Tom Merry's Merry Message is inside.

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Tom Merry's Guest

A GRAND TALE OF TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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NO. 47. VOL. 2.

MESSAGE

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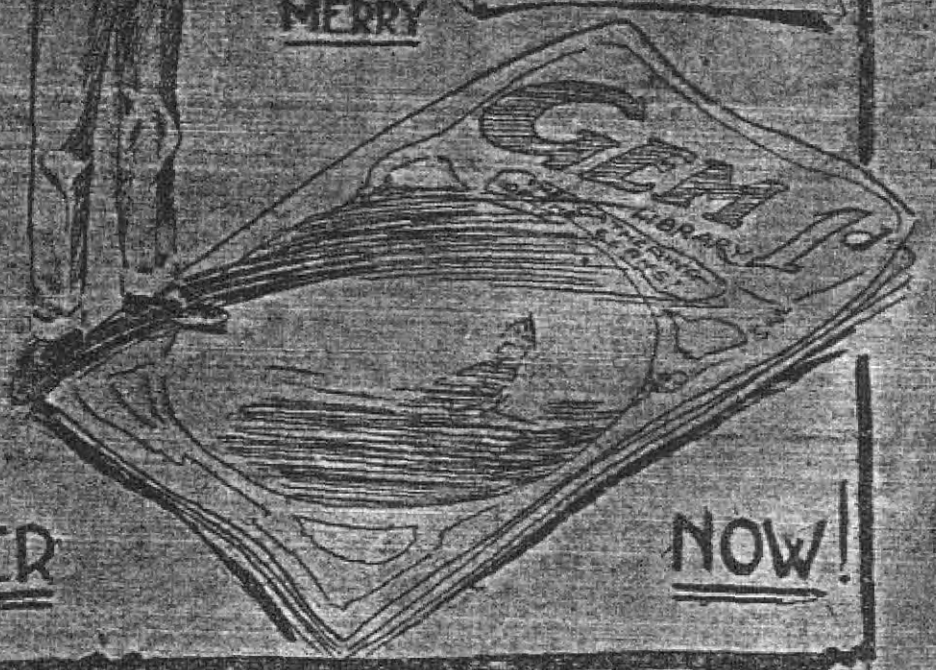

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"THE PETS OF ST. JIM'S." A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

No. 47. Vol. 2.

A "MERRY" MESSAGE.

Dear Chums,

It's not next week but the week after that that it comes off.

Yours jollily,

Tom Merry.

NEXT THURSDAY.

ONE HALFPENNY.

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

TOM MERRY'S GUESTS.

A Complete Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Visit from Uncle Frank.

TOM MERRY came off the football field at St. Jim's with the ruddy glow of health in his cheeks. There was an extremely muddy football under his arm, and a satisfied smile upon his face.

The School House had just beaten the New House by two goals to one, and so Tom Merry, the captain of the School House juniors, had reason to be satisfied with himself and his team.

Manners and Lowther, Tom's chums in the Shell, looked equally pleased, while Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, were brimming over with satisfaction.

"Done them this time," said Blake, with a grin. "Figgins played up like a giddy International, but we were bound to walk over them."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Right, Blake; and I must say that you kids played up well against the New House," he said approvingly.

The words of praise from their captain did not seem to particularly elate the chums of the Fourth. Blake, in fact, gave Tom Merry an extremely aggressive look.

"Who are you calling kids?" he asked.

"My mistake," said Tom Merry blandly. "I should have said cads—but really——"

"Telegram for you, Master Merry," said the School House page, who was waiting for Tom outside the pavilion.

Tom Merry took the buff envelope and looked at it rather anxiously. A junior at St. Jim's did not frequently receive telegrams, and naturally the thought crossed his mind that it might mean some bad news from home.

But as he opened it and glanced over the message a smile broke over his face.

His companions looked at him with interest.

"What's the news?" asked Manners. "Somebody died and left you a fortune?"

"Miss Fawcett coming to pay you a visit, and bring you a new chest-protector and a bottle of cod-liver oil?" asked Lowther.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "This is from Uncle Frank!"

"And what——"

"He's coming down here. Listen. Handed in at Huckleberry Heath post-office. 'Coming by the 4 o'clock. Rylcombe.—FRANCIS FAWCETT.'"

"Good," said Manners and Lowther together. They evidently liked the idea of a visit from Uncle Frank.

"I shall be glad to see him," said Blake. "He's wired so that you can meet him at the station, Tom Merry. I think we'd better all go, and show him that we appreciate the honour. Eh, what?"

"Yaas wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "It is weally incumbent upon us, you know, to tweat Uncle Fwank with gweat wespect. He was vewy kind to us at Hucklebewwy Heath, you know."

"Righto," said Herries. "Let's go and meet the train. We shall have time if we buck up."

Tom Merry glanced up at the big clock on the tower.

"By Jove! we shall have to buck up!" he exclaimed. "This wire has been here some time, I suppose. Let's get changed and be off. We'll all go, of course."

"Let's ask Figgins too, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "He was with us at Hucklebewwy Heath, you know, and vewy fwiendly with your wespected uncle."

"Of course. I say, Figgy! Figgy!"

Figgins, the captain of the New House juniors, had gone off the field. He turned in the doorway of the pavilion as he heard Tom Merry calling. Kerr and Wynn—otherwise known as the Co.—were with him, and they stopped too. Figgins & Co. were looking just a little bit glum. They had expected to win that footer match, and they had played up well to win, but the School House had been a trifle too strong for them.

"Hullo," said Figgins.

"You remember Uncle Frank," said Tom Merry, joining Figgins & Co. "He's coming to Rylcombe by the four train. Will you come along to meet him with us?"

"Rather," said Figgins, heartily. "Jolly glad he's coming. We'll give him a welcome. You kids will come too."

"Certainly," said Kerr.

"Oh, yes, rather," said Fatty Wynn, "I suppose it will be the proper thing for somebody to stand a feed when a distinguished visitor comes, won't it? I think so, anyway."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I expect there will be a feed," he remarked. "You'll have a chance to show what you can do in the line, Fatty. Uncle Frank won't have seen all the sights of St. Jim's unless he has seen Fatty as a trencherman——"

"I don't eat much," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Somebody's always cracking jokes on the subject, and that's got me a reputation as a big eater. I'm fearfully hungry now, after the footer. A goal-keeper gets hungrier than any of the others, I think."

"Ha, ha! He does when he's named Fatty Wynn. But get changed, kids; we shall have to hustle to get to Rylcombe in time."

The juniors were not long in towelling down and changing their clothes. Inside of ten minutes they were all ready, with a single exception. That exception, of course, was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Come on, Gussy!" shouted Blake, looking in again.

"Wait a minute, deah boy! I cannot find my tie-pin."

"Come without it."

The swell of the School House stopped in his search for the missing tie-pin, to fix a withering glance upon Blake.

"If you think I can go to meet a wespectable gentleman without a tie-pin, Blake, you are makin' a gweat mistake," he said.

"You silly ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I wegard——"

"If you can't come without the pin, look for it, fathead."

"How can I look for it while you are talkin' to me. You are wastin' time——"

"Are you coming?"

"Yaas, wathah, when I have found my tie-pin."

"I say, aren't you ready?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking in. "It's high time we were off."

"Gussy is off," growled Blake, "right off his silly rocker. He's looking for his hair pins——"

"Don't be fwivolous, Blake. I am looking for a tie-pin, Tom Mewwy——"

"Here, take mine, if you can't come without one," exclaimed Blake, impatiently.

D'Arcy looked at the pin Jack Blake extended towards him. Then he shook his head.

"I am afwaid I couldn't wear that pin, Blake. It is not at all a nice one——"

Blake glowered.

"Righto, then you'll come without one, ass. Get moving, donkey. If you don't shift I shall stick the pin in you, fathead. Do you hear, image?"

"I wefuse to be chawacterised—oooohoooh!"

Blake had given the swell of St. Jim's a gentle dig with the tie-pin, and D'Arcy jumped a foot clear of the ground.

"Blake! You howwid beast——"

"Are you going?"

"Not until—pway keep that pin away—you howwid boundah—don't! Ow! Yaas, I am goin'—I will go without my tie-pin if you like."

"Thought you would," grinned Blake, as D'Arcy bolted. "Come on, Merry! I've shifted the image at last."

The nine juniors marched off together towards the gates. D'Arcy was looking extremely indignant, and it was evident that the loss of his tie-pin still worried him. Not that he thought of the value. It was certain to turn up, for that matter. But Arthur Augustus was extremely particular about his appearance.

Tom Merry looked at his watch as the party poured out into Rylcombe Lane.

"I say, we shall have to run," he exclaimed. "Follow your leader, kids. I'll race you to the station."

"Righto."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, after a game of footah, it is weally too exhaustin' to wun, and——"

"You'd better follow then," snorted Blake.

And the juniors set off at a run. D'Arcy hesitated for a moment, and then he ran too, and the party came into the village at top speed, and arrived breathless at the railway station.

CHAPTER 2.

The Anglo-Indian Arrives.

"NO!"

"But my tear sir——"

"Certainly not!"

"But——"

"I tell you, no. Stuff! Nonsense! No!"

"Hallo, that's Uncle Frank's voice," murmured Tom Merry, as he entered the little country station. "He's arguing with somebody. I believe he's generally arguing with somebody."

Figgins grinned.

"Who's that with him?" he said. "Do you know the bounder, Merry?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

Mr. Francis Fawcett, late of Boggleywallabad, India, and now of Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, was looking exasperated. He was a little brown-skinned, dried-up looking man, with eyes as keen as gimlets. Twenty years in the tropics had made him as brown as a berry, and his keen little eyes looked like black currants in an [illegible]. His companion, who appeared to be urging something upon him, was a member of the tribe of Israel. A very old gentleman, with very shiny hair, and a very aquiline nose, and a very insistent and, at the same time, insinuating manner.

"But, my tear sir," persisted the old gentleman, "I tell you—feefty pounds——"

"No, I tell you, Mr. Solomonson."

"Feefty pound——"

"I would not take a hundred."

"You did not give so mooch——"

"I gave ten rupees for that little idol, Mr. Solomonson, but, of course, I did not know its value when I bought it for that sum."

"Exactly. If you receive feefty pound, you make a good ting out of it."

"But I don't want to make a good thing out of it——"

"My tear sir——"

"Stuff! I tell you I won't sell the idol. That settles it. Hullo, Tommy! So you've come to meet me, have you?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, as he shook hands with Mr. Fawcett. "I was afraid we should be late. I didn't get your wire as soon as it arrived, as I was on the football field. But we're in time, so it's all right."

"Yaas, wathah! If I may make a wemark, Mr. Fawcett——"

"Now, don't bother me any more," exclaimed Mr. Fawcett, turning to the old man at his side, who was tapping him on the sleeve. "You've badgered me all the way down in the train, and I've had enough of it."

"But my tear Mr. Fawcett——"

"Ha! Get away! Stuff and nonsense! No more, I tell you."

The aspect of the peppery little Anglo-Indian was decidedly threatening, and Mr. Solomonson thought he had better give it up. He moved away, but with evident unwillingness.

"Hah! He's gone! Thank goodness!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcett. "The old fellow has been bothering me all the way from Huckleberry Heath! He got into my carriage on purpose. You remember the little golden idol I showed you at Laurel Villa, boys. He wants to buy it, and won't take no for an answer."

"Shall we duck him in the pond outside, sir?" asked Figgins, ever ready to oblige.

"Ha, ha! No. I am glad to see you all, boys——"

"If I may make a wemark——"

"Ah, D'Arcy," exclaimed Mr. Fawcett, shaking hands with the swell of St. Jim's. "Hullo, my lad, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

"N—n—n—no," gasped D'Arcy.

Uncle Frank had a grip like a vice, whenever he chose to exert the full power of his strong fingers, and D'Arcy had had the full benefit of it. The swell of St. Jim's looked quite limp.

"Are you sure?" asked Uncle Frank, tightening his grip. "You are looking very flustered, D'Arcy. Have you been over-exerting yourself?"

"N-n-n-no."

"Well, you certainly look a little exhausted," said Mr. Fawcett, releasing D'Arcy's hand, much to his relief. "You must take care of yourself."

"I was goin' to wemark——"

Mr. Fawcett looked at him.

"I am extwemely asharned," said D'Arcy, "of appearin' in the pwesence of a wespected gentleman without a tie-pin, but it is weally not my fault. It was that boundah Blake who wushed me off——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I wefuse to wing off, at least until I have pwopahly explained to Mr. Fawcett the weason why I appeah——"

"Dry up! Shall we walk to the school, Mr. Fawcett, or shall we take the hack?"

"We will walk," said the Anglo-Indian, taking up his bag. "If I had required a conveyance I should have asked Dr. Holmes to send one. I shall be staying at the school for a few days, I expect, and I hope to see something of you during that time, though I shall probably be busy during the evenings."

Tom Merry wondered what Uncle Frank would be busy about during the evenings, but he did not ask any questions. The party left the station, and the old globe-trotter set out at a steady tramp up the lane to the school, escorted by the delighted juniors.

Tom Merry dropped behind, and made a sign to Figgins, who dropped behind too.

"What's in the wind?" asked the New House leader.

"We shall have to give Mr. Fawcett a study feed," said Tom. "We had better get some things while we're in the village. Got any tin?"

"Yes, three bob and some coppers."

"Good. If the Co have any, gather it in. I'll see it clear next week. Here's all I have. Will you do the shopping?"

"Certainly," grinned Figgins.

