

MEET "WINGS" OF THE MOUNTED, THE FLYING POLICEMAN, INSIDE!

The GEM 2^D



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READ HOW TOM MERRY NEARLY STARVED IN THIS RIPPING—

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry on the Sick List!

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

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

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

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

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

"Poor old Tom!"

Monty Lowther gave a nod.

"Poor old Tom!"

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

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

But now that he was laid up everybody missed him. The same concern could be seen in every face, from that of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, to the smallest and inkiest countenance among the fags of the Third Form.

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

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

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

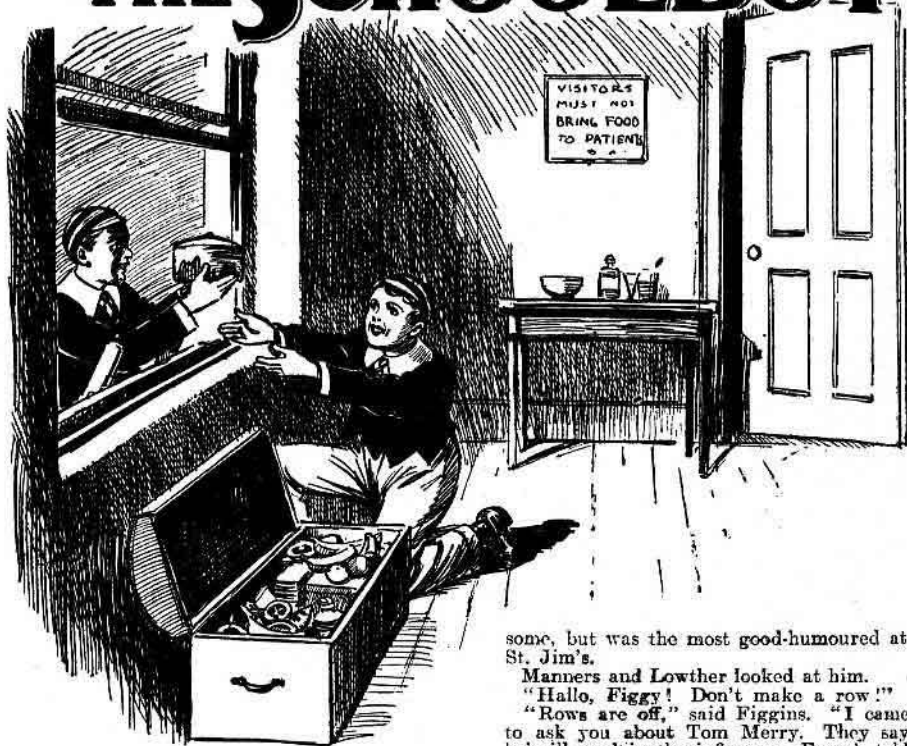
"Well, it wouldn't do any harm," said Monty Lowther. "But I don't suppose—"

"Hallo, you kids!"

It was the voice of Figgins of the New House. He came towards the School House juniors with an unusual gravity in his face—a face that was not exactly hand-

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THE SCHOOLBOY



some, but was the most good-humoured at St. Jim's.

Manners and Lowther looked at him.

"Hallo, Figg! Don't make a row!"

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

"It's true!"

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

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

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

Figgins whistled.

"I say, that's serious."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You must not speak so disrespectfully of Dr. Short," he said.

"I respect him very much, sir; but—"

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

"Thank you, sir," said Manners dismally.

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

"But weally, Mr. Wailton—"

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, certainly; but—"

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

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

The juniors wandered disconsolately into the quadrangle again.

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

CHAPTER 2.

A Touching Appeal.

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

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

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

Monty Lowther was even worse.

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

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

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

Monty Lowther blushed.

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

"Eh?"

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

"That will do, Lowther."

"Thank you, sir!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

They stared hard up at the window.

Tap! Tap!

"Do you hear that, Manners?"

"Rather!"

"It's Tom tapping the glass inside."

"It must be."

"He wants to draw our attention."

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

Manners and Lowther frantically waved their hands to show that they understood. Manners tossed his cap up to

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the window, and it plumped on the glass, and dropped into the quadrangle again.

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

The chums of the Shell watched it excitedly.

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

Manners clutched him by the arm.

"He's writing something."

"By Jove, so he is!"

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

"And an R."

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

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

The finger had left off tracing on the glass.

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

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

What did Tom Merry mean to convey to them?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The juniors looked startled at the idea.

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

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

"That's a B," said Figgins.

"G-R-U-B!" read out Monty Lowther. "GRUB! My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Grub!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That's the idea."

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

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

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

Unfortunately, there was a considerable shortage of cash.

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

"Good idea."

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

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

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

"What did you say, Mannahs? I—"



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

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

"There'll be plenty of supplies," said Figgins, "thanks to Gussy."

Arthur Augustus bowed.

"Now, the question is, how to get them to Tom Merry. That's not so easy."

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figgins & Co. looked wrathful.

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

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

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

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

"As I was saying—" said Blake.

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

"You?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

"I weally think—"

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

"School House or New House!" said Figgins, tossing the coin. "Guess, Blake."

"Heads," said Blake.

Figgins disclosed the sixpence; heads it was.

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

"If you are alluding to me, Figgins, I weally—"

"Oh, I shall go!" said Blake.

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

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

"I am nothing of the kind. For the sake of Tom Mewvy, who is gweatly in need of gwub, I think I ought to be entwisted with the job."

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

"I am agweeable."

Blake tossed up the sixpence.

"Tails!" said D'Arcy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fatty Wynn re-entered the study, heavily laden.

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

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

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

"I weally do not set why you should expect it to be a fwoast. I—"

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

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

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

"I will be extremely careful."

"About these biscuits—"

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

"Good wheeze!"

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



Tom Merry's forefinger was tracing another letter over the glass. "G-r-u-b!" read out Monty Lowther. "My hat! GRUB!"

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

"I quite compwehend."

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

"I understand quite well."

"Off you go, then!"

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

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

There was a crash.

"You howwid bwute!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

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

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

"You howwid bwute! I—"

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

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

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

"Oh, blow the topper!"

"It is completely wuined—"

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

"But my toppah—"

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

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

CHAPTER 3.

Not Quite a Success!

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

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

Gore stopped and stared at him.

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

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

"But it ain't allowed."

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

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

"Gwub for Tom Mewwy."

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

Arthur Augustus looked alarmed.

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

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

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

"What do you know about that, Goah?"

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

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

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

D'Arcy stepped in to the door and looked round.

D'Arcy heaved a sigh of relief as he saw the room was empty, when a sudden tap on the shoulder electrified him. He swung round with a jump, to find himself face to face with Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster eyed him sternly.

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"What are you doing here, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus was completely taken aback.

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

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

"You were going to see Tom Merry?"

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

"Go back at once to the School House!"

"I—I—"

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

Tom Merry was shaking with silent laughter.

D'Arcy did not stir.

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

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, watah, Mr. Railton!"

"Then why do you not go?"

"I—don't you know—you see, sir—yaas—"

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

"Yaas, but—I—"

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

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

"D'Arcy, what do you mean by this?"

He shook the swell of the School House violently.

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

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

Tom Merry fairly howled.

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

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir!"

"What does this mean?" The Housemaster had continued shaking the junior until he seemed to have shed all his burden. "Were you taking these things to Tom Merry?"

"You see, sir, he's hungry, and—"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Tom.

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

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

Mr. Railton shook him again.

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

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

Mr. Railton breathed hard.

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

"Yaas, sir, certainly!"

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

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

A sigh of disappointment escaped Tom Merry.

"But, weally, sir—"

"You may go!"

"This is my pwivate property—"

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

The Housemaster surveyed the discomfited youngsters grimly.

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

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

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

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

"This is a ghastly fwost, and no mistake!" said D'Arcy.

"It wasn't my fault, deah boys. That howwid Waitton had no right to pop up like that all of a sudden."

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

"Oh, I don't know!" said Figgins. "It was easy enough

to foresee that it would be a frost if you School House kids had the handling of it."

Blake's eyes gleamed.
"You would have done better, of course!"
"Well, we couldn't have done worse," said Figgins.

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

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

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

"Well, I was thinking that it's no good trying to get in at the door, but we might manage at the window," said Blake. "It's getting dark, and you know that long ladder of Taggles—he'd let us have it if he didn't know what it was for. You kids could go and get it, and he'd think it was one of the usual House rows, and would hold his tongue."

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

"I think I had better go up the laddah," said D'Arcy. "Undah the circe—as a person with a strong nerve will be needed, I weally think I am the pwopah—"

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

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

"Back pedah!" said Blake. "Figgys, we'll work this idea. You go and get the ladder, and as soon as it's quite dark we'll try it."

