hand rose, and something was jerked from his palm into the room, and fell with a light thud upon the carpet.

There was a gasp of alarm from within the room.

"You 'eard that, Micky?"

"I 'eard it, Bilker."

The two ruffians stared about them uneasily. They were cramming the massive silver from the sideboard into a sack, and there was a musical clink of metal as Micky dropped the sack.

"Look!" gasped Micky.

He stared in blank terror at a small object on the floor. It had been invisible when it dropped from the hand of Uncle Frank, but now it was glimmering with a faint blue flame, with strange sparkles in it.

"Wot—wot is it?" gasped Bilker.

"It's a-a-a-a snake!"

From the little flaming ball a snake appeared to unroll itself, dimly seen, but terrible in the pale light, with a gleaming, scaly back and glittering, red eyes.

Micky made a dash to the window.

"It's—it's a snake—a pizenous one!"

Bilker made a dash at the snake, a cudgel swinging aloft in his hand. He was evidently of a more determined nature than his companion. The cudgel came down with a crash on the writhing snake.

Then the burglar staggered back.

The moment the cudgel touched the writhing form it exploded into a stream of sparks, and the burglar was dazzled and bewildered.

(Continued).



THE TEMPEST HEADLAND

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questions I put to you. I shall put some more difficult ones, and you had better take great care how you answer them.

Mr. Rolls put some rather awkward ones. Snigg was not able to answer a single one, but Willie was correct nearly every time.

"Your ignorance is lamentable, Snigg," said Mr. Rolls. "Here is a little boy, at least six years your junior, who knows infinitely more than you do. In fact, I fail to see that you know anything. Can you read?"

"Of course I can!" sobbed Snigg, who, although a dreadful bully himself, had a great aversion to being bullied. He felt that he was being unfairly treated, and this made him sorry for himself. It also made him weep, and Mr. Rolls kept telling him not to snuffle.

"Say the alphabet, you dolt!" roared the new master. "Say it straight through! It begins with A."

It was gall and wormwood to Snigg, but the upraised cane and Mr. Rolls' stern manner quelled him. The new master actually smiled at the shouts of laughter as he forced Snigg to go through the alphabet.

"I see you know that!" he exclaimed. "I am glad to discover that you actually know something. I won't listen to your reading this morning. Your crass ignorance has shocked me too much already. I really think that you are the most ignorant boy I have ever come across. But I shall teach you, my lad. Ah, I shall teach you! You will find that I am a very different description of master to those you have been accustomed to. My method is to cane a boy who will not learn. All boys can learn. Even an utter idiot like you can learn, if he is made to do so. You will be wise. You will find the floggings I intend to administer a great incentive. Now, I believe it was you who struck that little boy in that brutal manner. It is my intention to find out; and if I am satisfied that it is you, I shall publicly flog you!"

"You have no right—"
"Silence! Answer my questions. When did you strike that boy last?"

"I am not in the habit of striking boys smaller than myself."

"Indeed! My impression of your nature is that you would never dare to strike a boy bigger than yourself. Mind this, Snigg, you will gain nothing by speaking falsely to me. I will have the truth. When did you strike that boy last?"

"I boxed his ears about a fortnight ago."

"Is that the last time you struck him? Take care, boy."

"Yes."

"When did he last strike you, Willie?"

"Oh, please, sir, I'd rather you flogged me! It isn't kind-ness to me."

"Do you suppose that I want to be kind to you? I want to punish Snigg for having struck you in that brutal manner. Now, Snigg, you are making a rod for your own back, and I can assure you that it will be a heavy one. To hit the lad in that manner was brutal, no matter what he had done. You have one chance. Prove to me that he gave you sufficient cause to strike that blow, and I shall flog him instead of you."

"I suppose the kid isn't going to call me a liar?"

"So you did strike him?"

"He hurt himself by falling."

"He did not black his eye by falling. Did you call him a liar, Willie?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the reason?"

"I would rather not say."

"I suppose he insulted you. Ah, you are silent!"
"He did not exactly do that, sir."
"Is your father living?"
"No, sir."
"Ah, then your mother is, and that was the lady whom he insulted! He made some insulting remark concerning that lady, and you were foolish enough to take notice of it. You see, boy, I can read your thoughts pretty correctly. I can tell by your changing countenance that I am correct. Snigg, you cowardly bully, I intend to give you a lesson that you will remember to your last day. I will stop your bullying, my lad."

Then Mr. Rolls seized the cowardly young bully. Some people may have thought he struck too hard. Snigg certainly did, judging by the way he howled. Mr. Rolls seated himself on a chair, got the bully across his knee, and, as Venus would have said, he whacked a treat.

At every stroke of the cane a howl burst forth; there were a good many howls. Snigg was in a very helpless position, and he did not dare to show fight. He only howled at the top of his voice, and the noise he made brought the masters to the scene. Dr. Buchanan was the first to enter the room, and for some moments he gazed in blank astonishment at the extraordinary scene. Mr. Rolls, who had not seen him, whacked away as though he enjoyed it, though it is very certain that Snigg did not.

"I'll teach you to bully a little boy and black his eye," panted the new master. "I'll teach you to answer your master impertinently, and—"

"What is this?" gasped the doctor, striding forward. Mr. Rolls dropped his howling victim to the floor, and gazed at the Head with a sort of blank expression.

"Who are you, fellow?" cried the doctor.

"Er—sorry, sir. Didn't think you were in."

"Are you hurt, Snigg?"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus. The question appeared superfluous—not to say stupid—to him.

"Woo-hoo! Warah! I'm dying!"

"Nonsense. Who are you?"

"If you please, sir, I am Cyril Conway—er—sort of impersonating Mr. Rolls. Sorry, sir. Little accident. Was merely putting Snigg through his paces, and—er—teaching him."

"Do stop that noise, Snigg! Silence, boys! Take off that wig and moustache, Conway!"

Cyril obeyed, and stood revealed to the howling boys. He gazed in a lamblike manner at his master, and looked as mild as buttermilk. Dr. Buchanan did not.

"Explain what has happened, boy," ordered the Head.

"If you please, sir, you sent me to the station to meet Mr. Rolls, knowing that I was a quiet, steady lad, and—"

"Nothing of the sort. I had other reasons for sending you."

"Well, sir, he must have missed his train, and it gave me the idea of impersonating him. I dodged into the barber's, and hired this wig and moustache, then I borrowed one of the masters' cap and gown, and—er—came to give the boys a lesson. They have enjoyed it—especially Snigg, sir. If you ask him, he will tell you that he has gone through the most exciting quarter of an hour in his life."

"I wuw-won't stand this!" howled Snigg. "I shall write to my father. I won't stay at the college to bub-be treated like this, and by that demon. I wish he would drop dead—"

"Silence, boy! You don't know what you are saying in your passion."

"Yes, I dud-doh. I'm most frightfully injured. No master has ever hit me like that—and to think it's only that beast Conway. Oh, won't I punch your head for this, you meek-faced blackguard!"

"I will not allow such language, Snigg," cried the doctor. "Of course, Conway has behaved in a very disgraceful manner, and must be punished for it; but you have no right to call him those names."

(Another long instalment of this splendid school story in next Thursday's number. Please order your GEM in advance.)

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