"Bring it along to the School House when you've got it. I can't stop behind, as I am the host in Study X."

"That's all right. There's plenty of tin here, and I'll take Fatty Wynn along to help in selecting the tommy."

"Righto, and get to the school as quickly as you can. Go right into our study if we're not there, and get tea going."

"Rely on me," said Figgins.

"Uncle Frank is bound to be hungry after his journey, and the cupboard is quite bare," said Tom anxiously. "I've spoken to Blake, and it's the same in Study Six. So get a move on you, Figgy, old man, and we'll keep uncle occupied until tea's ready."

Figgins grinned and nodded, and dropped to the rear with Fatty Wynn, and stopped at the tuck-shop presided over by Mother Murphy. The rest of the juniors marched on with Mr. Fawcett.

The Anglo-Indian did not appear to notice the diminution in the numbers of his escort. His gimlet eye for a moment fixed itself on the tuck-shop, but he gave no other sign. A slight smile hovered for a moment on his brown face, however.

Tom Merry & Co. had talked a good deal at St. Jim's of "Uncle Frank" and the marvellous magical tricks he had brought from India, and so there were a number of eyes fixed upon the gentleman from Boggleywallah as soon as he entered the ancient gateway of the school.

Tom Merry was rather proud of his relation as he escorted him across the old quadrangle amid the gazing fellows.

"Hallo," Gore, the cad of the Shell, remarked to his crony Mellish. "That's Tom Merry's Uncle Frank, is it? My hat! He looks more than half baked."

Mellish giggled.

"Got a face like a bun, hasn't he? Is he Merry's uncle, or a monkey he has captured?"

"I'll ask him?" grinned Gore.

He signed to Tom Merry as the little procession came by. Tom stopped with a look of inquiry.

"I say, Merry," said Gore, in a stage whisper.

"What is it, Gore?" asked Tom Merry unsuspiciously. He was not on good terms with the cad of the Shell, but he did not guess what was coming. Gore had never been known to play the game, and he never allowed courtesy to stand in the way of a knock at anyone he disliked.

"Is that your uncle, Merry, or is it a monkey you have picked up off an organ?" asked Gore in the same stage whisper, which he knew perfectly well would reach the ears of the Anglo-Indian.

Tom Merry flushed red.

While he was in the very act of doing the honours of St. Jim's, it was particularly annoying to have his relative treated with inexcusable rudeness.

Tom did not waste time in replying to Gore's question in words. There was only one way of replying to it adequately, and that way Tom Merry replied. His right fist shot out like lightning, and Gore rolled heels over head along the quad.

Uncle Frank did not even look round.

The little party arrived at the door. Gore sat up and rubbed the back of his head, and then his nose. Mellish was grinning at him.

"You are coming to have tea with us in the study, of course, sir," said Tom Merry.

Uncle Frank nodded.

"I'm afraid that will be giving you a lot of trouble," he said.

"Not in the least; we shall be happy, sir," said three or four voices together.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "It's always a pleasuah to entertain a distinguished visitah, sir; and we'll pwovide a weally wipping tea."

Mr. Fawcett smiled.

"In that case I shall be very pleased to come," he said. "I must first go and pay my respects to the doctor. When do you have tea, Tom?"

"Oh, any—any time, sir. If it's not quite ready we'll show you round St. Jim's before it gets dark, if you like, sir."

"Certainly. A good idea."

And the visitor from India betook himself to the doctor's study, and the youthful entertainers were left to consult together.

"I wonder how long Figgins will be," muttered Tom Merry. "I'd like to have a nice tea ready for Uncle Frank. He was awfully kind to us at Huckleberry Heath."

"Yaas, wathah! You can get everything weady in the study, you know," said D'Arcy. "And you can get some gwub to start with at the school shop. Those little pork pies of Dame Taggles are vewy nice when they are fwesh, and the waspbewwy tarts——"

"Good idea," assented Tom Merry. "They're not as good as Mother Murphy's things, but we can't keep a hungry traveller waiting. Go and get some, Gussy. I've left all my tin with Figgins, so you can pay for them."

"With pleasuah, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus trotted off. The Terrible Three entered their study and began to tidy up with rapid fingers, and get the grate neat and swept, and the kettle boiling. Meanwhile, Mr. Fawcett was in the presence of the doctor.

They were old acquaintances—very old, in fact, as they had not seen each other for more than twenty years. The meeting was a very cordial one. Dr. Holmes was a great chess player, and Mr. Fawcett was equally devoted to the game, and as soon as the head of St. Jim's knew that the Anglo-Indian was in England, he had immediately asked him down to the school to settle an old and friendly rivalry.

"I am taking tea with my sister's ward, Tom Merry, in his study," Mr. Fawcett explained to the doctor, with a smile.

"We dine at seven," said the Head, as he shook hands again with his old friend.

And then the Head of St. Jim's fell to his writing again, and the man from India left the study in quest of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy is taken in—and Uncle Frank gets a Shock.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY crossed the quadrangle with unusual haste in his movements. Gore and Mellish noticed at once that he was making for the tuck-shop, and observed, too, that for the moment his manners had lost that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Going for some grub," Mellish remarked, jerking his thumb towards the swell of the School House. "They're feeding the brown-faced chap in their study. They won't ask us to the feed."

"I say, suppose we let Gussy get his stuff at the tuck-shop, and then bone it from him," suggested Gore. "It would be a ripping wheeze to leave Tom Merry and his lot without anything in the larder for the visitor."

Mellish chuckled.

"Yes, it would be all right so far; but what about when Tom Merry and the rest got on the track, and wiped up the quad with us?"

"H'm! I suppose they would be wild. But I know! We'll put the New House fellows on the scent; they'll soon relieve Gussy of his provisions——"

"No go!" said Mellish, tersely. "Tom Merry and Figgins & Co. are as thick as thieves now, over entertaining this Indian chap. House rows are off."

"Oh, hang it!" growled Gore. "I owe Tom Merry one for that dot on the nose. Can't you think of some idea, Mellish, confound you?"

Mellish grinned.

"I've already thought of one, if you like to help me carry it out," he said.

"Get it off your chest, then."

"Come on, and let's speak to Gussy."

They hurried after the swell of St. Jim's, and overtook him before he reached the school shop. Gore tapped him on the shoulder.

"Pway don't delay me now, Goah," said D'Arcy, lookng round. "I am in a feahful huwwy."

"Why, what's on?" asked Mellish.

"We've got a visitah, you know, and nothin' weady for his tea."

"Horrid!" said Gore. "You're going to give him a ripping feed, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you're going to ask us?"

"No, wathah not. The study won't hold more than ten, you know, and you are such a howlin' cad, Goah, that you can't expect it. You were wude to Mr. Fawcett when he came in."

"If you want a dot on the nose, Adolphus——"

"Shut up, Gore," said Mellish, with a wink. "Gussy's right. You were rude to Mr. Fawcett. What are you going to get, D'Arcy?"

"Some pork-pies and waspbewwy tarts," said D'Arcy. "I know Dame Taggles made a fwesh lot to-day, and when they're fwesh, they're weally wippin'."

A gleam shot into Mellish's eyes. He stopped outside Dame Taggles' little shop, and the swell of St. Jim's went in.

"I say, Gore," whispered Mellish, "will you cut off to my study, while I watch here for D'Arcy, and get me the bottle of red ink off my table, and the jar of mahogany-stain out of the cupboard."

"What on earth for?" asked Gore, staring at his companion as though he thought Mellish had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Oh, only to add a flavour to the grub for Tom Merry's study," said Mellish.

Gore stared again, and then he grinned, and then he dashed off at top speed towards the School House. He returned within three minutes with a jar in one hand and a bottle in the other. The winter dusk was thickening in the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

"Has he come out?" whispered Gore.

Mellish shook his head.

"No. Give me the things. Look here, I'll get back behind the corner, and as soon as he comes I'll dash out and send him flying—by accident, of course. You'll help him up and keep him busy as long as you can, while I do my little bit with the tarts."

"Righto!"

Arthur Augustus, unconscious of the deep-laid plot of the two young rascals, was busy in the school shop selecting his pork pies and his tarts. Dame Taggles was an economical soul, and she always tried to sell the old stale ones along with the new, and you needed a keen eye to do your shopping satisfactorily at St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus scrutinised every separate tart and pie carefully through his eyeglass, and they were then wrapped up in two paper bags. The swell of St. Jim's paid for them, and marched out of the tuck-shop with a paper bag well filled under either arm.

There was a rush of feet, a sudden biff, and a yell from D'Arcy. Mellish, dashing round the corner, had run right into him at top speed, and the swell of St. Jim's went flying. The bag of tarts flew in one direction and the bag of pies in another, and both of course burst as they touched the ground, and the viands were scattered.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" exclaimed Gore, rushing up.

He seized D'Arcy to help him to rise, and slipped, and fell upon him, pinning him to the earth.

"Lemme gerrup!" came a muffled voice from under the weight of Gore. "You howwid boundah, you are simply cwushing me! You are wuffling my twousahs and my beastly waistcoat!"

"Can't help it!" gasped Gore. "I've broken my legs."

"I don't care a wap if you have bwoken all your beastly legs and arms. Get off me and let me get up, you heavy bwute!"

"How can I when I've broken my leg?" demanded Gore, keeping an eye on Mellish as he spoke.

Mellish was industriously collecting the scattered tarts and pork-pies. He slipped a few into his pockets, as prizes of war, but most of them came in for the little improvement he had designed for the benefit of the feasters in Tom Merry's study. The raspberry tarts received a strong flavouring of red ink, which was not likely to be noticed along with the juice, and a little mahogany stain was squeezed into the pork-pies. Of course, these kindly attentions took some little time; but Gore was quite able to keep Arthur Augustus busy.

"Goah, I wegard you as a wotten cad!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, struggling in vain under the weight of the bulky Shell boy. "You are doin' this on purpose!"

"Well, that's what I call ungrateful!" exclaimed Gore. "I rush to your aid like a chum, and break my leg in helping you, and then you call me names."

"I don't believe your leg is bwoken."

"Well, I can't move, anyhow."

"You must move. I must get up. My twousahs will be wuined. My waistcoat will be a mere weck. Besides, Mr. Fawcett is waitin' in Tom Mewwy's study by this time for his tea, and we shall look wude."

"Ha, ha! I mean oh, oh, how my leg hurts!"

"You are tellin' beastly woppahs, Goah!"

"I tell you——"

"If you do not instantly let me wise, I shall thwash you when I get up. Unless you want a feahful thwashin', Goah, you will let me wise at once."

"I can't. I shall have to risk the thrashing."

D'Arcy struggled furiously. But Gore had the advantage, and he was easily able to keep the slim swell of the School House pinned down by his weight alone.

"Oh, you howwid beast!" exclaimed D'Arcy, gasping for breath. "I will thwash you feahfully when I get up! Wescue! Wescue, St. Jim's!"

"Now shut up, D'Arcy, and when my leg feels a bit better I'll get off your waistcoat."

"You are tellin' untwuths, Goah. There is nothing whatevah the mattah with your wotten leg. I wegard you as a cad."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wescue—wescue!"

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" asked Mellish, coming up out of the dusk. "I'm sorry I ran into you, Gussy. I've collected up your tarts and pies."

"Thank you vewy much, Mellish. That is a vewy fwiendly thing to do. I should wegard it as a gweat favah if you would shift this howwid boundah off me."

"It's all right," said Goah. "I don't think my leg is broken after all. The pain is gone now. You can get up, D'Arcy."

And Goah rose, and D'Arcy scrambled to his feet.

"If I were not in such a feahful huwwy, Goah, I would give you a feahful thwashin'," said the swell of the School House hotly. "Give me the bags, Mellish. Thank you vewy much. You can have some of these tarts if you like. Take some."

"No, thanks," said Mellish, whose pockets were already full, and who had no taste for tarts flavoured with red ink. "Thanks very much, but you'll want them all for the study feed. Gore I'm surprised at you for treating Gussy in this disrespectful fashion. Come along, and don't stand there grinning like a hyena."

And Mellish and Gore walked away together.

"Howwid bwute, that Goah!" murmured D'Arcy. "I despise him feahfully. This wotten wow has made me quite cwoss."

He hurried to the School House, and arrived at Tom Merry's study just as it was reached by Mr. Fawcett. D'Arcy waited for the Anglo-Indian to enter first, and then carried in the paper bags.

The cloth was laid, and in the light of the gas and the cheerful fire, the study looked very homelike and cosy. Figgins and Fatty Wynn had not yet arrived, but D'Arcy's supplies came in time to begin tea. The kettle was boiling, and Lowther made the tea as Mr. Fawcett came in. Manners and Blake were cutting bread, and Kerr was searching through the cupboard for any fragment that might have escaped previous search, wherewith to grace the festive board. He could find nothing but a fragment of mouldy cheese, which he thought he had better leave where it was.

"Please sit down, sir," said Tom Merry, drawing out the only easy chair between the table and the fire for Uncle Frank. "Tea's just ready. If the chair's too low there's a nice cushion here. That's only cocoa been spilt on it, and it's quite dry. Have you made the tea, Monty?"

"Yes, just," said Monty Lowther. "Better let it draw a minute or two."

"Righto! Pork-pies this way, please. You'll find these pies simply ripping, sir. Dame Taggles makes them, and they're a special thing."

"I'm sure I shall," said Uncle Frank. "How nice they look. You are in cosy quarters here, Tom. This makes me feel young again."