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER 4.
After Dark I

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

"I can't!"
"You must lie—"
"I won't!"

"You—"
"Rats!"

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

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

"My dear Master Merry—"

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

"You must not talk, Master Merry."

"I tell you I am not ill!"

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

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

"Dr. Short is very concerned about you."

"Dr. Short is a donkey!"

"My dear Master Merry!"

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

"You are feverish."

"I'm not feverish!" howled Tom. "I'm all right!"

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

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

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

The House dame smiled patiently.

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

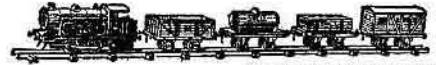
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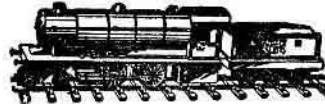
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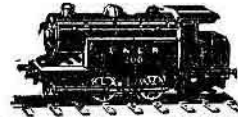


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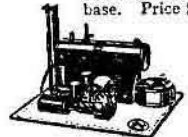
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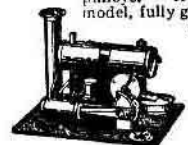
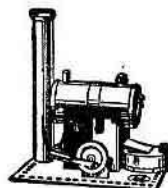
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THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLERS!

(Continued from page 7.)

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

"Give me something to eat, then."

"Yes. Would you like the broth?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Would you fancy the beef-tea?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Ah, here is Dr. Short!"

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

"Ah, good-evening, Mrs. Mimms!" said the physician.

"And how is our little patient?"

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

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

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

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

"I'm well now!"

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

"Blow my little face!"

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

"There's nothing wrong with me."

"Now your wrist, my dear child."

"Who are you calling a child?"

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Railton nodded.

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

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

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

After the doctor was gone, Tom Merry lay restless.

Tap!

The invalid gave a sudden start.

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

Tap!

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

The curtain was drawn, but the blind was not down, so anyone outside could see into the room now that the lamp was lighted. Tom Merry, keeping one eye on the dame, raised his arm from the pillow and made a sign towards the window to show that he was aware of the tap. Then he gave a portentous yawn.

Mrs. Mimms looked up.

Tom Merry yawned again.

"Would you like to sleep, Master Merry?"

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

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

"Yaw—aw—yes, please."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hallo, Figgy!" he whispered.

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

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

"Right-ho!" Figgins glanced down into the darkness.

"Keep the ladder steady, kids. Who was that bumping against it?"

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

"I dropped my eyeglass," said Arthur Augustus. "The stwing is bwooken, and I was afraid that some of you clumsy persons would twead on it."

"Shut up!"

"I did not mean to bump on the ladder. And I should have been weally sowwy if Figgins had fallen down and bwooken any bones."

"You image—"

"I distinctly refuse to be chawactewised as an image. I—"

There was a faint yelp in the gloom. Someone had stuck a pin into D'Arcy, and for a time he was quiet.

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

"I know," said Tom, laughing quietly.

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

Tom's eyes glistened.

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

"You don't look ill."

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

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

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

"Half a mo'! Quiet!"

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

"Are you asleep, Master Tom?"

Tom Merry snored.

"I thought I heard you speaking."

Snore!

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

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

But the communicating door was now left open a good

two inches. It was some minutes before Tom Merry ventured to move.

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

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

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

"That's a good idea, Figgy."

And Tom Merry returned to bed. Then he commenced to snore regularly, and the sound penetrated to the next room and comforted the soul of Mrs. Mimms.

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

The snoring ceased for a moment.

There's enough here to keep Tom Merry well fed for days. That'll do."

He turned towards the bed.

"I say, Tom— Oh, my only pyjama hat!"

There was a step outside the door.

A voice the junior had heard before was audible.

"Where is my darling Tommy?"

The door opened.

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

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

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

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

Tom Merry snored loudly.



Tom Merry's face was twisted up into something like a Guy Fawkes mask as Mrs. Mimms carefully poured the medicine into his mouth!

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

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

"Right-ho, kid!"

The snoring recommenced.

Figgins leaned out of the window.

"Hand 'em up!"

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

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

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

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

"That's enough," he whispered. "The rest'll keep."

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins in a Fix!

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

She was fearfully anxious.

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

And the Head had had no choice but to accede.

Miss Fawcett advanced to the bedside.

Mrs. Mimms brought in the lamp, making the old lady a sign to be silent, but that was not needed, for Miss

Priscilla moved on tiptoe. If Tom Merry's life had depended upon it, she could not have been more cautious.

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

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

She looked round the room.

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

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

"The window open, ma'am? Do you think I should be so careless?" said the House dame.

"But it is open."

"Bless my soul, so it is!"

Mrs. Mimms stared at the open window in amazement.

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

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

Mrs. Mimms was suspicious.

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

"Master Merry, you were not really asleep!"

"Yaw—aw—aw!"

"Did you open that window?"

"Yaw—aw—aw!"

"The dearest child is sleepy," said Miss Priscilla. "Pray close the window. My dearest boy always had a fancy for

fresh air. Even when he was a little tot he would never sleep with his window shut."

"Yaw—aw—aw!" yawned Tom Merry.

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

"Yaw—aw!"

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

"Yaw—aw—aw!"

"He wishes to sleep," said the House dame.

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

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

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

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

"Yaw—aw—aw!"

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

His yawning was sufficient for Miss Priscilla.

"Very well, he shall sleep, then," said the old lady fondly.

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

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

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

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

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

"No," grunted Tommy.

"Please take it away, Mrs. Mimms."

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

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

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

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

Tom groaned.

"My dearest, are you in pain?"

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

"You are sure?"

"Yes, quite—yaw—aw—aw!"

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

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

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

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

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

A sound something like the buzzing of a bee began to

(Continued on page 12.)

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HALLO, chums! Isn't this week's issue of the good old *GEM* a treat? It is! It is! So is next week's number. In the first place there's a rattling good yarn of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, entitled—

"EASY TERMS' FOR THE SAINTS!"

That's got you guessing, I'll wager. Still, you'll find out all about it when you get next Wednesday's *GEM*. Another extra special item is the complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, which appears under the title of—

"THE PRISONER OF THE VAULTS!"

Owen Conquest excels himself in this magnificent yarn. To round off the "long story" programme, there's another real live thriller dealing with another episode in the adventurous life of—

"WINGS OF THE MOUNTED!"

whilst the "short" attractions consist of another humorous strip starring Potts, the Office-boy, and items of interest from my notebook. A final word, chums—order next Wednesday's *GEM* now. That's the best way to make absolutely certain of it.

THE SINGING DOG!

Ever seen a dog, with webbed feet, that can sing like a bird? Not yet! But if success attends the efforts of an American zoologist who is hunting for animal freaks in British Guiana, it's quite likely such an animal will be on show in the British Zoos before long. The web-footed dog with the musical voice is reckoned to be a survivor of some prehistoric animal that lived principally in the rivers, and his repertoire of songs consists of a very musical whine. This "animal" fact from my notebook brings me to mention a famous *Annual* which is much sought after by boys and girls interested in birds and animals and the "great outdoors." I refer to the "*NEW ZOO ANNUAL*," which costs six shillings. To use a familiar phrase, it is selling like hot cakes—a live proof of its value and popularity. Harry Rowntree the famous artist, contributes two magnificent colour plates to this grand book, whilst all the leading naturalists o, the day, and those patient and clever men who specialise in taking animal photographs, have given of their best. Here's a bumper book that makes an ideal gift. When you're out shopping ask to have a look at the "*NEW ZOO ANNUAL*."

HEARD THIS ONE?

Schoolmaster: "Can you tell me which travels the faster, heat or cold?"
Bright Boy: "Heat every time, sir. Anybody can catch cold."

THE LEVIATHAN OF THE AIR!

It will weigh sixty tons, it will fly non-stop across the mighty wastes of the Atlantic from England to Canada, and the passengers will have all home comforts: hot food, comfortable beds, etc. Such is the claim of the designer of the biggest heavier than air plane in the world. The *DO-X*, the famous German air liner, will look a midget beside this British giant, which is intended to link up the air routes of the world. Eight or twelve engines will be fitted to this aerial monster, which will be built on the lines of a monoplane, and largely composed of stainless steel. Everyone these days is interested in aviation, for it has a fascination all its own. A handy book showing the progress of flying from the pioneer days of the Wright Bros. to the present stage, with photographs, drawings, and instructive and interesting articles by flying experts, is always acceptable as a Christmas present. The "*Modern Boy's BOOK OF AIR-CRAFT*" is the best of its kind. Already—and this year marks its first appearance—it promises to sell out quicker than any other "*Annual*" of its kind. Well printed, well-bound, this handsome book is worth every penny of the seven shillings and sixpence it costs. Have a look at it, anyway, and see for yourselves.