And Uncle Frank, who was really hungry, made active play with his knife and fork. Some of the juniors followed suit, for company's sake, while Lowther poured out the tea and Tom Merry was ready to pass Mr. Fawcett anything he needed.

The pork pie on Uncle Frank's plate looked very tempting. It was nicely done, and when it was cut a rich gravy ran out—a surprisingly thick and rich dark gravy.

"Very good," said Uncle Frank. "I——"

He stopped suddenly, and his jaws, which had been busy, stopped working. Tom Merry was alarmed at the look which came over the brown face of the Anglo-Indian.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" he exclaimed anxiously.

"The—the—the——"

"What is it, sir? Nothing wrong with the pie, I hope?"

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

"What can it be?"

"Ow!" exclaimed Kerr, jumping up. "Ow! What's the matter with the beastly thing? I'm poisoned!"

Tom Merry looked at him in amazement.

"Is it anything wrong with the pies, Kerr?"

"Yes. Ow! G-r-r-r-r! Ow, I'm poisoned!"

"Horrible!" exclaimed Blake, with a shudder.

"I—I suppose this is a little joke, is it?" thundered Uncle Frank, rising to his feet.

Tom Merry looked dismayed. The Anglo-Indian had a temper as hot and peppery as the climate he came from, and his face was absolutely crimson now.

"A—a joke, sir!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Yes!" roared Uncle Frank. "You have put mahogany stain or something like that in the pies, I suppose. That's what it tastes like."

"I haven't, sir!" exclaimed Tom, deeply distressed at being thought guilty of a trick upon a visitor under his own roof. "I assure you——"

"Great Juggernaut! I am poisoned!"

"Ow—ow—ow!" moaned Kerr.

"Ooh—ooh—groo!" mumbled Blake.

"I assure you, Mr. Fawcett," exclaimed Tom Merry, "I give you my word, sir, that I didn't know anything was wrong with the pies."

Tom Merry never told a lie, and Mr. Fawcett knew that he was to be believed. He could see, too, that Kerr and Blake were suffering as much as himself. He mumbled over his handkerchief, trying to rub the taste out of his mouth.

"Dame Taggles must have been careless," said Tom Merry. "It's a rotten shame!"

"It's a rotten pie!" groaned Blake.

"Mrs. Taggles must have been using Chicago tinned meat for the pies," said Manners. "That's the only explanation I can think of."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Tom Merry. "I'll chuck that away, and will you try another pie, sir?"

"No, I think not," said Mr. Fawcett, recovering his calmness and resuming his seat. "Pray forgive me for suspecting you of playing a trick, but that pie tasted exactly like some furniture stain, and it would be a dangerous trick to place anything of that kind in food. But I know you would do nothing of the kind. I was hasty."

"That's all wight, sir," said D'Arcy, beaming. "You weally did look feahfully bad-tempered; but it's all over now, and your apology is accepted."

Mr. Fawcett's eyes fixed on the swell of the School House like a pair of gimlets, but D'Arcy was drinking his tea and did not notice it.

The door of the study opened, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn came in, each with a rather bulky parcel under his arm. Mr. Fawcett took up his teacup and appeared to notice nothing. He did not seem surprised when he had finished slowly drinking his tea at the great addition to the viands on the table when he set down his teacup.

"Sorry I'm late for tea," said Figgins blandly. "We dropped behind in the lane somehow, and Fatty Wynn can't get along."

"Oh, I say, Figgy!"

Figgins trod on his toe.

"Better late than never!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Sit down! There's the coal-box for you, Figgins! And as for Fatty, there never was room for him at any ordinary-sized table, so he can have the locker. Now we're all right."

And the troublesome pork-pies having been disposed of in the coal-locker, the feast in Tom Merry's study went forward gaily enough.

CHAPTER 4.

Uncle Frank, the Peacemaker.

TOM MERRY was always a pleasant host, and a feed in the study of the Terrible Three was seldom anything but a success. The rivals of St. Jim's being all on the most amicable terms, and their honoured guest being determined to please and to be pleased, everything was certain to go swimmingly.

The provisions brought from the village tuckshop were really first-class. Mr. Fawcett, who was to dine with the doctor, ate sparingly, but he took a little of everything, and was pleased with it, so his present hosts were satisfied.

Tom Merry kept him supplied, while Lowther was on the watch to fill his tea-cup whenever it showed a sign of getting empty. Mr. Fawcett was not a great tea-drinker, but he distinguished himself upon that occasion.

He told stories of India which held the juniors spell-bound. Like all healthy British boys, there was a love of adventure deeply seated in their natures, and tales of wild life on the frontiers of our great Empire appealed to them strongly. And Mr. Fawcett could tell a story well. His way was rather short and abrupt, and he would relate a yarn in a series of ejaculations, as it were, but, on the other hand, he never posed, or forgot a necessary point and had to go back for it. There was nothing prosy about him, a fault which a hearer finds it hardest to forgive.

"I say," said Figgins, presently, after Mr. Fawcett had finished a story of Indan magic, "I should like to see some of those tricks again that you showed us at Huckleberry Heath, sir. Some of us were not there, you know, and Kerr and Wynn and Manners haven't seen any Indian magic."

"We should like to, though!" chimed in the three at once.

Mr. Fawcett smiled.

"I shall be very pleased to give you an hour after dinner, if you like," he said. "I am booked after that to play chess with the Head."

"You are very kind, sir," said Tom Merry. "I say, suppose we have it in the common-room, so that all the kids can see. They'd all like it as well as we should."

"Yaas, wathah! That's extwemely thoughtful of you, Tom Mewwy! I wegard the suggestion as a weally good one."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Fawcett heartily.

"You'll have a raspberry tart, sir," said Lowther hospitably, as he saw that the gentleman from Boggleywallahbad had finished.

"Well, really——"

Mr. Fawcett hesitated.

"They're ripping, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I fetched them myself and selected them with extweme care, sir."

"You must have one, sir," said Tom Merry.

"You must have one, sir," said Kerr. "When Gussy selected them with his own fair hands."

"Oh, weally, Kerr——"

"Thank you, I will," said the Anglo-Indian, and a raspberry tart was placed upan his plate, and he dutifully attacked it.

"How rich they look!" Lowther remarked. "I never saw a raspberry tart such a rich red before. Dame Taggles is improving."

"You see, Lowthah, I selected them myself with extweme——"

"Gerroooooooh!"

That sudden and expressive ejaculation broke from Mr. Fawcett.

He sprang to his feet, sending his chair flying backwards in his haste; and it crashed against the fender.

Streams of red were running from the corner of his mouth, and his features were twisted up into an expression of anguish.

Tom Merry jumped up in alarm.

"Oh—ooooh! Ugh! Ow!"

"What's the matter, sir? What's the——"

"Ink!" howled Uncle Frank. "Red ink! Ow! You have poisoned me!"

"Red ink!"

"My hat!" said Manners, who had just tasted one of the tarts. "Mr. Fawcett is right. Somebody's been shoving red ink into the tarts."

Mr. Fawcett wiped out his mouth.

Tom Merry was looking so distressed that the old gentleman could not for a moment suspect him of having been a party to the trick.

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Figgins. "You young rotter! So that's your little game!"

"I fail to compwehend you, Figgins," said the swell of the School House, with great dignity.

"You fetched the tarts and the pork-pies——"

A light broke on all the fellows at once. A chorus of denunciation arose.

"You rotter!"

"You fetched the tarts, and you doctored them."

"You shoved furniture polish into the pork-pies."

"It's his idea of a joke!"

D'Arcy looked round in amazement at the indignant faces of the juniors. Mr. Fawcett fixed him with his gimlet eyes.

"So that is your tit for tat, D'Arcy, is it?" he asked. "I remember you were the victim of a conjuring trick at Laurel Villa, which was played for your own good, but your——"

"My dear sir, pway listen to me——"

"You doctored the tarts!" howled the Terrible Three.

"Inhospitable beast!" chorussed Figgins & Co.

"I'm ashamed of you, Gussy!" said Blake and Herries together.

The swell of St. Jim's rose to his feet with a great deal of dignity.

"I fail to compwehend the weason of these wemarks," he said. "If you suspect me——"

"Rats! You're a rotter!"

"You're a beast!"

"If you suspect me of bein' guilty of the extweme and inexcusable wudeness of playin' a twick on an honahed guest——"

"Who did it if you didn't?"

"I can only say that I wegard the suggestion with the contempt it deserves, and that you are weally a set of extwemely asinine persons."

"Rats! Who did it then?"

"If the pork-pies have been flavoured with furniture polish, and the waspbewwy tarts with wed ink, I can only say that I am ignowant of the circs."

"You brought the rotten things here——"

"Yaas, wathah!" But I did not tampah with them, deah boys. Mr. Fawcett, I weally hope you will accept my assuwance that I did not tampah with the pwovisions destined for the entertainment of an honahed guest. I am sure you are aware that I wespect you too highly."

The Anglo-Indian laughed.

"I accept your word, D'Arcy, of course."

"As a gentleman, I should expect you to do so," said Arthur Augustus. "As for these stupid persons, I disdain to weply to such an accusation."

"Well, we're going to get to the bottom of the affair!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Did the things pass out of your hands after you bought them from Mrs. Taggles?"

"No. Only Mellish wan into me vewy wuffly in the quad, and that waseal Goah sat on me, so that I could not collect up the tarts and pies. Mellish gathahed them up for me."

"Oh, I see! And doctored them at the same time."

"Yaas, wathah! Now you suggest it, I weally think he must have done so. I wemembah I was surpwised at Mellish doin' a decent thing for once."

"You—you ass! You ought to have guessed that it was planned between them!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Oh, wats! How was I to guess anythin' of the sort? But I tell you what, deah boys! We cannot overlook a feahful insult like this diwected at a guest of this study. We must give Goah and Mellish a feahful thwashin'."

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "I was thinking so."

"We'll have them out and frog's march them up and down the quad," exclaimed Figgins excitedly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Allow me a word," said Mr. Fawcett.

"That's all right, sir," said Lowther. "We'll make them smart. We'll make them sit up."

"I was going to say——"

"Yaas, wathah! We'll give them howwid beans, sir! I assuah you that they shall be made to wegwet this extwemely iwwitated conduct."

"But I want to ask you——"

"If you don't considah a fwog's march sevore enough, sir, we'll put the wotten wascals undah the pump, sir."

"That is not what I——"

"Then we'll lick them with a stwap, Mr. Fawcett. I assuah you that you shall be completely satisfied in this wespect."

"Let Mr. Fawcett speak!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Try up for a minute, Gussy!"

Gussy adjusted his eyeglass and gave Lowther a stony stare.

"I wefuse to dwy up, Lowthah! Mr. Fawcett is talkin' all the time, and I am answering him. You are an ass, Lowthah!"

"I wanted to say," said Mr. Fawcett, "that I want you lads to let this matter drop. I do not want my visit here signalised by a quarrel. Pray, take no more notice of the affair, and I shall take it as a favour to myself."

"Oh, weally, Mr. Fawcett——"

"Come, now, am I to have my way?"

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry promptly. "You shall have it exactly as you like; and if you say the word, we won't rag those wasters."

"Very good, let the matter drop!"

"It dwops this moment, sir," said D'Arcy gracefully.

And then Mr. Fawcett took his leave, promising to visit the juniors' common-room when he left the doctor.

"That's a good idea about the entertainment in the common-room," said Monty Lowther. "Let's go and tell the fellows about it."

"We'll let some of the seniors come in," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "That is, of course, if they behave themselves and keep their place. The room's ours, and we shall have to be in authority."

"Good!" grinned Blake. "We'll get Kildare to come along and see fair play."

And Tom Merry & Co. left the study.

CHAPTER 5.

Knox, the Prefect, is very much put out!

THE news that there was to be an exhibition of Indian magic in the juniors' common-room was received with enthusiasm by the fellows of the Shell and the Fourth Form, and the lower Forms at St. Jim's. There was not likely to be a lack of attendance, but rather the reverse, for the juniors were soon turning up in large numbers, and as New House fellows were admitted it looked like being a crush.

The common-room used by the juniors of the School House was not quite equal to that belonging to the upper Form fellows. It was in reality an odd room which had been allowed to the youngsters for themselves, and it was not very large. But by judicious management, Tom Merry hoped to keep the crush in order.

The nine comrades were all ready to deal with trouble if it arose, and it soon did arise. Many of the seniors were glad to come to the entertainment, and Tom Merry issued the invitations with a royal liberality. But some of the upper Form fellows were inclined to put on airs of mastership, and were far from wishing to acknowledge that they were there on the kindness of the juniors.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had promised to look in, but he had not yet arrived.

Knox, the most unpopular prefect of the School House, was the first senior to come in, and the room by that time was pretty full of juniors, and the best places were of course taken. There was plenty of room to stand, but every kind of article that could possibly be used as a seat was taken up. Knox stared about him rather ill-humouredly, and while he was doing so Sefton of the New House came in.

"Hullo, Knox!" he remarked. "No seats left."

"Blessed if I'm going to stand," said Knox.

"That's what I was thinking. Some of these youngsters can give up their seats. Here, Gibbons," went on Sefton, speaking to the champion dullard of the Shell, "I want that chair. Jump up."

Gibbons looked up at him.

"I'm sitting in it," he said simply.

"I know you are, and I'm going to, so you can get out of it. Up with you."

"But it's my chair."

"Is it? Well, you can lend it to me."

Gibbons looked round the crowded room in his slow way.

"But there's no other seat," he protested. "I can't stand, you know."

"I think you'll have to," grinned Sefton. "Come! Up with you, before I twist your silly ear! Get a move on!"

Gibbons was about to rise, with extreme reluctance, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came on the scene.

He promptly interfered.

"Don't get up, Gibbons. Sefton, deah boy, you are labouwin' under a misappwehension. You seniors are not in authowity here."

Sefton glared at him. But D'Arcy had been glared at before, and it had never ruffled his aristocratic composure.

"You see, deah boy," he explained, "this is the juniors' room, and we are in authowity here. There are nine of us keepin' ordah, and I weally hope that you will not start givin' twouble."

"You cheeky young rascal!" roared Sefton.

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye.

"Weally, Sefton, I wegard your language as most wepwehensible. You are a scowah, as a mattah of fact. I must beg you to westwain yourself."

"Do you want a hiding, you young ass?"

"Certainly not. And I wefuse to be called an ass. I wegard you as a wude bounduh, and I shall be obliged if you will kindly leave the woom," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Sefton stared at him blankly for a moment, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"Yes, I can see myself doing that!" he exclaimed. "Get out of the way, you little ass. Gibbons, get off that chair."

"You will do nothin' of the sort, Gibbons," said D'Arcy; "and you, Sefton, must behave yourself in a more gentlemanly mannah if you are goin' to wemain here."

"Oh, get away!" exclaimed Knox. "I'm a prefect, D'Arcy, as you ought to know, and I tell you we're not going to stand up while kids like you sit down."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass from Sefton to Knox.

"I am aware that you are a pwefect, Knox, and a wotten bad one you are," he replied; "but on the pwesent occasion you must wegard the wules like the west of us. This is our woom, and we are mastahs here. Everybody who comes in must submit to our pwopah authowity."

"Are you going to get out of the way?" roared Knox.

"Certainly not. It is a question of dig with me, and I uttahly wefuse to get out of the way."

Knox wasted no more breath in words, but seized the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder.

D'Arcy would have been swung out of the way without ceremony, but the fracas had attracted the attention of Tom Merry and his comrades, and they were hurrying up.

Knox's hand was knocked off D'Arcy's shoulder.

"Get out of the room, then."

Knox hesitated, and then strode savagely to the door. A faint hiss followed him, but a single glance from Kildare stopped that.

Monteith gave Sefton a glance.

The New House bully stepped quietly away, and leaned against the wall at the back. The humiliation of Knox had been a lesson to him, and he had no desire to draw the anger of the captain of St. Jim's upon himself.

The room was still in a buzz with the exciting incident when Mr. Fawcett came in. In blissful unconsciousness of the late row, Uncle Frank passed through the crowded audience, who gave him a cheer, and entered the space which had been left for him—not a large space, but sufficient for his purpose.

And then the entertainment commenced.

CHAPTER 6.

Gore in a Fix.

MR. FAWCETT had doubtless foreseen that his Indian magic would be in demand at St. Jim's, for he had brought the necessary paraphernalia in his travelling-bag. He seemed to require very little, however, for even the most wonderful tricks, many of them far more marvellous than anything the boys of St. Jim's had seen before.

The youngsters prepared themselves for a treat, and they were not disappointed. When Uncle Frank asked for a watch, D'Arcy passed forward his famous gold watch with a smile. He remembered the fright he had had at Laurel Villa, when Uncle Frank had played a trick with that same watch, and he knew now that he had nothing to fear.

Uncle Frank smashed the watch in a basin with great thoroughness, and then restored it uninjured to its owner; and then he produced yards and yards of coloured ribbon from Figgins's cap, and a set of chess from D'Arcy's silk hat. These were only a preliminary canter, so to speak; the real magic was to come.

Gore and Mellish had front seats, having taken care to be early, and they were watching the performances of the magician with as much interest as the others, but in a carping spirit, as was usual to them.

Mr. Fawcett's eyes had dwelt upon Gore for a moment, and he certainly recognised the boy who had [illegible] during the [illegible], but he made no remark.

[illegible] show. "Call this magic!"

"You're right, Gore; it's a fraud."

"Now, my young friends," said Uncle Frank, looking at his interested audience, "I am going to show you the Indian knot trick."

"Nother stale old wheeze, I expect," murmured Gore.

"I shall tie a knot in a certain way," went on Mr. Fawcett, "and every lad who chooses will be allowed to attempt to untie it; but I do not think it will be done."

"Bet I could do it!" muttered Gore.

Mr. Fawcett's gimlet eyes were on him at once.

"Ah, here is a lad who thinks he can do it!" he said. "He shall have the first attempt, then."

Gore turned red.

"Blessed if the josser hasn't ears as sharp as needles," he muttered.

"Yes, my hearing is quite good," said Mr. Fawcett, whose quick ears caught that remark too. "Will you come upon the stage, my lad? Let me see, what is your name?"

"Gore, sir," said the cad of the Shell. He rose to his feet, not at all displeased to be taking a prominent part in the show, and determined to make it a failure and turn the conjurer into ridicule, if he could.

"Ah, Gore! Please step this way."

The "stage" was only a portion of the floor left vacant for the conjurer. Gore stepped upon it, and Uncle Frank produced a thin, strong cord from his bag.

"Now," he said, "I shall tie this young gentleman's feet together——"

"Oh, will you!" exclaimed Gore.

"Certainly; that is the trick. Then you will be allowed five minutes to unfasten the cord with your hands. If you succeed, I will acknowledge that your boast is justified."

"But——" said Gore, rather uneasily.

"Sit down here, please," said Uncle Frank, fairly pushing Gore into a chair. "It will not take me many minutes."

It did not take many minutes, for Uncle Frank's hands worked like lightning. Gore tried to follow the volutions of the cord, but his eye was soon dazzled and defeated. He had to trust to his ability to find and untie the knots.

"Get out of the room!" said Tom Merry, with a ring of authority in his voice. "This is our room, and if you don't behave yourself you'll get swung out of it, and sharp!"

"Bravo!" shouted the juniors on all sides.

Knox was almost choking with passion.

"Do you know you are talking to a prefect?" he hissed.

"I don't care whether you are a prefect or not. You have no right to come and make a disturbance in this room."

"I'll do as I like. I'm going to sit down."

"You are going to do nothing of the sort. You should have come earlier. There are no seats left now."

"Lick him, old kid," advised Sefton.

"My hat!" said Knox, "if he gives me another word of his cheek I'll wipe up the floor with him."

"Will you?" said Tom Merry, with a glint in his eyes. "Not while I can hit out, Knox. You've made a mistake in coming here to bully us. If you don't behave yourself, there are enough of us here to sling you out."

Knox said no more, but reached out at Tom Merry. A general row was imminent; but at that moment Kildare, the captain of the school, entered the room.

The captain for a moment did not notice that a row was going forward. He glanced about the room with his pleasant, cheerful smile.

"Hullo! No seats left!" he said. "We shall have to stand, Darrel. Let's lean up against the wall at the back here. We can see over the heads of the youngsters."

"Righto!" said Darrel of the Sixth. "But, I say, there's some trouble there. Knox has got his rag out as usual. Hullo, Monteith!"

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had entered the room. He nodded to Darrel and Kildare, and joined them.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Something up between Tom Merry and Sefton," said Kildare, with a shade on his brow. "Sefton and Knox. Let's see what it is."

And the three seniors walked toward the scene of the dispute.

Knox had hesitated as he saw the captain of St. Jim's come in, but he felt that he had gone too far to retreat.

[illegible] may bother here now, what Mr. [illegible]

"Hullo, Mr. Fawcett!" said Knox.

Kildare's eyes flashed.

"Don't be a pig, Knox, if you can help it," he said quietly. "If you say anything of that kind in the hearing of the doctor's visitor I'll make you sorry for it."

"Will you?" said Knox, setting his teeth.

"Yes, I will."

The captain's manner was quiet, very quiet; but it carried more weight than the prefect's bluster.

Knox's defiant gaze fell, and he gave an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, don't get your rag out over nothing!" he exclaimed. "I haven't any intention of being rude to our entertainer. It's decent of him to provide a show for nothing, and if the hat is passed round I'll put a tanner in it."

Smack!

Tom Merry's open hand came across the prefect's mouth with a crack like a pistol-shot.

"You cad!" he cried.

Knox staggered back.

The blow was nothing, but sheer surprise made him stagger. To be smacked across the mouth by a junior was a new experience for a prefect of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry stood scarlet with rage, quivering from head to foot. If he had been expelled for it the next moment, he would still have struck that blow.

It was only for a moment that Knox yielded to amazement; then, spluttering with rage, he leaped forward, and it would have gone hard with Tom Merry if the powerful grip of the Sixth Former had fastened upon him at that moment.

But a strong arm was thrown between, and Kildare pushed the savage prefect back.

"Get out of the way, Kildare!" roared Knox, mad with rage.

"I shall not get out of the way!"

"He has struck me—a prefect."

"And serve you right," cried Kildare. "If he had not done so, my blow would have. You cad! Get out of the room!"

"I won't——"

"Get out of the room!" roared Kildare, his hot Irish temper flaring up in a blaze of indignation. "Get out, or I'll fling you out!"

Knox looked into the face of the Irish lad, and weakened. Kildare could have thrown him half across the room if he had liked, and he looked as if he would do it.

"I don't want a row with you, Kildare," muttered Knox.

A dozen feet of cord were used up before Uncle Frank ceased. Then Gore's feet were as firmly fastened together as if they had been glued. The ends of the cord were not visible, and the mass of it looked impenetrable.

"Now," said Uncle Frank, rising to his feet, "you are at liberty to untie that, Bore—is your name Snore?"

"Gore, sir!"

"Oh, Gore. Well, you may now untie the rope; and if you cannot do it, the other young gentlemen may take their turn."

Gore bent down and tackled the cord. The crowded audience watched him with great interest. Gore was a fellow much given to what the juniors described as "showing off," and his discomfiture, if it happened, was not likely to get him much sympathy.

Five minutes passed, and Gore had made no impression upon the cords. With an aching back, a flushed face, and tingling fingers, he at length sat up.

"Do you give it up, Snore—I mean Bore?"

"Yes," snapped Gore. "I can't undo the beastly thing. Get it off!"

Uncle Frank turned to the audience.

"Would anyone care to tackle the knots?"

The juniors almost fell over one another in their eagerness to show their skill. Fellow after fellow tried, and had to give it up. Kildare came forward at last and tried his skill, but had to give it up, like the rest.

Uncle Frank smiled blandly.

"So you give it up, my young friends?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, my dear sir, it's beyond me, you know. I weally cannot untie the knots, or even find the beastly things, you know, and so it's no use these fellows twyin'——"

"Oh, ease off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to ease off. I was sayin——"

"Rats!"

"As the task is given up, I will untie the knots myself," said Uncle Frank—"that is, of course, if I am able to do so."

Gore gave a jump as if he had been electrified.

"What's that?" he howled. "If you're able? Do you mean to say——"

"Patience, my young friend. I tied that cord on the understanding that you would untie it. You declared that you could do so."

"I—I—I——"

"I will do my best, and I have no doubt that in the long run I shall succeed," said the Anglo-Indian. "But you must be patient."

He bent down and fumbled with the cord. He rose to his feet again in a couple of minutes, and shook his head solemnly. Gore was watching him with intense anxiety. Already he was beginning to feel cramped about the lower limbs.

"I am extremely sorry," said Mr. Fawcett. "The cord, as you see, remains fastened. I am afraid that it must be left to your skill, Gore."

"I can't unfasten it. I've told you so."

"That is very unfortunate, as it is of no use leaving it to me. I am sorry for you, Gore. Let this be a lesson to you not to be too sure of your own abilities in an untried direction, and——"

"Are you going to get me loose?" howled Gore.

"As I have said, I am compelled to leave that to your own ingenuity."

"I'll jolly soon cut the cord, then!" exclaimed Gore, taking out the knife from his pocket and opening the largest blade.

"Here, weally, you must not destwoy Mr. Fawcett's pwoperty!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Don't be a cad, Gore!"

"I can't get loose, you fathead!"

"That does not mattah vewy much. You can sit there, and pewwaps the cord will get loose. You have no wight to destwoy anothah gentleman's pwoperty."

"Oh, I have no objection," said Mr. Fawcett, with a smile; "only the cord has a metal wire running through the centre of it, you see, which I am afraid will not yield to a knife. But Gore may as well try."

Gore simply snorted with rage. He was beginning to suspect that Mr. Fawcett had deliberately played this trick upon him. He slashed savagely at the cord with his knife. The outer covering came off in patches, showing the thick, strong wire within. A wood-axe would not have severed that!

Gore cut and hacked at it, and blunted his knife and cut his trousers. But he made no impression on the wire. The whole room was shouting with laughter by this time. Gore's cocksureness had received its proper punishment, and no one felt anything but amused at his predicament.

"Pray have patience, my dear boy," said Uncle Frank blandly. "I cannot spare more time now, as I have little left for the rest of the tricks I wished to show you, but I will have another try when the entertainment is over. Now, please don't say any more, as I must have silence for the next trick."

"I want to be let loose——"

"I said I wanted silence."

"I want——"

"Silence!"

"Order!"

"Hold your row!"

The audience joined in the demand with no uncertain voice. Gore scowled, and was silent. The looks of the juniors were threatening, and he already saw pea-shooters and catapults coming into view, to bombard him if he did not keep quiet.