A CRAZE FOR HOBBIES!

The good-natured aunt was out shopping. She had bought presents for all her nieces and nephews except one. The remaining nephew presented some difficulty. While auntie was idly turning over the pages of a bulky book which was offered for sale at six shillings, her eyes lit on the two-page index it contained. She knew her difficulty was over then, for Tommy, her nephew, was a born hobbyist. He wanted to make things himself; he dabbled in woodwork, wireless, electricity, photography model railways, model ships, stamps—everything that could be called a hobby. And here was auntie gazing at the very book which catered specially for such a boy. Her eyes beamed, and straightway she purchased this bargain book. Another would-be customer in the shop who incidentally was faced with the same difficulty of buying the right present, happened to catch sight of the name of the book. She saw "*EVERY BOY'S HOBBY ANNUAL*," had a look at it, and she, too, walked out of the shop

knowing that her son would jump for joy when he received his present. He did. Very proudly he showed his "*Hobby Annual*" to his pals. Now they're simply mad to get one for themselves. A popular book soon sells out, and *Gemites* with a liking for hobbies who are keen to get this sparkling volume should place their order now.

SOME BIRD!

... "and the tail of the cockerel was twenty feet long." *Phew!* That, at first sight, looks like a "tall yarn," not a long tail, but it's true, nevertheless. Over in Japan, where these roosters have been bred since the year 600 B.C., they are a common enough sight. The owners of these majestic-looking roosters even go to the extent of providing special attendants for them, whose job it is, among others, to escort the rooster for its before-breakfast stroll, taking care to keep the beautiful feathered tail well clear of the ground. The name of this Japanese rooster is the *Yokohama*, and once its tail feathers are damaged or plucked they never regain their original magnificence.

EVERY BOY'S FAVOURITE!

"Ha, ha, ha!" There was no mistaking the high spirits of the boy on top of the bus—he chuckled, he laughed, he roared! Next to him sat an elderly gentleman who was trying to read his newspaper. As another peal of boyish laughter rang out, the elderly gentleman dropped his paper and glared at the boy. All unconscious of the glare the boy went on reading from a bulky volume, obviously very much amused by what he read. "Excuse me, young man," said the elderly gentleman at last, "but may I inquire just what book it is you're reading. It seems to be entertaining you vastly." "It's the '*Greyfriars Holiday Annual*,'" came the quick reply. "And I'm reading about Billy Bunter—" "Billy Bunter?" A puzzled look settled on the face of the elderly gentleman. "Billy Bunter—why I used to read about a Billy Bunter years and years ago." "Did you, sir?" said the boy excitedly. "Well, it's the same old Bunter—just as fat and as funny. There's always stories about Billy Bunter and Harry Wharton & Co. in the '*Holiday Annual*,' Tom Merry & Co., the boys of St. Jim's, are in it, too." "Well—well," said the elderly gent. "I remember them also. Wasn't there a funny fellow, with an eyeglass, at St. Jim's?" "Right on the target, sir. You mean Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He's still going strong. So are Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co." "How much is this '*Annual*,' my boy?" asked the elderly gentleman. "Six bob, sir. And it's the best book that money can buy. You see, in addition to the topping school stories of St. Jim's and *Greyfriars* there are adventure stories of every description, a play in verse, and eight gorgeous colour and photogravure plates." "By Jove, young man," said the elderly gentleman with a smile. "You've solved a big problem for me. I was wondering what to buy my young rascal of a nephew for a present. It shall be the '*Greyfriars Holiday Annual*.'" "Won't he be bucked, sir?" chirped the youngster. "I've never met any kid yet who wasn't jolly pleased with the '*Holiday Annual*.' Two hundred and eighty pages of the right stuff, sir, that's what it is." And the boy on top of the bus summed up this bumper bargain book in the right terms. The "*Holiday Annual*" is indeed the "right stuff." Have a look at it, boys.

YOUR EDITOR.

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THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLERS!

(Continued from page 10.)

permeate the room. Figgins heard it and wondered what it was. When it dawned upon him that it was Miss Fawcett's variety of snoring he felt a thrill of satisfaction. Now was his chance.

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

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

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

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

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

"Master Merry, how could you—"
"It was not Master Merry. There must be a cat in the room!"

"I don't think so. I am sure—"
"There must be a cat or a dog. I will look under the bed. Ah! Did you hear that? I distinctly heard a movement under the bed."

"Dear me! So did I! It must be the cat!"
"Show the light, and I will frighten it away."
"I say, it doesn't matter," said Tom Merry. "I don't mind a cat. Let her alone. She won't do any harm here."
"My dear boy, the animal would disturb your slumbers. It must be driven out. Shoo, shoo!"

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

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

"Good heavens!"
"I saw his boot distinctly!"
"Oh dear! We shall all be murdered in our beds!"

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

"What's the matter, nurse?"
"You will promise me not to be frightened."
"Rats! What's the giddy game?"

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

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

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

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

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

The base wretch declined to come forth.
"I say," giggled Tom Merry, "it's old Figgins! Go easy with that poker!"

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

"I tell you it's Figgins!" roared Tom Merry.
"Yes, yes! Pray calm yourself. Come forth, base ruffian!"

Another lunge under the bed, and Figgins gave a fearful yell.

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

"I will not strike you if you go quietly."
"Honour bright?"

"I will keep my word, base wretch!"
Then the base wretch consented to show himself. The door opened as a figure crawled forth; the noise had been heard, and Mr. Railton had looked in to see what was the matter.

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

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

"You may get up, Figgins."
Figgins got up.

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

"What are you doing here, Figgins?"
"I came to speak to Tom Merry, sir."

"You know what to expect. Go to my study!"
"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, "Figgie came here to see me, sir, because I wanted him to! It was my fault."

"Go to my study, Figgins."

"If you want to lick anybody, lick me!" said Tom recklessly. "If you lick old Figgins I'll—I'll get worse! I'll get really ill! I won't take any medicine, and—"

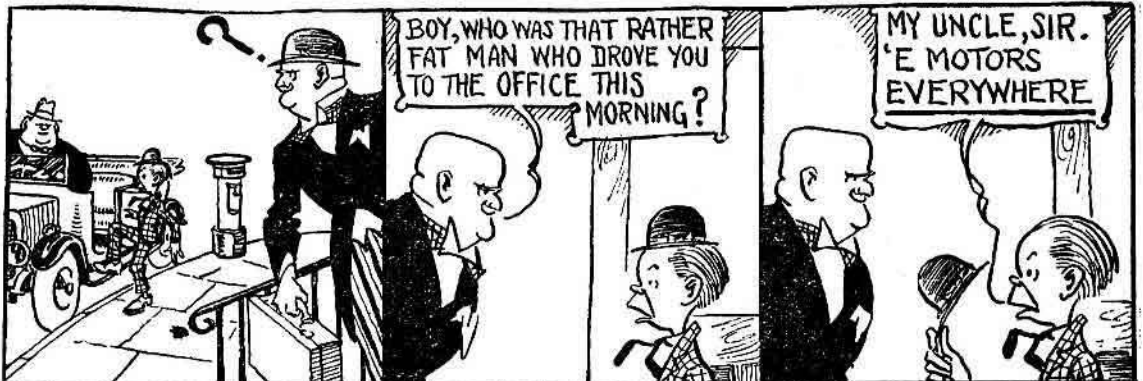
"Silence, Merry!"
"Let Figgins off, then!" Tom sat up in bed. "I'll get excited—feverish—and very likely die on your hands, sir! Are you going to let Figgins off?"

"My darling child, compose yourself—compose yourself!"
"Are you going to let Figgins off?"

"Calm yourself, my sweetest boy!"
"Are you going to let Figgins off?"

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

Potts, the Office-Boy!



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

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

"Thank you, sir," said Figgins demurely.

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

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

"Good-night, Figgy—and thanks awfully for coming!"

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

CHAPTER 6.

The First Feed!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Tom! Tom! My darling Tommy!"

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

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

"Well, I didn't."

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

"My dearest Tommy. Do you feel inclined to take a little medicine?"

Tom shuddered.

"No, thanks."

"Are you hungry?"

"No."

"A little gruel—"

"I'm not hungry."

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

Tom Merry grinned.

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

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

"Yaw—aw—aw!"

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

Slumber at last reigned in the sick-room.

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

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

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

"Eating? He has not been eating."

"Look at him, my dear madam."

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

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

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

"Dear me, look here!"

Miss Fawcett looked and was equally horrified.

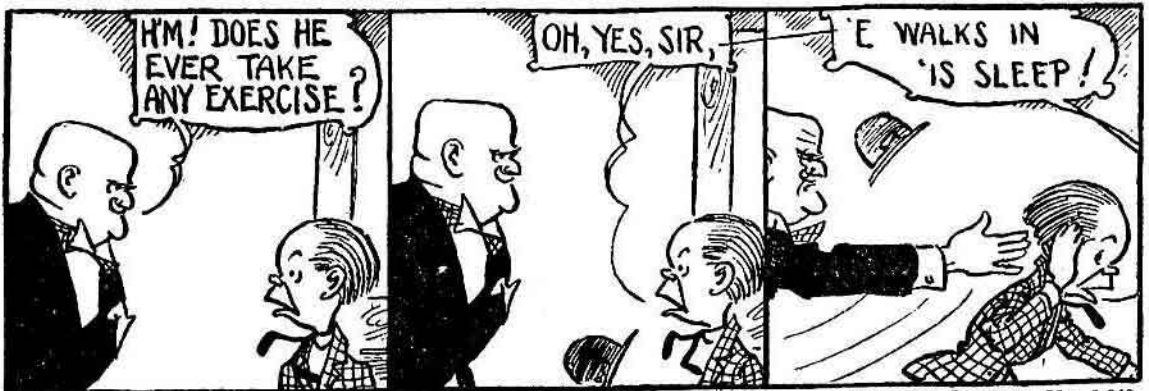
"Bless my soul! That dreadful boy Figgins must have placed them there."

"The young rascal!"

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

Tommy did not look much like expiring. In fact, he looked a great deal better than he had looked the previous

"Ear" Again!



day, and any unprejudiced observer might have thought that the meal had done him good.

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

Tom Merry opened his eyes.

"Hallo! What's the row?" he said sleepily.

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

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

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

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

"Calm yourself, my darling child—"

"Are you going to take that grub to Study No. 6?"

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Mimms hastily.

"Right-ho! Now, don't offer me any medicine. I don't want any. I want some eggs and bacon, and I could do with some coffee."

"My sweetest Tommy! A little cod-liver oil—"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"You would like a little gruel, then?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Some nice warm broth?"

"Nice warm grandmother!"

"My dearest boy!"

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

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

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

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

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

"Hang it! I won't!"

"Now, Master Merry!"

"Take the beastly stuff yourself, then!"

"My dear boy—"

Tom Merry threw up his hands as to ward off the insistent House dame and the medicine.

"I can't! Take it away! Gr-r-r-r!" He turned away his head with the wryest face he could make.

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

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

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

"Now, Master Merry!"

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

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

Tom Merry grinned.

"Oh, all right, chuck it in!"

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

"There's a good little boy!"

"Oh, rats!"

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

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

Dr. Short shook his head and smiled.

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

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

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

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

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

"Gr-r-r-r!"

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

"Tommy! My rash darling—"

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

"My dearest child, you must be quiet."

Tom Merry resigned himself to his fate.

He was too fond of his own governess to wish to distress



Gore brandished his novel weapon, but the Juniors rushed into violent

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

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins & Co. Come Out Strong!

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

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

Figgins soon noticed the glum looks of the chums of Study No. 6, and he whispered to D'Arcy, who sat nearest

him in the class-room. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was a very short-sighted gentleman, and very seldom noticed what was going on in the class.

"I say, Adolphus!" whispered Figgins.

D'Arcy turned his head languidly.

"I think I have previously remarked to you, Figgins, that my name is not Adolphus," he said. "It seems extremely curious to me that you cannot address me by my proper name, dear boy."

"That's all right, Aubrey—"

"My name is not Aubrey, either; my name is Arthur Augustus."

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

"Pway do not address me again, Figgins! I have an



Figgins staggered back as the hard bristles of the brush came with his face!

except a few things which, I suppose, Tom Mewwy had eaten."

"What a frost!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Rather not!"

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

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

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

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well," said Figgins, looking round, "you chaps remember Kerr's giddy impersonations, don't you, and how jolly well he does 'em?"

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

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

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

Blake looked thoughtful.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blake gasped.

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

Figgins looked pleased at this unsolicited testimonial.

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

extremely strong objection to bein' chawacterised as a fathead."

"Never mind. What's the—"

"I have requested you not to address me."

"Look here! What's the cause of—"

"I refuse to reply."

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

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

"The unfortunate what?"

"The unfortunate cires, that the—"

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

"Circumstances, dear boy. Owin' to the unfortunate circumstance that the gwub has been discovered in the bed-room of Tom Mewwy."

"My hat! Has it?"

"Yaas, wathah! We found it in the study this morning."

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

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

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

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

"Thank you for nothing!" said Figgy.

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

"I'm willing," said Kerr.

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

"That's agreed?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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

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

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

"Hallo! What have you been thinking?"

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

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"I am not the kind of fellow to put myself forward, I think," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I am speaking now simply for the good of the cause. I weally think that, as the cires wequiah tact and judgment, it would be safah to twust the mattah to me."

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

"I weally do not see—"

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

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

"Cheese it!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blake looked at him curiously.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

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

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

"How could you do it?"

"By telling what I know."

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

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

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

The chums walked on. Gore scowled after them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Short usually comes in a carriage."

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

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

CHAPTER 8.

A Change of Diet.

"DR. SHORT!"

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

Dr. Short was unexpectedly announced. He was not expected till nine, and it was barely five. But Miss Priscilla was glad to see him. His early return showed, of course, how deep an interest he took in his precious patient.

Tom Merry looked up from the "Holiday Annual."

"I say, Dr. Short!"

"Yes, my boy? How do you feel this afternoon?"

"Hungry."

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

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

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

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

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

"Implicitly, Dr. Short!"

"The medicine—"

"My dear boy has taken it regularly."

"Does he like it?"

"Well, he— I—"

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

Dr. Short rubbed his hands.

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

"Rats—I mean I shouldn't!"

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

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

Dr. Short rubbed his chin.

"Yes—er—undoubtedly, Miss Fawcett."

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

"I haven't been ill," said Tom. "It's all rot!"

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

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

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

Tom Merry looked curiously at the doctor.

"I have decided to change the diet," said the doctor hastily. "Let me see! So far, you have been giving him—"

"The gruel—"

"No more of that!"

"The broth—"

"Throw it away!"

"The beef-tea—"

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

Tom Merry put out his tongue.

The doctor took a survey of it through his pince-nez.

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

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

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

The doctor felt Tom Merry's pulse.

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

"Done with my fist?" asked Tom.

"Yes, my little lad."

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

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

Tom's eyes sparkled.

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

"What would you like, Master Merry?"

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

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

"Then a plum-pie and a jam-pudding."

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

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

"Yes; I do not think they will harm the patient."

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

"Excellent!"

"Biscuits and toffee and chocolate."

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

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

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

"And when—" began Miss Priscilla.

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

Mrs. Mimms left the room.

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

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

The doctor bent over the astonished patient.

"How's that, Tom, old buck?" he inquired.

Tom Merry gasped.

"Eh—what?"

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

"Kerr?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Kerr! My only hat!"

"Make the most of the grub while it lasts," whispered Kerr. "The real doctor will be here to-night, and you'll be starved again."

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

"Mum's the word!"

Miss Priscilla was coming back with the tumbler of water. "Er—thanks so much!" said the doctor. "I shall not, after all, require it, but thank you very much all the same. Good-bye, my little patient!"

"Good-bye, kid—I mean, sir!"

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

And the little doctor bowed himself out.

"My dearest Tommy, I am so glad that the doctor came

early," said Miss Priscilla. "It is very kind of him to take so much interest in your case, is it not?"

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

"You have faith in his judgment now?"

"Never knew such a sensible chap."

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

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

"Oh, Tom, he is a good, kind—"

"How long will they be with that grub, do you think?"

"Not very long, darling."

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

"Certainly, dearest!"

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

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

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

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

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

"Has that giddy rash gone, sir?"

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

"Ha, ha, ha! Is it smallpox or measles, do you think, sir?"

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

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

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

(Continued on next page.)



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

"How did it go?"

"Did it work?"

"Have you changed the diet?"

"Tell us all about it!"

"Yaas, watahah!"

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

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

And a chorus of cachinnations sounded from the old barn which would certainly have made a passer-by imagine that it was tenanted by a company of lunatics.

CHAPTER 9.

What Did Gore Know?

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

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

The Head of St. Jim's listened in amazement.

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

"Yes, sir; I have," said the medical man emphatically.

"I have no doubt whatever that it was one of the young rascals belonging to the school."

"Impossible!"