The next trick was the basket trick, famous enough in India. A live rabbit was brought in, and Mr. Fawcett placed it in a basket, and covered it up in the full sight of the audience. Then a white mouse was dropped in, and the basket closed.

Mr. Fawcett's next proceeding filled the juniors with amazement, and many of them with horror and dismay. He took a short Oriental sword from his bag, and drove it again and again into the wicker sides of the basket. Shrill squeals of pain were heard from within, and a stream of red ran under the edges.

Figgins looked at Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell was looking grave, but that was all. He knew that Uncle Frank was incapable of cruelty to an animal, but he was amazed.

"My word!" muttered Lowther. "That rabbit isn't cut to ribbons, the man's a black magician, and no mistake."

Uncle Frank ceased his stabbing and jabbing at last. He drew away the sword, which was red halfway to the hilt, and wiped it. The cries of pain had ceased in the basket, but the horrid red was still in sight on the floor.

"Will someone open the basket?" asked Uncle Frank.

There was a general hesitation. So real had the whole thing seemed, that the juniors could not help feeling that when the lid of the basket was raised, a horrible scene of slaughter would be revealed. It was Kildare who came forward at last and opened the basket.

He uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"Well, get out the body!" said Uncle Frank.

"There's—there's nothing there!"

"Nothing there!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

There was a rush to examine the basket. Sure enough, it contained nothing living. The rabbit and the white mouse had disappeared.

The juniors were astounded.

"But where's the giddy rabbit?" demanded Tom Merry. "I'll swear I saw it put in the basket—or, rather, I'd almost swear it!"

Uncle Frank laughed.

"Perhaps D'Arcy could tell you," said he.

"I!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in amazement. "I weally cannot do anythin' of the sort, my dear sir—I haven't seen the wabbit since you put it in the basket."

Gore cut and hacked savagely, but he made no impression on the wire.

"What is it doing in your hat, then?"

"My hat!"

D'Arcy's hat, the silk hat that had been used in a previous trick, was still standing on its crown on the floor. There was a general stare towards it, and exclamations of astonishment.

"The rabbit!"

Sure enough, there was the white rabbit, curled up in the topper, and comfortably asleep.

The juniors stared at one another and at the magician. The animal had not been hurt.

"And where's the white mouse?" asked Figgins.

"Ask Gore."

"Hang the white mouse!" said Gore. "How should I know?"

"You ought to know what's in your own pockets."

"My pockets! I know there's no white mouse in my pocket!"

"Better let D'Arcy look."

"Rats! I tell you—my only Aunt Jane!" Gore broke off in absolute amazement, as the swell of St. Jim's thrust a hand into his pocket and drew out a white mouse.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Solomonson Again

"BAI Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Well, my word!" said Tom Merry. "Fancy Gore having it in his pocket all the time!"

"And he says he never knew!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Oh, we all know how to believe Gore," said Kerr.

"I tell you I didn't know!" howled Gore. "And it's not the same white mouse, either. You can't tell these little beasts from one another."

"Oh, dwy up, Goah; you are a boah!"

"I tell you he must have slipped it into my pocket when he was fooling over this cord, and it's not the same white mouse——"

"Oh, wats! Pway dwy up!"

"He's hidden the other one somewhere."

But no one was listening to Gore. Whether his explanation was true or not nobody cared a rap. The trick was, none the less, a marvellous one.

Uncle Frank looked at his watch.

"Ah, I shall have to leave you now," he said. "You may put those things into my bag, Tom. I will try——"

"Will you undo this cord, Mr. Fawcett?" exclaimed Gore.

"To find an opportunity of showing you some more magic before I leave St. Jim's——"

"Will you untie me?"

"But I am almost due now to play chess with the doctor. Are all the things in the bag, Tom? I must be gone in five minutes."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I have no more to——"

"Will you unfasten me?" screamed Gore. "I know jolly well you can if you like!"

"So good-night, lads!" said Mr. Fawcett. "Good-night. Eh? Did you speak to me, Gore?"

"Will you unfasten this beastly wire?"

"Oh, that wire. I cannot leave it there, Gore, I shall want it again, so perhaps I had better have another try."

Mr. Fawcett bent down and took hold of the twisted wire-cord, and in some mysterious way it came loose in his hands in a few seconds.

He rose to his feet, folding it up into a coil, and slipped it into his bag. Gore got off the chair, and yelped as the cramp made his legs tingle, and began to rub his ankles savagely. Mr. Fawcett smiled blandly as he snapped his bag shut.

"How fortunate that I was able to undo the cord," he remarked. "Gore might have remained like that all night otherwise. My lad, may I advise you not to be too cocksure in the future? You need improvement in that respect."

Gore would have made a disrespectful reply if he had dared. But he knew that Tom Merry would wipe up the floor with him if he did, so he only growled sullenly. Mr. Fawcett laid a little packet on the table.

"You asked me to let you see my little curiosities?" he remarked. "Here they are, Tom. Put them on the table in my room when you have done with them."

There were many curious articles turned out of the packet. Among them was the famous little golden idol, with the hideous face, to which the Anglo-Indian had hinted that a story was attached. It passed from hand to hand, and many a shudder was caused by the malevolent expression of the hideous little wizened face.

But the one upon whom the deepest impression was made was Gibbons, the dunce of the Shell. He turned quite pale when he looked at the horrible little idol, and retained a scared look even after it had passed from his hands.

Mr. Fawcett took his leave, leaving the curios in the hands of the juniors. Tom Merry told the story of the little idol, as much as he had heard of it from Uncle Frank, and the juniors listened with awe.

"Rats!" said Gore, the sceptic. "I don't believe that it ever was boned from an Indian temple. It's all moonshine."

"I didn't say it was," said Tom Merry. "I say the native who sold it to Mr. Fawcett said so. That's all I know. It's a hideous thing, but I should say it's valuable."

"Yaas, wathah! The eyes are made of wubies!"

"Bet they're not real rubies!" sneered Gore.

"And the thing's made of gold, too," said Lowther.

"Spoof, I expect!" said Gore.

"Oh, shut up, Gore!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally considah that Goah should shut up! Goah, old fellow, you are too much and too often!" said D'Arcy. "Pway dwy up!"

Gore stalked away scowling. He had had a lesson that evening, but he did not seem much the better for it.

Kildare looked at his watch as he left the room presently.

"Five minutes to bedtime," he remarked.

Tom Merry collected up the curios to take them to Uncle Frank's room. He left the common-room with the packet in his hand, and went upstairs. In the dim corridor he ran against a strange figure.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, stopping in amazement.

"My tear young shentleman——"

It was a silky, insinuating voice. The man was the ancient Hebrew Tom Merry had seen talking to Mr. Fawcett at the station; the curio collector who was determined to gain possession of the little golden god with the ruby eyes.

Tom Merry stared at the collector in amazement and strong suspicion.

"How did you come here?" he exclaimed.

The dealer made a deprecating gesture.

"I mean no harm—of zat I assure you, my nice young shentlemans——"

"What are you doing here?"

"I—I come to see Mr. Fawcett——"

"How did you get into the house?"

"I—I——"

"Look here," said Tom Merry. "I know your little game perfectly well, Mr. Solomonson. If you weren't an old man I should dot you on the boko, and trot you downstairs head first. As it is, I'll see you off the premises."

"My dear young shentlemans——"

"Are you going quietly?"

"My tear young——"

"Scat!" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently. "Will you clear out?"

"I came to see Mishter Fawcett——"

"I'll take you to him, then," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

But the old collector exhibited signs of dire alarm at the offer. He avoided the hand Tom Merry would have slipped through his arm.

"I—I mean to say, young shentlemans——"

"You are a prevaricating old humbug!" said Tom Merry. "You'll either come straight to Mr. Fawcett, or I'll see you out of the school. Which is it to be?"

"I—I vill go out if you vish——"

"Come along, then, and get done with it!"

The old collector unwillingly followed him down the passage. His hawkish eyes lighted upon the parcel in Tom's hand, and he appeared to recognise the shape of the rosewood box within which the curiosities were contained.

He stopped, his black eyes snapping with eagerness, and laid a claw-like hand on the junior's shoulder.

"Shtop a minute, my tear young shentlemans," he said, in a wheedling voice, "I vant to speak to you most important!"

Tom Merry stopped. He realised that the old collector was not exactly a purloiner of the property of others, in the common way. He was evidently led astray by the mania of a collector to possess a certain article. And, having regard to the man's years, Tom Merry, indignant as he was, could not be rough with him.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "I've got to get to bed in a few minutes, and I can't stop talking here."

"Vun minute only, young shentlemans!" said the collector appealingly.

"Oh, go ahead; I'll listen, but do cut it short!"

"You are vun nice boy—a fery nice young shentlemans——"

"Leave all that out," said Tom Merry tersely. "Cut the cackle and come to the hosses, Mr. Solomonson!"

"I know zat schoolboys sometimes run short of de monish," said the old fellow, diving his claw into his pocket and making some coins rattle, "I know zat."

"Well, what about it?" asked the hero of the Shell impatiently.

"I should like to give you vun tip, zat is all, my tear and nice young shentlemans!" said the old man coaxingly.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

Mr. Solomonson outspread his hands in his earnestness.

"I speak not of vun shilling or half-ze-crown," he said. "I vill gif you a pound—a whole golden pound to yourself."

"I don't want it," said Tom Merry, wondering what on earth the old man, who certainly did not look like a philanthropist, should want to give him a sovereign for.

"But I vill, I vill—and not vun only, but five," exclaimed the collector, diving his hand into his pocket again, and bringing it out half full of gold. "Look zere! Vill you have five—ten—ten pound?"

"Off his rocker!" murmured Tom Merry. "Fancy offering to give away ten pounds! Put your money away, Mr. Solomonson, I don't want it!" he added, aloud.

"But I offer you ten—tventy," said the old man eagerly. "You shust let me look into ze box you carry, and I gif you tventy pound."

Tom Merry flushed scarlet.

He understood now. The old Israelite evidently knew what he was carrying, and was offering him twenty pounds for a chance to steal the little golden idol.

"Vat you say?" said Mr. Solomonson cajolingly. In the dimness he could not see Tom's expression clearly, and he mistook the boy's silence. "Tventy pound, shust to let me look into zer box——"

"You rotter!" said Tom Merry. "If you were about a hundred years younger, I'd use you for a duster, and wipe up the corridor with you."

"My tear young shentlemans——"

"Are you going out, or shall I run you out on your neck?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Tventy pound—— Oh, I am going! Don't be excited I am going."

"Go, then, confound you!"

Grumbling to himself all the way, Mr. Solomonson walked slowly down the stairs, and Tom marched him out into the dark quadrangle.

"Go to ped now, my tear young shentlemans," said Mr. Solomonson. "I find my vay easy to zer gate."

Tom Merry smiled.

"You're very kind, but I'll see you off the premises," he said. "This way. Come on, and don't waste time!"

"But my tear young shentlemans——"

"Oh, come along!" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently, and he gripped the old fellow by the arm, and took him down to the gates at a run. The gates were locked, but Tom Merry roused out Taggles the porter.

"Let the bounder out!" he exclaimed. "You oughtn't to have let him in."

Taggles looked self-conscious. Mr. Solomonson had expended a pound in persuading the school porter to let him in, to go to the house unannounced. Taggles, to do him justice, had only imagined that Mr. Solomonson was an eccentric old Jew who wanted to see the Head on business, and had never dreamed that the wizened old Israelite meant any harm.

He unlocked the gates without a word, and Mr. Solomonson passed out into the road. Tom Merry stood by while Taggles locked up again. Mr. Solomonson came close to the gate, and stretched a claw between the bars.

"Tventy pound!" he said.

Tom Merry put his hands in his pockets, with the box under his arm, and walked away. Mr. Solomonson shook the bars in his earnestness.

"Tventy pound!" he shrieked.

But the hero of the Shell was gone.

"'Ere, get hoff with you," exclaimed Taggles indignantly. "What 'ave you been a'doin' hof? Stealing somethink, I suppose."

"Tventy pound!" moaned Mr. Solomonson. "Tventy pound! He is gone."

"Yes, and you'd better go, too, if you don't want me to set the dog on yer," said Taggles disdainfully.

"Mein goot frient," said Mr. Solomonson, "I haf to see Mr. Fawcett on a matter of fery important business——"

"So you said afore, you old fraud."

"I vill gif you five pound if you let me in——"

"You old hass," said Taggles, angry at having to refuse such an offer, and venting his anger upon the old collector. "You silly hold hass, it's as much as my place is worth. Get along with you and your five pound!"

"Tventy pound!" shrieked Mr. Solomonson.

Taggles growled and walked away. He slammed the door of his little lodge, and the disappointed collector gave it up.

CHAPTER 8.

An Alarm in the Night.

TOM MERRY re-entered the School House, and went up to Mr. Fawcett's room, where he placed the rosewood box in its wrappings on the table by the bed. Then he hurried off to the Shell dormitory.

The boys of the Shell were just going in, and Tom joined them in time.

"Lights out in ten minutes," said Darrel.

"Righto, kid," said Tom Merry. "Don't worry yourself. We wouldn't keep our little Darrel waiting for worlds. I'd never keep my own grandfather waiting."

Darrel walked away snorting.

The Shell began to undress, and Tom heard a great deal of laughing and chattering going on round Gibbons, the dunce of the Form. Gibbons was looking very strange, and Tom walked over to him.

"I say, anything the matter?" he asked.

"Only the booby's frightened," grinned Gore.

"What's the matter, Gibbons?" asked Tom Merry, taking no notice of the cad of the Shell. "You can tell me, I suppose?"