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

"I understood that he was much better."

"A merely outward and fictitious appearance of health."

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

"To some extent."

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

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

"Certainly, certainly!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You can sit down, old chap."

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

"What's the matter?"

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

The juniors looked grave.

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

"I second that motion," said Manners promptly.

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you think he really knows anything?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Shut the door, Figgy."

Blake advanced towards the alarmed occupant of the study. "If you interfere, Mellish, we shall scrag you. Stand aside!"

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

"No, I'm not."

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

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

"Stand back, you cads! Keep off, or—"

"Rats! Collar him!"

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

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

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

The door of the study opened.

"What is all this disturbance about?"

Mr. Railton was looking into the study.

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

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

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

"Yes, sir!"

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

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

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

CHAPTER 10.

The Truth at Last!

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

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

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

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

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

"My word!"

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

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

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

"Oh, chuck it!"

"Well, you will, I know. I—"

(Continued on page 23.)

"Mean to say you're willing to lend me five bob if I dodge down into the vaults to look for a blessed ghost? I'll do it like a shot, old chap? After all, it's broad daylight up here, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dashed if I see anything to chortle about! I'm as brave as a lion!" said Tubby proudly. "You chaps ought to see the way I've slept in haunted rooms when I've been staying with my friends in the nobility! I can tell you you'd be astonished—astonished and envious of my fortitude!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"Well, if this is a go, then, Dodd, old chap—"

Unnoticed by Tubb Muffin, Tommy Dodd had already made a signal to Cook, which had had the effect of sending that junior off in the direction of the chapel. The leader of the Classics was grinning as he responded.

"It's a go, all right, old bean! On condition that you stay down in the vaults for two minutes—"

"Through the ruined entrance where the door's gone!" interrupted Tubby Muffin quickly. "The reason for that is that my constitution needs constant fresh air!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That'll do!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "On condition that you stay down there two minutes, I'll hand you over five bob. That all right?"

"Right as rain!" smiled Tubby Muffin. "Follow me, you chaps. Keep your peckers up, you know, and don't be scared. Be like me—brave as a lion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin rolled off in the direction of the chapel, behind which were the ruins of part of the old Rookwood buildings that concealed a maze of vaults and secret passages. The Fistical Four and the two remaining Modern juniors followed in a state of keen anticipation.

A tall, middle-aged gentleman, whom the juniors recognised as Professor Carr, an archaeologist, who had been spending a considerable amount of his time at Rookwood, was coming away as they approached the entrance to the vaults. He nodded, and gave them an interested look as he passed.

"Exploring, my boys?" he asked.

"Just ghost-hunting, sir!" explained Tommy Dodd cheerfully. "The Rookwood ghost is supposed to hang about here, as you probably know."

Professor Carr's rather beady eyes seemed to narrow a little.

"I have heard that, certainly; and I shouldn't be too anxious to inquire into its ghostly habits, if I were you. Though nowadays we don't, perhaps, believe in ghosts, there are certain sinister influences surrounding a good many ancient buildings which are best left to themselves."

"Oh, we're not scared, sir—or, at least, Tubby isn't!" said Tommy Dodd, indicating the fat junior. "He's going to show us how ghosts are really laid, aren't you, Tubby?"

"I—I say, you chaps, I—let's get it over!" suggested Tubby Muffin anxiously. "I—I'm as brave as a lion, of course; but I'm in a hurry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors went their way, and Professor Carr, after watching their retreating figures for a few seconds, proceeded towards the gates.

Tubby Muffin rolled through the ancient Gothic arch, beyond which a flight of stone steps led down into the abysmal darkness of the vaults. The fat junior was trembling visibly by this time. He found Professor Carr's remarks the reverse of reassuring.

"L-look here, Dodd, old chap," he said, pausing at the top of the flight. "It's—it's rather late now—dinner-time soon, you know! Suppose you hand me the five bob now and I'll do it after dinner! Not that I'm scared—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Deal's off!" said Tommy Dodd. "Either you do it now or you go without the five bob! What's it to be?"

"Beast! I'll do it, then," said Tubby ungraciously. "Who's frightened of a blessed ghost, anyway? I'll jolly well show you what courage is!"

With sudden determination the fat junior braced himself up and rolled down the stone steps at express speed.

Down below unknown to Tubby Muffin, Tommy Cook prepared to give vent to the most terrifying, ghostly howls he could muster.

The juniors waited expectantly.

They were not disappointed. Almost as soon as Tubby disappeared from view, a long, drawn-out, blood-curdling moan ascended from the vaults. Then came the sound of a scuffle and a howl of sheer terror.

The howl was from Tubby Muffin. The fat junior was suddenly seen to fly up from the darkness of the underground chambers as though fear had literally lent him wings.

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"Help! Murder! Police!" shrieked Tubby Muffin. "It's after me! I heard it and felt it! Save me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stay here and keep it back while I run on!" roared the terrified Tubby, as he bounded away past the hilarious juniors. "Don't let it get me, whatever you do! Whoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The "ghost" in the shape of Tommy Cook suddenly came into view up the stone steps. Tubby Muffin saw him out of the corner of his eye and pulled up dead.

"What—what—" he stuttered.

"Only little me!" smiled Tommy Cook. "Did you think I was a ghost, Tubby?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin blinked. Then he endeavoured to grin.

"He, he, he! Of course, I knew it all the time!" he said. "The fact is, you chaps, I was pulling your legs. I wasn't afraid; perish the thought!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I consider I've shown you how brave I am, anyway," said Tubby. "That being so, I fancy I win the five bob. Hand it over, Dodd, old chap!"

But much to Tubby's disgust, Dodd merely continued to roar with the rest. The leader of the Moderns apparently did not see eye to eye with Tubby on the subject of whether the prize had been won. The fat junior had to go into dinner that day—as Lovell put it—dollarless!

CHAPTER 2.

A Shock for the Moderns!

"ONE good deed per day!"

"Eh?"

"One good deed per day!" repeated Jimmy Silver, regarding the rest of the Fistical Four over the tea-table in the end study with great seriousness. "As Boy Scouts, it's up to us to do that at the very least. Well, we haven't done it to-day, you men—yet!"

"Rats!" said Arthur Edward Lovell warmly. "We fixed up a booby-trap for Carthew this morning. That's doing the school a good turn, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not enough!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Gather round and listen to the other good deed your Uncle James is thinking of doing, anyway! You heard those Modern fatheads say they were going ghost-hunting to-night?"

"Tommy Dodd said something about it, I fancy!" nodded Newcome. "Far as I'm concerned, they're welcome. I'd sooner stay in bed than go rooting round the giddy vaults in search of non-existent spooks!"

"Same here!"

"Slackers!" said Jimmy Silver. "Mean to say you'd stay in bed and sleep, knowing that our dear old Modern pals were going to be disappointed? Shame!"

"What the thump—"

"My own feeling is that it would be an awful pity to let them crawl back into bed without even a sight of a spectre," said the leader of the Fistical Four, with a shake of his head. "I've made up my mind they won't be disappointed if I can help it, anyway."

"Going to rake up a ghost from somewhere or other, then?" asked Lovell, rather sarcastically.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"That's what I was thinking of doing."

"Eh?"

"Why not? There's plenty of suitable clobber among the Dramatic Society's props, and I'm tall enough to make quite a good spectre myself!"

"Oh crickey!"

"A white sheet and a little phosphorous paint ought to work wonders," said Jimmy Silver. "If I wait down in the vaults for Dodd and his pals to turn up, I fancy I can give 'em a real treat. They won't be a bit disappointed by the time I've finished with 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell and Newcome and Raby roared as they understood the nature of the little jape that had formed itself in their leader's fertile brain.

"Like it?" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Tip-top!" chuckled Lovell. "Of course, they may be suspicious—"

"Well, I don't know that they will," said Jimmy Silver. "They only mentioned it in a sort of aside, when Tubby rolled up. Probably they're under the impression we know nothing about it."

"Then again, they may not turn out when it comes to the time," put in Raby. "Pretty poor sort of jape if we wait there an hour or so for nothing."

"That'll have to be risked," said the leader of the Fistical

Four. "I rather think they'll turn up, myself. Tommy Dodd seemed to be keen enough on investigating, this morning, anyway."

"Worth taking a chance, any old how," said Newcome. "It'll be a big Classical score if we do scare the life out of them. Do we all rig up as ghosts, then, Jimmy?"

"Fatehead! Think ghosts trot about in batches, then?" asked Jimmy Silver scornfully. "I'll do all the ghost-work that's needed. You chaps can come along and watch if you want to do so; but you won't have to do anything else."

"All serene, then."

And thus it was arranged. The Fistical Four went to bed with the rest of the Classical Fourth that evening; but not to sleep. They remained quiet but wakeful while the rest of the Form dropped off one by one to sleep.

At last, when the steady breathing of the dormitory indicated that most of the fellows were asleep, Jimmy Silver sat up in bed.

"You fellows awake?" he whispered.

There was an answering rustle from other corners of the dorm as Lovell and Newcome and Raby sat up.

"Ready, Jimmy?" asked Lovell.

For answer, the leader of the Fistical Four slipped out of bed and began to dress. His three chums followed suit.

By way of preparation for their little jape on the Moderns the Fistical Four had already taken down to the vaults the theatrical "props" in which Jimmy Silver was to disguise himself, and after dressing themselves and donning rubber slippers, they were able to quit the dormitory.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not belong to the select coterie which made a habit of breaking bounds at night; but it was not the first time they had made a nocturnal excursion in the cause of a jape, and they knew the way out of the window at the end of the dormitory passage and down the ivy into the quad.

They made that somewhat perilous descent without mishap, and turned their footsteps in the direction of the chapel, keeping well in the shadow of the School House in case some stray master or prefect happened to be abroad.

Once behind the chapel, they felt themselves to be safe. They hurried through the dim, starlit ruins of what had, centuries before, been the main Rookwood building and went down the stone steps where Tubby Muffin had displayed his bravery earlier in the day.

In the pitch darkness of the vault, Jimmy Silver switched on an electric torch and found the suitcase in which they had previously left the props. He bent over the case. Then he stood upright suddenly.

"Hear anything, you fellows?" he asked.

In the white light of the flashlamp the Fistical Four looked at each other.

"I—I fancied I did, for a moment," said Raby, a little dubiously. "Sort of metallic sound, I thought."

"Just what I thought myself," nodded Jimmy Silver. "I suppose it isn't possible that there's something in what Tommy Dodd—"

"Bosh!" said Lovell. "It's just that it's a bit creepy down here. You're imagining things!"

"That's about the size of it, I suppose," agreed the leader of the Fistical Four. "Still, I did think I heard something."

He turned to the work in hand and the Fistical Four speedily forgot the matter as Jimmy Silver prepared himself as a ghost.

With the aid of a white sheet, some phosphorus paint and other theatrical appurtenances, Jimmy Silver speedily became transformed from a schoolboy into a most realistic spectre. The phosphorous paint gave him a weird, unearthly glow, which was truly startling in the gloom of the vault.

"My hat! Gives me quite a queer feeling to look at you, Jimmy!" remarked Lovell. "I can quite imagine those Moderns—"

"S-sh!"

The Fistical Four shrank back into the shadows as they heard from the direction of the stone steps the sound of subdued voices.

They soon recognised the voices as those of Tommy Dodd & Co. From the steps they saw the gleam of a flashlamp and heard Tommy Cook speaking.

"Better douse that light, Tommy Dodd; if there is a ghost, it's bound to scare it away!"

The Fistical Four saw the light go out.

"Keep close to me, you chaps!" they heard Tommy Dodd



Tommy Dodd joined his two companions in their mad rush for the exit. At the foot of the flight of steps they met with a crash and three separate yells!

say. "We won't go too far—just far enough to have a look round."

The Moderns shuffled down into the pitch darkness, Jimmy Silver & Co. heard them drawing nearer.

It was Jimmy Silver's cue. Suddenly he came out of the alcove where he and his chums had been sheltering and advanced towards them with slow and majestic steps.

There was a sudden commotion from the direction of the Moderns.

"What the thump—"

"L-l-look!"

"Bejabers, an' it's the Ould Gentleman himself!" roared Tommy Doyle. "Help!"

CHAPTER 3.

Attacked!

"HELP!" "Oh erikay! Run for it!" gasped Tommy Cook.

It was only a few hours since Tommy Cook himself had taken the principal part in a "ghost" scene. But the sight of the dreadful apparition that was gliding towards him banished all thoughts of japes from Tommy Cook's mind. Tommy Cook's only thought was to get upstairs with the utmost speed.

He and Tommy Doyle made a rush through the inky darkness towards the stone steps.

Tommy Dodd was not so quick to join in the panic. He held back for a few seconds.

"Half-a-mo'! Stand up to it, you chaps—whoop!" he concluded, as the ghostly leader of the Classicals began to glide in his direction.

Tommy Dodd was possessed of more than the average share of courage. But down in the eerie Rookwood vaults at night-time, it required almost superhuman courage to face the phantom that was gliding across the flagstones.

Tommy Dodd hesitated for a second or two. Then he joined his two colleagues in their mad rush for the exit.

At the foot of the flight of steps they met with a crash and a yell

"Ow! Lemme gerrout!"

"Help! Gerraway!"

"It's after us! Whoop!"

Jimmy Silver accosted, and there was a wild scramble up the steps on the part of the Moderns.

Lovell and Newcome and Raby, who were by this time out of hiding, could no longer repress their feelings. A roar suddenly echoed across the dismal vault, and this time it was a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Classicals saw the figures that were silhouetted against the dim starlight above pause in their flight.

"What the thunder—" they heard Tommy Dodd exclaim.

"Faith! An' it's an army of devils that's afther us!"

"Devils be blowed!" roared Tommy Dodd. "It's the Classicals!"

"What!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! You're right!" exclaimed Tommy Cook. "I can hear Raby, anyway! It's—it's a jape!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ware ghosts!" yelled Lovell. "After 'em, Jimmy! Let 'em show their pluck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you idiots!" howled Tommy Dodd, addressing his followers. "Didn't I tell you to stand your ground? It's only Silver and his crowd!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Tommy Dodd switched on his flashlamp, and the Three Tommies stared down into the vault at the disguised Jimmy Silver and his hilarious followers.

"M-m-my hat!" was all that Tommy Cook could say.

"Bedad! It's meself that thought I'd met Ould Nick himself and all the time it was that spalpeen Silver!"

"You—you blithering bandersnatches!" gasped Tommy Dodd, while the Classicals simply howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that beats it," remarked Tommy Cook, in tones of deep disgust. "To think I was taken in by a rotten Classical jape. Ye gods!"

"Who's Cook House now?" demanded Newcome, and from Raby and Lovell and the "ghost"—who by this time was beginning to shed his disguise—came a triumphant yell:

"Classical House!"

"You—you facheads!" snorted Tommy Dodd, his face a study in chagrin in the light of his flashlamp. "Well, you've scored off us this time, and no mistake. Only thing left to do now is to call it a day and buzz off to bed. You wait till our return jape comes off, though!"

"If we're to wait till your brains start working we'll have to wait a long time, old bean!" retorted Jimmy Silver, bundling his trappings into the suitcase and slinging it cheerfully into a corner of the vault. "Now for bed, or we'll feel tired in the morning. Or perhaps you prefer to carry on with your ghost hunt, Dodd?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thanks; but I've had enough for one night," said Dodd. "Come on, you men! We'll never hear the last of this!"

The entire party ascended the stone steps, and made for the quad.

It was as they rounded the chapel and came in sight of the main school buildings that a sudden exclamation came from Newcome.

"Cave! It's the Head!"

"Oh, my hat! Bob down, you chaps!"

Dr. Chisholm himself, coming evidently from the School House to his own private house, was bearing straight down on the horrified juniors!

There was no time to take measures to meet the emergency; there was no time even to think, and to "bob down," as Lovell had suggested, was out of the question, since no suitable cover existed.

All the juniors could do was to break up and run for it. Tommy Dodd & Co. instinctively raced off in the direction

of the Modern House. With Jimmy Silver & Co., however, the choice of direction was not so easy, for the Head was walking between them and the Classical House.

"This way, you men!" hissed Jimmy Silver, after a hasty glance round.

The Classical junior, thinking quickly, had decided that their best chance would lie in their running round the chapel and trying to effect an entrance from the back of the school. But, quick as he was, he was too late! Lovell and Newcome and Raby were already running in the opposite direction.

There was a sudden surprised exclamation from the Head.

"Bless my soul! Boys! Stop—halt, I say!"

But the flying juniors were deaf to the voice of the charmer. They ran for dear life.

Jimmy Silver realised, with a start, that his chums had got past the Head, but that, in his own case, retreat was cut off.

There was nothing else for it but to turn tail and take his chance at the back of the school. The leader of the Classicals wheeled round and broke into a run back towards the chapel. As he did so he heard the Head's angry voice again:

"Boy! Stop! I have seen you!"

"But not recognised me, old bean, or you'd use my name!" muttered Jimmy Silver to himself. "Here goes, anyway."