"It's—it's nothing," stammered Gibbons. "Only that—that——"

"That what?"

"It's the little idol," sniggered Gore. "Gibby has got it on the brain. He's afraid to go to sleep."

"It's not true, Gore," exclaimed Gibbons, turning red. "Only——"

"What's not true, you fathead? Do you mean to say——"

Tom Merry pushed Gore back.

"Let him alone!" he said quietly.

"Mind your own business, Tom Merry, and keep your beastly hands to yourself," exclaimed Gore furiously.

"Let him alone, I say. There's going to be no bullying in this Form while I'm at the head of it, and if you say another word, Gore, I'll sling you across your bed," said Tom Merry, with a flash in his eyes.

Gore turned away with a growl.

"It's—it's only that horrid little thing—that beastly idol; it haunts me," said Gibbons hesitatingly. "I—I can't get its horrid little face out of my mind. I—I thought I saw the beastly thing peering out of the shadows——"

"Oh, put it out of your head," said Tom Merry soothingly. "I oughtn't to have let you see it, I suppose. I never thought of it—but never mind, old chap. Don't think of it. When you go to bed, start the multiplication table till you fall asleep, and you'll be all right."

"That's right, coddle the booby," sneered Gore. "I think——"

Tom Merry caught the cad of the Shell by the neck, and gave him a swing that sent him fairly sprawling across his bed. Gore gave a yell, and rolled off the bed, on the further side from Tom Merry.

"You beast!" he roared. "I'll——"

"You'll hold your tongue," said Tom Merry. "Only a word or two more, you cad, and I'll give you the champion hiding of your life."

And Tom Merry walked back to his own bed.

"Good for you, Tommy," said Manners. "That simple kid Gibbons will start dreaming about that horrid little idol if he thinks about it, and have the nightmare. Hallo, here's Darrel! Are you looking for anything, Darrel?"

"I'm looking to see if you youngsters are in bed," said the prefect, laughing. "Hurry up with you, you young rascals. Do you want to keep me waiting all night?"

"Well, old kid," said Tom Merry, "we do, as a matter of fact. You're so nice to look at, you know——"

"Hurry up, you scamps!"

The scamps hurried up, and Darrel put out the light and left the dormitory. The chatter of the fellows died away presently, and silence reigned in the long, lofty room.

Slumber fell upon the heroes of the Shell.

Tom Merry fell into a sound sleep. He had had a strenuous day, and he was ready for a good rest. He lay sound in slumber till, with a sudden start, he awoke. Something had awakened him; what it was he did not know, as he lay blinking up into the darkness, and wondering dizzily what had happened.

The chime from the school tower came to his ears, the four quarters, and then the solemn strokes. He knew that it was striking midnight. But that had not awakened him; he was awake before it commenced.

A sudden cry rang through the dormitory!

Tom Merry started and shivered.

He heard it clearly, the cry of someone in wild terror, and he knew that it must have been a previous sound of the same kind that had roused him from sleep.

He sat up in bed quickly. What was the cry—whence came it? As he sat shivering in the cold, it was repeated.

"Gibbons!" muttered Tom Merry in alarm, as he detected the bed from which the cry came. "What can be the matter with him?"

The hero of the Shell scrambled out of bed. He felt for a box of matches among his clothes, but—as is usual in such cases—the matches were not to be found just when they were wanted.

The cry rang out again, followed by an incoherent muttering. Voices raised in alarm were heard now calling out to know what was the matter.

"Oh, where are those hanged matches!" groaned Tom Merry.

He found the box at last, and struck a vesta. With the match flaring in his hand, he ran quickly towards Gibbons' bed.

He caught a sight of the boy sitting up in bed, his face white and fixed with terror, and the match went out.

Setting his teeth, Tom struck another, and lighted a candle. Then he hurried to Gibbons. The boy was awake, and mumbling to himself.

"Gibby! I say, Gibby, old chap, what's the matter?" exclaimed Tom anxiously.

Gibbons looked at him uncomprehendingly, and went on muttering strangely. Lowther and Manners were out of bed by this time. Gibbons did not seem to recognise the chums of the Shell, and all the time the unmeaning muttering went on.

"I say, look after him a bit, and I'll fetch Mr. Fawcett," said Tom Merry hurriedly.

"Righto. Buck up!"

Tom Merry hurried out of the dormitory. Mr. Fawcett's room was not far away, and Tom was soon in the passage upon which the door opened. At the end of the passage was a tall window overlooking the quadrangle, and upon the window fell clear white moonlight with a ghostly effect.

Tom's eyes were on the light window as he came up the passage, and he had almost reached Mr. Fawcett's door when he gave a sudden jump, and stopped.

Clear and black against the moonlit window appeared the profile of a head!

It was a profile Tom Merry knew!

The long, prominent nose, the pointed chin, the bushy eyebrows; he knew them at a glance, though it was only a silhouette he saw.

It was Mr. Solomonson who stood at the end of the passage, and was just turning away from the window!

The next instant the figure disappeared.

Tom Merry hesitated a moment, and then he ran into Mr. Fawcett's room. In the darkness of the passage he knew that he, at least, had not been seen. Whatever object brought the old Hebrew to St. Jim's in the dead of night, the matter was of secondary importance now. The first thing was to get help to Gibbons.

"Mr. Fawcett! Uncle Frank!"

"What is it?" came the quiet voice of Uncle Frank.

"One of our fellows is in a fit or something. Will you come?"

"In one second."

It did not occupy Mr. Fawcett much more than a second to jump out of bed and slip a dressing-gown round him, and a pair

of slippers on his feet. Then he touched Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Let us go."

Tom led him at a run along the passage. In a few seconds they were in the Shell dormitory. In the candlelight a dozen fellows were collected round the bed of Gibbons, all of them looking pale and anxious. There was a general gasp of relief when Mr. Fawcett entered the room.

"Please come here, sir," said Manners. "We can't do anything with him."

Mr. Fawcett was at the bedside in a moment.

"What is the matter, my lad?" he asked, in a soft, kindly voice, very different from his usual abrupt tones, and he took Gibbons's hand.

The boy continued to mutter incoherently.

"He has been dreaming," said Mr. Fawcett. "Do you know anything of the cause? Has he been reading any lurid nonsense—low-down stories, or trash of that kind?"

"I think not, sir," said Tom Merry. "I think it's the little golden god that's on his mind. He's been talking about it a lot, and he seems to have got it on the brain."

Mr. Fawcett nodded.

"I understand. He is evidently a boy of simple mind. I should really have removed that wretched thing from the collection before handing it to you. But I thnk I can soon cure this state."

The boys watched the Anglo-Indian in wonder. Mr. Fawcett fixed his eyes upon the staring orbs of the semi-conscious boy, and began to make passes with his hands before Gibbons's face.

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "He's a giddy hypnotist."

The lads watched the Anglo-Indian spellbound. It was an exhibition of Eastern magic they had not counted upon seeing. The effect of the passes was soon apparent upon Gibbons. He ceased to mutter, and the wild look left his eyes, and they closed peacefully.

"Lie down," said Mr. Fawcett quietly. "Lie down, and sleep soundly."

To the amazement of the boys, Gibbons laid himself quietly down, his cheek to the pillow, and fell into a deep sleep.

"Thank goodness," said Tom Merry, with a deep breath of relief. "I—I don't know what might have happened to him."

"You may go back to bed, boys," said Mr. Fawcett quietly. "This lad will not wake again till the morning. Good-night. I am glad you called me, Tom."

And the Anglo-Indian went to the door. The boys tumbled back into bed, discussing the strange happenings in whispers.

Mr. Fawcett was just leaving the dormitory when Tom Merry ran quickly after him. The hero of the Shell had completely forgotten Solomonson in the excitement and anxiety of looking after Gibbons. But he remembered now.

"Uncle Frank! Stop a minute."

The gentleman from Boggleywallabad stopped and looked round.

"What is it, Tom?"

"There's a thief in the house!" gasped Tom Merry.

"What do you mean?"

"As I was coming to call you," said Tom Merry hastily, "I caught sight of him against the window. It's Mr. Solomonson. He's come for that little idol."

To his surprise, Uncle Frank gave a slight chuckle.

"Are you sure it is Mr. Solomonson, Tom?"

"Quite certain, sir. I saw his profile in the moonlight at the window, and I would know it anywhere," said Tom Merry, with conviction.

"How do you know he has come for the golden idol?"

"He tried to get it from me," said Tom; and then he related his interview with Mr. Solomonson, and how he had seen the ancient Israelite off the premises.

Uncle Frank chuckled again.

"So you refused a twenty-pound note, Tom?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry innocently. "Twenty sovereigns, sir."

"Hah! Well, very good. And so Mr. Solomonson has taken to burgling to get hold of the golden idol, has he? He must not have it, because the old rascal deserves to be punished for his dishonesty."

"It's valuable, too, sir, isn't it?" asked Tom Merry, surprised to hear the reason Uncle Frank gave for not allowing the old collector to take the little Indian idol.

"Well, Mr. Solomonson seems to think so, as he has offered fifty pounds for it, and has taken to burgling in his old age to obtain possession of it."

"I thought you said you gave a few rupees for it, sir, because you didn't know its true value," said Tom Merry.

"Did I? Well, it was quite true," smiled Uncle Frank. "But now let us go and interview Mr. Solomonson. I have no doubt we shall find him in my room."

They hurried to the Anglo-Indian's room.

There was a gleam of light under the closed door.

"He's there!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Yes. Hush! Not a sound."

Uncle Frank turned the handle of the door with perfect stillness, and opened it. The light streamed out into the passage. Uncle Frank did not enter the room; he simply stood looking in, with a grim smile upon his mahogany face, a twinkle of mocking humour in his gimlet eyes.

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Solomonson Will Not Be Happy Till He Gets It.

MR. SOLOMONSON was in full view of the Anglo-Indian and Tom Merry, as they stood silent at the door looking into the room.

A lighted lantern stood on the table beside the bed, and the old Israelite was bending over the rosewood box, his back to the door.

Mr. Fawcett had made no sound, and the old collector was not alarmed.

"Goot!" they heard him mutter the words aloud, "Goot! Zat is vat I look for."

He had succeeded in opening the rosewood box, and now he held up in a clawy hand the little golden figure of the hideous idol.

His hawk-eyes fairly gloated over it.

"Zat ish it. Goot!"

Still the watchers at the door did not move or speak, and the old man was too deeply engrossed to think of looking round.

He gazed at the idol as if he would never be tired of gazing at it, but finally he laid it on the table, and slipped his hand in his breast.

Mr. Fawcett and Tom Merry watched him curiously, wondering what was coming next. To their amazement, the old fellow drew out a roll of rustling banknotes and placed them in the rosewood box, and closed the lid.

Tom Merry and Mr. Fawcett exchanged glances.

The rabid curio-collector was determined to have the little Indian idol, but at the same time he could not bring himself to be an actual thief!

He was placing the refused purchase-money in the box in place of the curio he had taken.

"My word!" murmured Tom Merry.

He was amazed and a little touched, for there was a kind of honesty in the proceeding of the old collector, and Tom's indignation died away. Tom could not have touched a thief with a pair of tongs, but Mr. Solomonson was evidently the victim of a fixed idea rather than a thief.

Mr. Fawcett smiled.

The twinkle was still in his eyes as he stepped silently into the room. Perhaps he was softened too by the sight of the old collector's desire to do the honest thing, as well as his ruling passion would allow him.

"Hah! Good-evening, Mr. Solomonson," said Uncle Frank.

The old collector gave a jump, and swung round.

"Mein gootness cracious!" he stammered.

"So you've taken to burgling in your old age, have you?" said Uncle Frank, picking up the little golden idol from the table and slipping it into his pocket.

The old fellow's eyes followed it hungrily.

"Better telephone for the police, Tom," said Mr. Fawcett, with a wink of the eye that was furthest from Mr. Solomonson, from which Tom Merry understood that the order was not to be regarded seriously.

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry briskly.

Mr. Solomonson groaned.

"Der police!" he said. "Ah, I am not a tief, Mr. Fawcett!"

"What are you doing here, then?"

"Mein tear frient——"

"You took this little idol out of the box, and were going to collar it."

"I vant it so mooch for mine collection."

"That's no reason why you should have it when it belongs to me."

"But I have paid for it, mine tear frient."

Uncle Frank grinned as he opened the rosewood box, and passed the banknotes towards the Jew. Mr. Solomonson refused to take them up.

"They are yours," said Uncle Frank. "I won't have you arrested, but you must clear out, sharp! How did you get in?"

"I take a ladder and climb over the wall," said Mr. Solomonson dismally. "I pull der ladder over, and put him to a window and get in."

"Great Juggernaut!" ejaculated Mr. Fawcett in amazement. "I never heard of such nerve, at all events! Why, you confounded ass, you might have been caught a dozen times!"

"I must have der idol."

"You would have been arrested——"

"Vill you not sell me der idol?"

"No, I won't! Get out!"

"I must have der——"

Mr. Fawcett struck a match, and approached the blaze to the roll of banknotes.

"Will you take your notes away, or shall I set them alight?" he asked.

The old collector snapped them up in a twinkling.

"But vill you not sell me——"

"Are you going?"

Mr. Solomonson turned unwillingly to the door. He looked back as he went out, and then went on again, and then looked back once more.

His claw-like fist was thrust into his breast, and came out again crammed with banknotes.

"Take it all!" he pleaded. "I moost have der idol. Dere are hundred—two hundred pound! Take it all, only——"

"Get out!"