From behind him he heard the sound of hurried footsteps. The Head was after him. Subterfuge was necessary now. He could never gain access to the school from the back, with the Head only fifty yards behind him.

Jimmy Silver had a sudden inspiration. He would return to the vault until the Head was past, then double back after his chums and get back the same way as he had got out.

He tore round the chapel, raced through the old ruins, and fairly dived down the stone steps that led to the vaults.

At the bottom he stopped, his heart pounding against his ribs, hardly daring to breathe. He heard the faint thud of the Head's footsteps on the turf above, and wondered how soon he could, with safety, venture out.

But Jimmy Silver was destined not to leave the old vaults as soon as he had anticipated.

As he crouched in the vault a sudden sound attracted his attention.

He looked round.

What he saw drew a gasp of amazement from him.

What had only ten minutes before been a dark stone wall had, by some unseen force, been swung back, revealing a small inner chamber, illuminated by a small electric lamp. And in the light of that lamp the petrified junior saw the tall figure of a man who stared at him with a fixed, menacing stare.

Instinctively, Jimmy Silver jumped for the steps.

He was too late. With a single bound the man was across the floor. Jimmy Silver felt himself seized, and felt strong, sinuous hands grip him by the throat and throttle his cries for help. Then he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER 4.

The Mystery of Jimmy Silver I

"EXTRAORDINARY!"

Thus Dr. Chisholm.

It was the morning after. Classes were in progress at Rookwood, but notwithstanding that fact, six juniors, not to mention their Form master, Mr. Dalton, were ranged before the desk in the Head's study.

The six juniors were Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern House, and Lovell and Newcome and Raby of the Classicals. Jimmy Silver was conspicuous by his absence. When morning came and the leader of the Classical Fourth had not turned up, the remainder of the previous night's adventurers had had no alternative but to go to the Head and tell him all about it.

"Most remarkable, sir!" Mr. Dalton supplemented. "There seems no doubt, however, about Silver's having left the school. The search I have made with the aid of the Sixth has been exhaustive."

"You are quite sure that the vaults have been thoroughly explored?"

"Quite positive on the point, sir. Our search-party had the co-operation and assistance of Professor Carr, who happened to be at work this morning, and we left no corner unexplored."

The Head pursed his lips.

"It is most mysterious and disturbing. I can understand Silver, of course, being anxious to escape being caught; but why he should run away from the school is altogether beyond

me. The second offence is much more serious than the first."

"He hasn't done it voluntarily, sir, that's certain," ventured Lovell. "I know Silver better than that—we all do."

"Oh, rather, sir!"

"Depend on it, sir, something's happened to him," said Tommy Dodd. "Silver's being kept somewhere against his will."

"It seems incredible," murmured the Head. "Nevertheless, Mr. Dalton, unless Silver turns up very soon I shall be compelled to regard the suggestion seriously, and call in the help of the police. Come in!"

The last in response to a tap on the door. Replying to the invitation, the school page entered, carrying a telegram in his hand.

Dr. Chisholm took the telegram, opened it, and read it.

As he did so an exclamation escaped him.

"Bless my soul!"

"News of Silver, sir?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"The telegram is from Silver himself!" was the Head's reply; then he read it out aloud:

'Regret had to leave school suddenly. Am safe and well. Do not call in police.—SILVER.'

"Goodness gracious!" said Mr. Dalton.

For a few seconds the juniors could only blink. Then there was quite a chorus.

"It's wrong, sir!"

"All wrong! Silver never sent that wire! The fact is—"

"Some awful scoundrel sent it to put us off the track, sir. Perhaps a burglar or a kidnapper—"

"Silence!" said Dr. Chisholm, smiling faintly. "I am afraid your imagination runs away with some of you. Silver's behaviour is peculiar, certainly. But I should

consider it much more peculiar for him to have been kidnapped. What do you think, Mr. Dalton?"

Mr. Dalton looked rather thoughtful.

"From what town was the telegram sent, sir?"

"From Bagshot," replied the Head, after a glance at the buff form. "That, then, was Silver's situation at the time when he sent this message. It should be easy to obtain confirmation from the post office."

But it was not so easy as the Head had anticipated. When he got through on the phone, it was only to be informed that the telegram had been sent and paid for automatically from a public telephone booth.

"Well, well, I must think over the matter," he said, when he had replaced the receiver. "Certainly, I am not disposed now to consider seriously the suggestion that Silver has met with foul play."

"But, sir—"

"If you call in the police—"

"Silence, boys! I do not feel justified in going to such extreme lengths. For the moment you may consider the matter at an end. You will each take five hundred ones for being out of your dormitories last night. Silver will be dealt with later—on his return!"

The Head dismissed them with a gesture. The juniors filed out. Dr. Chisholm apparently was satisfied. But Jimmy Silver's colleagues were by no means satisfied. What could have gone wrong in the few minutes after he had become separated from them in the quad they did not know. But on one thing they were determined—that they would not rest until they had unravelled the mystery and found out what had actually happened to their missing chum.

THE END.

(Who was it who attacked Jimmy Silver? Where is Jimmy now? Don't miss next week's great yarn! You'll learn all about Jimmy Silver in it!)

THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLERS!

(Continued from page 18.)

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

"I've got it!"

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

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

"You caught it off Tom Merry."

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

"What?"

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

"I shouldn't wonder."

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

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

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

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

"No doubt about it," said Monty Lowther. "I remember perfectly well that Goro caught up a hairbrush in that row, and whacked Tom in the face with it when Tom had his head in elantery. It's a dead cert."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We had better go and explain to the Housemaster."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A sibilant sound had floated in at the open door.

"Why, that's—"

Blake broke off. Tom Merry stepped into the study.

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake. "Here's the giddy invalid! We've done the trick; we worked the wheeze! Hurrah for us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

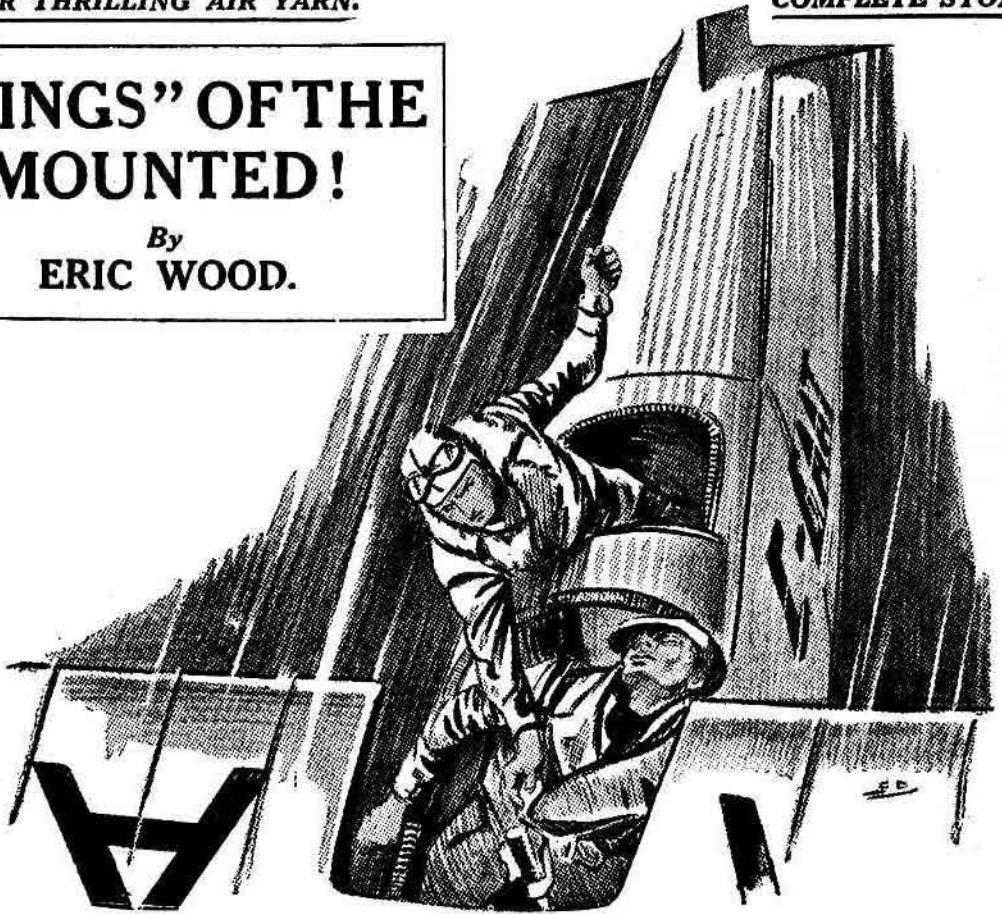
THE END.