With a dismal groan the Israelite went down the dusky passage.

"I suppose I had better see him off the premises," grunted Mr. Fawcett, taking up the lantern. "Aren't you cold, Tom?"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. He was curious to see the last of this peculiar adventure.

Mr. Solomonson went slowly and unwillingly downstairs, as if impelled by an invisible force which he struggled in vain to resist. Perhaps he realised that Uncle Frank's boot was ready behind him to help him if he tarried.

He reached the hall-door of the School House, and there he stopped. Mr. Fawcett marched on to light him out, the lantern held up in his left hand. Tom Merry was at his heels.

With a fresh groan Mr. Solomonson opened the door; then he turned a haggard face upon the Anglo-Indian.

"Mine goot tear frient——"

"Get out!"

"I entreat you—I moost have der idol," said Mr. Solomonson, almost tearfully. "Take dese notes—two hundred pound!"

He held out both hands full of notes. The mahogany face of the Anglo-Indian wrinkled.

"I tell you I won't touch your money. Get out. One second, though—just to show that I forgive you, I'll shake hands with you."

Tom Merry grinned. He knew what was coming. Mr. Solomonson evidently did not, for he took the offer as a sign of relenting on the Anglo-Indian's part, and held out his right hand eagerly. Mr. Fawcett's iron grip closed on it.

"Mine goodness! Ah-h-h-h! Ow-w-w-w-w!"

Mr. Fawcett connected his grip.

"Nothing like a grip of the hand to wipe away all misunderstandings," he said. "I will give you a good grip like this whenever I meet you, Mr. Solomonson, to show how I appreciate your honesty in paying for the things you steal."

"Ow-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w!"

Mr. Solomonson was dancing on one leg, the other twisted up to the air; and his body was curled up with the intensity of his sufferings.

"There!" said Uncle Frank, suddenly releasing his hand. "That's how I feel, Mr. Solomonson. Don't forget to give me your hand when I meet you again."

The old collector stood glaring at him speechlessly for a few moments; and then, still without uttering a word, he turned and disappeared into the darkness of the quadrangle. Mr. Fawcett chuckled as he closed the door.

"Hah! I think I have given that old fellow a lesson," he remarked. "I hardly thought his collecting mania would carry him so far as this. It's rather late in life for him to take to burgling."

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's not so bad as I thought at first, sir. I'm rather sorry for him."

"Hah! You're sorry for him, are you?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom frankly. "He seems to want the thing so much. Of course he can't have it; it's cheek of him to expect you to part with it."

"Hah! Perhaps I shall let him have it in the long run," said Mr. Fawcett thoughtfully. "He must have a lesson, though, for trying to take it. Perhaps, if I see him again, I shall let him have it."

Tom Merry stared.

"You mean you will sell it to him, sir?"

"Perhaps. I might give it to him. We shall see. Time to get back to bed now, Tommy. Run along. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Tom Merry returned to the Shell dormitory.

He went at once to Gibbons's bed, and found him sleeping soundly, with a quiet and peaceful look upon his face.

Uncle Frank's influence had evidently calmed his disturbed mind, and dismissed the fearful images that had filled his slumber with horror.

"Where have you been all this time, Tom?" mumbled Monty Lowther, from his bed. He was half-awake and half-asleep.

"Capturing burglars and things," yawned Tom Merry, as he tumbled into bed. "I'll tell you about it to-morrow." And he laid his cheek upon the pillow.

But his reply had fully awakened Lowther and Manners, too, and they were curious. They sat up in bed, on either side of Tom Merry's bed.

"I say, Tom, what's that?" asked Lowther.

"What's that about burglars?" queried Manners.

"Um-m-m-m!" mumbled Tom Merry. He was very sleepy, and was already falling into the arms of Morpheus.

"Tom! Don't go to sleep for a minute!"

"Tell us about the giddy burglar!"

"Is it a fact or were you rotting?"

Snore.

"Tell us about it, you image!"

"Come now, Tom, like a good fellow!"

Snore.

"Oh, rats!" said Manners. "He's fast asleep."

"Then we'd better follow his giddy example," yawned Lowther. "It will keep till the morning, I suppose."

And the chums were soon sleeping as soundly as Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Solomonson Gets the Idol, But Is Not Happy.

UNCLE FRANK said nothing the next day of the adventure of the night. Tom Merry told the story to his chums, but it went no further. Mr. Solomonson's first and last attempt at burglary did not become generally known.

Tom Merry was rather curious to see if the old collector would turn up at the school again in quest of the little Indian god.

The chums kept their eyes open for him, but he did not appear. Apparently his failure had made him realise that the attempt was useless, and he had given it up.

The little golden idol reposed safely in the rosewood box, and was not shown about any more. The effect of the hideous little image had been alarming in the case of Gibbons, though the dunce of the Shell woke that morning quite well, without any recollection of the scene of the previous night.

Uncle Frank stayed several days at the school, and the boy saw a great deal of him. He played chess with the Head most of the evenings, but he found plenty of time to make himself very pleasant to the boys.

But all things come to an end at last, and so did the visit of the man from Boggleywallahbad to the ancient college of St. Jim's.

The day of parting arrived, and at the request of Tom Merry, Uncle Frank arranged to catch a train on a half-holiday, so that the juniors could come in a body and see him off.

So on Saturday Uncle Frank packed his bag, and declining the trap, walked to the station with his bag in his hand, like the hardy old globe-trotter that he was.

Tom Merry & Co. walked with him. They were sorry to lose Uncle Frank, but they had determined to give him a good send off at the village station.

Herries had suggested musical honours, and offered to bring his cornet, but eight voices in unison had threatened to jump upon it if he did, and so he had given up the idea.

The little party arrived at the station ten minutes early for the train, and went into the little building; and then Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

A well-known figure was standing near the ticket-office, and it turned, and came quickly towards the Anglo-Indian. It was Mr. Solomonson once more.

"Goot tay," said the old collector, raising his ancient silk hat from his fringe of greasy, curling locks. "Goot tay, mine friend."

"Hah! You again!"

"I have come down vunce more to see you about der idol," said the collector, in his most wheedling tone. "I zink you take two hundred pound, ain't it?"

"I've given you my answer."

"Yes, yes, Mishter Fawcett; but——"

Uncle Frank held out his hand.

"You haven't shaken hands yet, Mr. Solomonson."

Tom Merry and his companions giggled. Mr. Solomonson changed colour, and shrank away from the brown hand that was held out to him.

"Come, shake hands," said Mr. Fawcett; "I might alter my mind about that idol, perhaps, in time."

The Israelite gave a jump.

"You vill sell him?" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps."

"Two hundred pound."

"I could not take that for it."

"Two hundred and fifty."

"I could not take that, either."

The old collector groaned.

"Name your own figure, my tear Mr. Fawcett."

"We had better go on the platform," said Mr. Fawcett; "I can hear the train coming in. You youngsters can come on with me."

They adjourned to the platform. Mr. Solomonson, trembling now with eagerness, followed. The local train which was to bear Uncle Frank as far as Wayland Junction, came puffing in to wait three or four minutes.

"My tear Mishter Fawcett——"

"Good-bye, my young friends," said Mr. Fawcett, shaking hands with the boys in turn, and considerately refraining from giving them his vice-like grip. "I have had a jolly time at St. Jim's, and I thank you all heartily."

"It's been very jolly for us, sir," said Tom Merry. "It was kind of you to come, and I hope you'll come again."

"Yaas, wathah! It is an honah we appweciate sincerely, I assuah you, my deah sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If you honah us with another visit, sir, we will twy to make you comfy."

"Good," said Figgins. "I hope you'll come again."

"I hope I shall, some day."

"And you'll give my love to Miss Priscilla," said Tom Merry.

"And all our respects," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Our weepects and our kindest wegards to the esteemed and amiable Miss Pwiscilla," said D'Arcy.

"I will not forget."

"Make haste there!"

It was the porter's voice.

Mr. Solomonson rushed to the carriage-door desperately, pushing the grinning juniors aside in his haste.

"My tear Mishter Fawcett!"

"Hallo! You still here?" said Uncle Frank cheerfully. "It's nice of you to come to see me off. Will you shake hands?"

"Der idol!"

Uncle Frank appeared to hesitate. There was a curious twinkle in his little black eyes.

"Two hundred and feefty pound——"

"I cannot accept that figure."

"Anyting you like!" exclaimed the collector. "Name your own figure, but remember dat I am a poor man."

Mr. Fawcett slipped his hand into his pocket, and drew out the little idol. The hawkish eyes of the collector snapped at the sight of it.

"You vill sell him to me——"

"Well, since you want it so much," drawled Mr. Fawcett, "but I cannot accept two hundred and fifty pounds. I gave ten rupees, which comes to a pound in English."

"You vill make big profit."

"I have said that I will not sell the idol to you, Mr. Solomonson. I mean it. But I don't mind giving it to you."

And Mr. Fawcett held out the little image towards the amazed collector.

Mr. Solomonson stared at the Anglo-Indian, and stared at the golden idol, without offering to touch it. He evidently feared some trick.

"Well, don't you want it?" asked Mr. Fawcett.

"'Urry up there!" shouted the porter.

Mr. Solomonson seemed dazed.

"The train's going. Are you going to take it?"

"You gif him to me?" murmured the amazed collector.

"Certainly. There it is."

The clawlike fingers clutched at the little idol. Mr. Solomonson fairly hugged it. Then his claw went to his pocket.

"But I gif you something!" he exclaimed. "I gif you——"

"Not at all——"

"But you are too fery generous."

"Nothing very generous in giving away a spoof Indian that I can see," said Mr. Fawcett, calmly.

The Israelite gave a yell.

"Spoof! Sham! Imitation! Vat?"

"Exactly. I've said that I didn't know its true value when I gave ten rupees for it in India. I didn't. It was worth about a shilling. Perhaps half-a-crown, as the workmanship is really rather good."

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

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

Mr. Solomonson's face was a study.

"Imitation!" he moaned feebly. "Spoof! Ah-h-h-h!"

"The real thing is safe enough in its temple in India," said Mr. Fawcett cheerfully. "These imitations are sold in Calcutta and Bombay for a few rupees each. I gave ten rupees because I was a griffin at the time—a new-comer, you understand. I was done! So would you have been if I had taken your two hundred and fifty pounds. Ha, ha, ha!" The mahogany face of the Anglo-Indian assumed a crimson hue as he chuckled away.

"Stand back there!"

The carriage-door slammed. Mr. Solomonson, holding to the imitation Indian idol, and staring at it blankly, was oblivious to his surroundings. The train moved, the engine was shrieking and smoke poured back along the line. Uncle Frank waved his hat from the carriage window.

"Good-bye, sir!"

"Good-bye, my lads!"

The juniors waved their caps and shouted. The train rushed on, and a bend of the line hid Uncle Frank from sight. He was gone, and Tom Merry & Co. turned to leave the platform. As they went out, Tom glanced back. The old collector was still standing there, the little idol in his hands, staring at it in dismay. And so he stood as the juniors poured out, and lost sight of him.

THE END.

Another Grand Long Tale dealing with the school days of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "The Pets of St. Jim's," By Martin Clifford. The week after that "THE GEM" LIBRARY will be permanently enlarged in size and price.

The ONLY NEW AND ORIGINAL SCHOOL TALE by this famous author.

TEMPEST HEADLAND

A SPLENDID NEW SCHOOL TALE.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

READ THIS FIRST!

Tempest Headland is a large school standing in an exposed position on Britain's coast.

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

A new master comes to the school, and asks a few easy questions of Snigg, a young bully in Cyril and Venus's class. He is impertinent, so the new master thrashes him. He is stopped by the Headmaster, and astonishes them all by whipping off a disguise and revealing himself as Cyril Conway.

(Now go on with the story.)

Preparing a Ghost.

"Do you think I'm going to be held up to ridicule before the whole college?" faltered Snigg. "Of course, I thought he was the new master, else I would have punched his head. He has kept us all in for over a quarter of an hour, and he has been fooling about asking me questions—and—and I won't stand it. He's only a boy the same as I am, and he's been treating me worse than any master. I—I—won't stand it!"

Dr. Buchanan glanced at his masters. Herr Ludvig was turning away looking out of the window, and he appeared to be choking. Not one of the other masters looked anything like serious. Dr. Buchanan ordered Cyril to follow him to his study, and the interview was painful; but the doctor sent him down to meet the next train, and in due course, Mr. Rolls arrived.

He was a tall, gentlemanly-looking young man, of athletic build, and handsome features. The doctor had known him for some years.

"What a remarkably gentlemanly lad Cyril Conway is," observed the new master. "He is wonderfully well-informed, too. We had quite a learned conversation. He must be very studious. And he is so quiet and well-behaved."

"I caned him this morning," observed Dr. Buchanan, smiling. "He never seems to study—at least, I never see him doing so. His ability is excellent. As for being quiet and well-behaved, he is seldom out of mischief. I will give you one instance."

Then the doctor told the story, and Mr. Rolls was convulsed with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! I believe I shall like that lad," he exclaimed. "Used to get up to pranks myself, though I never dared to impersonate a master. It is really funny, and from what you tell me Snigg deserved it."

"Undoubtedly. He had been bullying shamefully. But he will never hear the last of this. Conway had actually got him across his knee, and he was flogging him with extreme severity. The extraordinary part of the matter is that Snigg is considerably older than Conway, and, indeed, far bigger."

"Then it won't go well with my impersonator."

"Conway excels in all sorts of sports—boxing amongst them. They fought once. They are never likely to fight again. Not that Conway would care. I believe he would go for the biggest boy in this college if he caught him bullying. I tell you, Rolls, although I had to flog the youngster, I do not feel at all sure that he deserved it. At any rate, Snigg deserved what he got."

"I am certain that I shall like Conway."

"Yes, I have no doubt about that. A master could scarcely help it, because he is so clever. He seldom gives any trouble in class, except that he is abominably inattentive. But he is always polite. Out of class—well—you will discover all about that. Mind, there is one great thing in his favour. He is absolutely truthful. I have never known the lad to speak falsely to me, and he never minds convicting himself, though you would not make him convict another. Yes, you will like him. We all do."

The boys in the great college were all in bed, and most of them were asleep. In Cyril Conway's dormitory all were sleeping deeply with one exception, and that was Cyril. It was a dark, windy night, but the angry howl of the wind and the rattle of the college windows failed to awake the sleepers.

In the next bed to Cyril lay Venus. It was too dark to see his black face, but Cyril felt about for it, and, having found it, he rapped the woolly pate with his knuckles.

"Come in dere!" growled Venus.

"Snowy White Adonis Venus," cried Cyril, "arise!"

"I don't want to arise. I'm a lot too tired and cold to tink ob anyting like dat."

"You are as hot as boiling mustard."

"Dat's how I want to keep for free-four hours. I don't want to get out in de icy cold. Do go to bed like a respectable boy! You know we ain't allowed to get out ob bed in de middle ob de night, and I must say I tink it is an excellent arrangement. Groo!"

Venus commenced to snore, and Cyril felt convinced that nothing short of water would fetch him out of it. He groped his way to one of the wash-stands, and procured the water-jug; then he made his way along the bedsteads, and, stepping up to the side of the sleeper, gently canted the jug over him. Cyril tilted it more and more until it was upside-down, but no sound awoke the echoes. He knew the jug must be full, by its weight; but not a drop of water came from it. The cause was perfectly simple. There was a thin layer of ice over the top of the water, and as Cyril gave it a shake the ice gave way, and the whole contents of the jug dashed upon the sleeper's face and chest.

The yell that awoke the echoes was really extraordinary.

"Get up, Venus!" murmured Cyril calmly.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus.

"Fury!" howled the other voice. "Oh, I'm dad-drenched!"

"Yah, yah, yah! You'm caught de wrong sleeper dat time, Cyril! Yah, yah, yah! 'Scuse me laughing, but I'm mighty glad you caught de wrong bird. You wanted a blackbird, and you'm got a whitebird. Yah, yah, yah!"

"Well, don't guffaw like that, stupid! It's woke you, and that's the principal thing."

"Oh, you beast, won't I punch your stupid head!"

"Why, I believe it's Snigg!" exclaimed Cyril. "It's all right, Snigg. Only a slight mistake. I must have miscounted the beds in the darkness. There's no harm done."

"No harm, be hanged! I'm frozen to death!"

NEXT THURSDAY: **"THE PETS OF ST. JIM'S."** A Splendid School Tale By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

(Continued).

TEMPEST HEADLAND

The Only New and Original School Tale.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

"Well, you won't be much of a loss to the college. Hold your stupid row, and go to sleep! I never heard a fellow make such a fuss over a few drops of water."

"Why, you silly brute, you have emptied the whole jug over me, and—— Woohoo! Warah!"

Snigg's yells were followed by a loud crash. He had sprung out of bed, and tumbled over the water-jug, which Cyril had placed on the floor. Not only did he smash the jug to pieces, but he hurt himself with the fall.

"Do get into bed, you noisy, stupid creature!" exclaimed Cyril, lighting a candle. "What a ridiculous idiot you must be to tumble over a water-jug like that! Hurry up, Venus. Herr Ludvig will hear all this row directly."

Herr Ludvig had heard it long since, but he was not going to turn out of his comfortable bed to stop that noise. He preferred the noise to the cold.

Snigg made a frightful fuss, but Cyril simply ignored him.

"Never mind him, Venus!" he exclaimed. "You get dressed!"

"I don't mind dat boy, at all," grumbled Venus. "But I do mind all dis cold. I don't see why you can't wait till de sun commences to shine before fooling around in de dead ob de night. I wish I was a polar-bear, so as not to feel all dis cold. Yah, yah, yah! Can't help laughing when I tink ob Snigg getting dat little ducking. Was it sort ob cold?"

"You wait till I get at you, you little black beast!"

"Well, I would rader fight two free rounds wid you dan go prowling round de college dis time ob night!" grumbled Venus. "It's too mighty cold for dis sort ob work."

"It doesn't make any difference for swimming purposes whether the night is——"

"What?" gasped Venus. "You tink I'm going swimming to-night? Look here, Cyril, you can take Snigg for dat purpose. I ain't bahing any."

"Where's the water? Oh, there you are! I never came across such an obstinate boy as you are in all de course ob my life-long experience!" growled Venus, hurrying on his clothes. "I don't like de idea ob swimming in freezing water at all. I don't see dat it's funny."

"Now, are you ready?" demanded Cyril, lighting a lantern. "It's not far to the river."

"I wish it was 'bout forty-hundred miles, wid a few furlongs frown in!" growled Venus, following him from the dormitory.

"We are not going swimming, you silly cuckoo!" whispered Cyril. "I wanted that idiot Snigg to imagine we were, because he is sure to split, and no master would believe we would be such maniacs as to go swimming a night like this. What we are going to do isn't at all cold work. We are testing an experiment."

"Is dere a fire on de job?"

"Well, in a sense. What you have got to do is to go to the clock-tower. You will find the door open. Go in and call me gently by name. I sha'n't be there, but you may see someone else."

"Suppose it's de doctor?"

"Bless you, he's snoozing in his bed this time of night! Oh, no! It won't be a bit like the doctor. I want you to take particular notice. Now, go on!"

"Don't you tink you would like to come wid me, Cyril?"

"No! I don't want to frighten the man away."

"I tink he's a lot more likely to frighten me away," grumbled Venus. "I don't quite see where de fun ob de ting comes in; still, if you hab made up your mind, I 'spect dere's no help for it."

Cyril, who had already been down, had left the back door open. Venus made his way to the tower, and then he hesitated a little. Like every other boy in the college, he knew that this was the haunted tower, and that a ghost was wont to prowl around, making itself generally objectionable.

Now, if there were one thing in this round world that Venus objected to, it was ghosts. He would rather have fought the bully Snigg for an hour than meet a ghost for a minute; but he always liked to fall in with Cyril's views, because they were frequently funny—and Venus liked fun.

He took two or three long breaths, and then he flung the door wide open. Had you asked Venus afterwards, he would have told you that he thought he remained there for about half an hour without the power of moving, for the sight that met his gaze was what Cyril would have termed ghastly ghostly.

A huge form stood in the centre of the tower, and that awful form was at least fifteen feet high. A flickering red glow revealed its awful features, and it swayed in the wind. This was bad enough; but the most hideous howls came from its huge jaws.

Howls also came from Venus's jaws, for now he had regained his power of motion, and his first one was to slam that door and make a mad rush, but the next moment he found himself seized by Cyril.

"Come back, you silly owl!" he cried.

"Nunno! Dat's too mighty awful to go back to. It's yowling at me. I tink it eats niggers!"

"It's as harmless as a kitten."

"You ain't seen it!"

"Pooh! I made it."

"Golly! I shouldn't make any more ob dat sort. How do you make it yowl?"

"Quite simple. It cost me a good lot to make, but I don't grudge the money. You see, I brought you here to see what effect it would have on you. It is not intended to frighten you, but I wanted to see if the thing was likely to be a success. The head is some old theatre property—one of the Christmas demons. I got that fairly cheap. The gramaphone inside it cost a bit; but, then, I can use that on other occasions. The sheets I borrowed. The red fire is cheap enough, and it is made on rather a good principle. I fixed [illegible] on the starting lever, then I wedge it back with a [illegible] of candle. Directly the candle burns down, the [illegible] and the red fire catches alight. Then the [illegible] quite simple. The only difficulty is to time it correctly. I will show you how I light it to-morrow. The ghost is suspended by a line to the belfry, and he is made of ordinary wooden hoops to keep his petticoats out. The red fire burns for a very long time if you put enough there, and the howling continues till the spring runs down."

"Do you want to use it for de purpose ob frightening de doctor?"

"Rats! It wouldn't frighten him. No! That is for the use of Mopps, the porter. You know the scandalous manner in which he has been reporting us. Very well, we are going to get a little of our own back. He must come here to-morrow night to wind the clock. Very well. He will see the ghost, and if that ghost does not frighten him I shall be surprised. You see, I have got the key of the tower, and as I am going to lock the door to-night, he can't come here till I help him to find the key. You leave it all to me, and if he doesn't get a scare, it will be rather surprising."

"I'm inclined to tink dat ghost will be rader surprising to him, too," observed Venus. "I know dat it surprised me a mighty lot. I ain't got ober it yet, and I believe if we had gone for our swim I wouldn't be in a greater fright dan I am at de present moment."

"Well, never mind about that. All we have to do is to get back without waking the masters. It would be a thousand pities to spoil a grand scheme like that; to say nothing of all the money I should have wasted."

(Another long instalment next week.)

WHOM TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "GEM" Library, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

Well! I suppose that you've read Tom's Merry Message, and I hope that you're merrily anticipating the coming enlargement of this book.

I feel pretty certain that you will be pleased.

By the way it's not next week but the week after.

Our story for next Thursday will be entitled

"THE PETS OF ST. JIM'S."

THE EDITOR.

P.S.—One of the Pets! is shown on next page.

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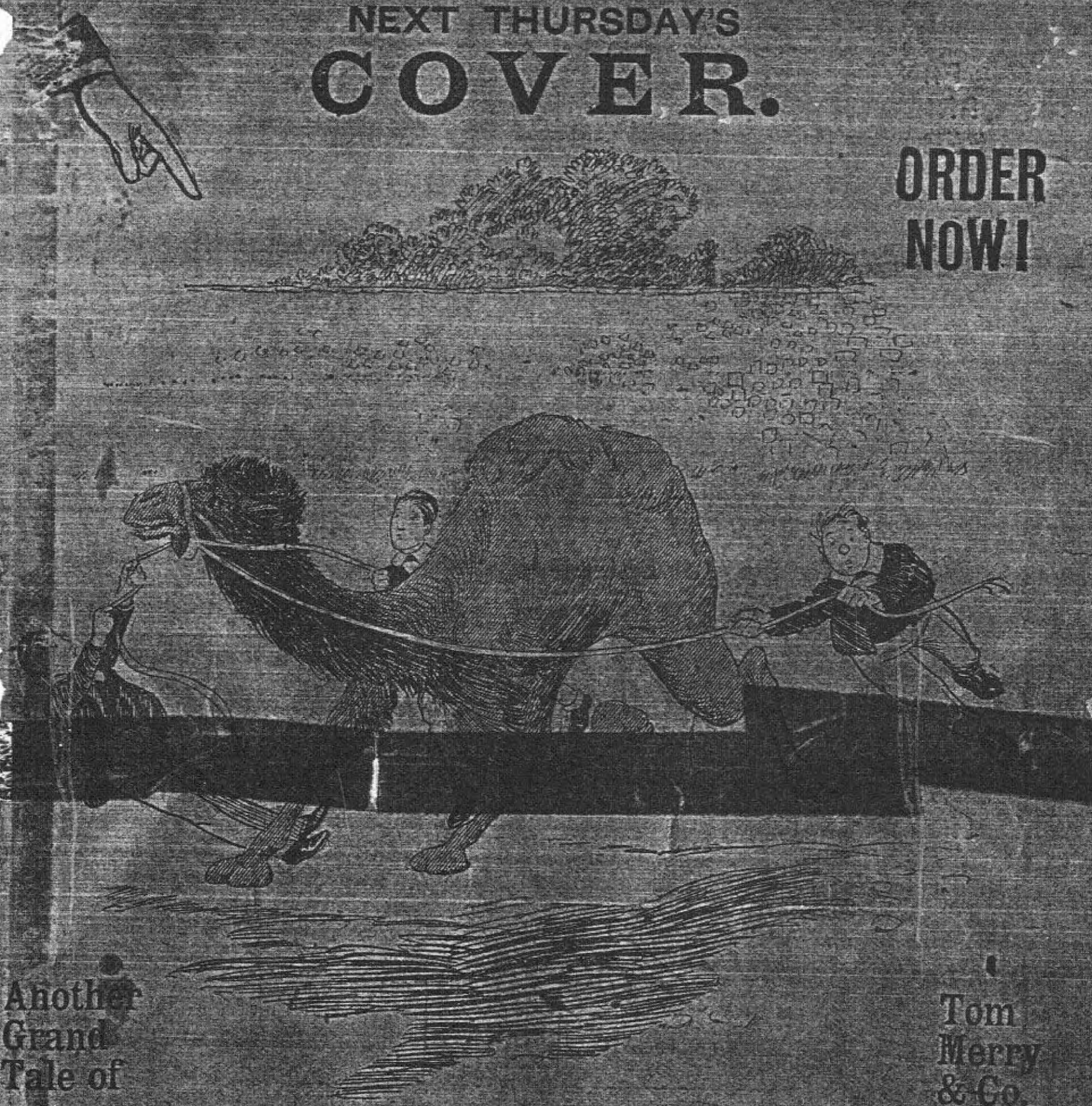

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