(For once in a way someone has scored over Tom Merry! But he comes to the rescue of the juniors in "EASY TERMS FOR THE SAINTS!" (next week.)

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"WINGS" OF THE MOUNTED!

By
ERIC WOOD.



CHAPTER 1.

A Parachute Descent!

JIMMY WELFORD, familiarly known as "Wings," of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, heard the startled gasp made into the telephone by his observer-chum, Hal Rawlings, in the rear cockpit. Wings had no time even to gasp, for the plane, on coming out of a long deep cloudbank, was heading directly for the towering side of a great mountain.

It was so close that Wings had no time to make even a dizzy, almost vertical bank to come round.

"I've got to climb that mountain!" Wings murmured to himself, and put the machine almost on her tail. He gave the engine the "gun," accelerating to the limit, and anyone watching might have thought that the machine was a great fly, running up the face of the mountain.

Wings' eyes were glued on the altimeter, the needle of which moved round the dial as the plane climbed for the ceiling of the world. The job called for all of Wings' flying skill. If he had tried to loop there would have been danger of his tail striking. Yet he had to ease over backwards just sufficiently to allow the wheels to miss. When his eyes left the dial they were looking straight up to heaven.

That thousand-foot climb was a nightmare experience—hours of tension packed into moments. But at last it was over—the machine topped the mountain, and Wings even-keeled her.

"Gosh, Wings, that was a close 'un!" came the throaty voice of Hal Rawlings. "Felt sure it would be a tail-spin or something."

"Don't know what I thought," said Jimmy Welford. "Don't think I did think! We're four miles up now, and we can't be far from the Liard River."

He switched from the danger incident to the subject of

their mission as casually as if the former had been a joy-ride.

On the Liard, at the Free-for-All Creek, was a fur-trading post, owned by one of the few surviving free-traders who had once waged fierce war against the great fur-trading companies. Free-for-All Post was owned by Dave MacDonald, grandson of the founder of the station. Thither trappers, white and red, brought in their pelts, and traded them for cash and goods.

But a mere matter of hours before news had reached Edmonton that there was trouble at Free-for-All, and the flying detachment of the Mounted, consisting of Wings Welford and Hal Rawlings, had been detailed to investigate.

An Indian had called at headquarters and given the news.

"Me find it in the smoke," he told, and it was known what he meant. He had been the last to see and to read the silent relayed message spelt by the smoke of signal fires over hundreds of miles—the first message perhaps sent up many, many times to en-

sure its being seen and understood by some foot-free Indian—sent up, maybe, without much hope. But it had been noticed, and so relayed and relayed until now it was given to the troopers at Edmonton. "Message him say, the Indian had said, 'that there trouble at Free-for-All, Liard River. Raided, robbed. Robbers they stay finish trade with trappers. MacDonald him prisoner. That's all.'"

And now, here was Wings Welford, in the cockpit of his plane—one of the most modern means of communication—called out by one of the most primitive—the oldest and newest joining forces across the gulf of time in the interests of justice!

"Remember, Wings," Hal Rawlings shouted through the phone, "there's no safe landing-place within three miles of the creek."

"Not likely to forget it," came Welford's reply; and at that moment saw, afar off, the glistening streak that was the melting Liard River, moving sluggishly, because the

A FIST FIGHT IN MID-AIR! Wings knocks out a dangerous plane-thief and makes a safe landing!

break-up of the winter's ice was not yet at the full. "Thought we'd take a flight right over the creek, flying low, to see how the land lies," he added.

"Right-ho!" Rawlings agreed; and the plane sliced through the sky, came over the river, and then Wings had her careering low down on the river route.

"Say," Wings told Rawlings presently, "we ought to have floats fitted to this ship—and we jolly well will when we get back. Floats and wheels—and she'll be fit for any old job, whether on land or water."

"Good idea," Hal replied. "Losh, man, there's the creek right ahead of us, and there's something doing! Spot those puffs of smoke? Looks to me as if they're made by rifles!"

Wings Welford peered through his goggles, but could not see as easily as his chum, who was using the powerful binoculars. Yet, after a while, Welford saw the smoke-puffs, and, like Hal, reckoned they must be made by rifles. It looked as if there were three men firing from a long, low, timber building on the bank of Free-for-All Creek, and a fourth replying to their fire from the dense forest on the opposite bank. It was this forest, spreading for miles without a break, that made it impossible for the airplane to land there; and Wings snapped his teeth as he realised his inability to go down—while someone certainly needed help.

"They'll know we're Mounties," he told Rawlings. "They'll see the emblem on our wings. I think I'll go lower down and draw fire—whoever fires at us is on the wrong side! What say?"

"Anything you like, Wings," Rawlings agreed; and Welford pushed down the stick and the plane zoomed at terrific speed, to be brought up on an even keel about a hundred yards above the river. Wings did not go lower because high-powered rifles, in the hands of expert marksmen, might prove very dangerous—and a hundred yards was running it fine.

Came the moment when the machine roared over the stretch of water between the building, which the Mounties knew to be the trading post, and the man, unseen, on the other bank. Firing had stopped a little while before, as if the warring men were waiting to know what the coming of the plane meant.

As she swept past, her Service marks plain to be seen from below, three rifles spat yellowish flame and blue smoke—and for one brief moment Rawlings had a vision of a man who sprang from the shelter of the trees on the opposite bank. That man waved his hands frantically, one of them holding a rifle. Then Hal gasped as he saw the man slump to earth, even as he had turned to spring back into cover. Rawlings had not seen the spewed flame from one of the rifles in the building, but the fall of the man told him clearly enough what had happened. One of the other side had snapped a shot, after firing at the plane.

"They've got their man, Wings!" yelled Rawlings into the phone. He was leaning overside, gazing backwards. "The poor beggar's not moving! What'll we do?"

The plane was out of range of the rifles now, and Wings Welford, before answering his chum, banked over, came round in a narrow circle, straightened out, and then climbed a bit, passing the scene of the drama at a greater height. Even so, the men in the building spewed lead at the plane, and a bullet zipped between the two chums at an oblique angle.

"Could bomb 'em out," said Wings, "but I don't fancy doing that."

"Nor I," said Rawlings. "But if we make off, and land miles away, they'll guess why we've gone, and they'll clear before we can get back. Or else they'll stay sieged up, and we'll stand no more chance of getting at them than that poor devil did. Bombing would also mean destroying MacDonald's furs and things. I wonder if it's MacDonald they've just shot? Never met the man, either of us."

"Messages said he was a prisoner," came from Wings. "Could have escaped, of course, and was trying to get the crooks."

The machine roared over the building this time, and, since the men below were thus "blind" no shots came up. Wings was merely spying out the situation, on the bare chance of being able to do something. But he was convinced that he could not land, or do anything except bomb the building. He looked at the westerling sun, and knew that in half an hour darkness would have descended on the wilderness.

"Say, Hal," he said, "what do you say to this—you take control of the ship and I'll go down by parachute out of range of their guns. I'll keep watch to see what happens while you go and land, and then come back on foot, unship

the machine-gun, and bring it with you, and maybe we'll find a use for it. What say?"

"Let me do the parachuting," Rawlings suggested; he wasn't anxious to have his chum work what was likely to be the most dangerous part of the game.

"Not on your life," retorted Wings, and, being senior, his word was law. A few minutes later they had swapped positions, and Wings had adjusted the harness of his parachute. Rawlings piloted the machine back over the post, out of range of the rifles. He carried on for some distance until Wings gave him the word.

"Slow down, Hal—I'll make it now," Welford said. "Those fellows will see me—which is what I want, because it'll make 'em stick to the building. You know where the landing-place is."

"I do," said Rawlings, who had a place marked on his flying-plan. "Three miles away. I'll pick up a trail and get down as soon as I can. I'll meet you this side of the post, on its side of the river, as near as you like."

"Maybe close up," was Welford's reply. "S'long, Hal." And next moment he had gone over the side. Like a stone dropped from a tower he shot for some time, and then the envelope of his chute opened and his downward progress was stayed. It was a hazardous feat because there was nowhere to alight except on the tree-tops or in the river—and as he could not control himself he did not know where he would come down.

Then the improbable happened. At one moment he had been traveling in the direction of the plane; the next he was caught in a back-current of air and was going in the opposite direction. He flung a backward look and saw that if the current held him he would travel over the post buildings!

"Unless I land before that," he murmured. He didn't like going with his back to the enemy, and he flung himself about and around wildly in his harness, striving to turn round. It was a tremendous job, but at last he had managed it—and still the parachute was travelling towards the post.

Now he saw three men rushing along the narrow strip of cleared bank before the buildings.

"It's getting warm," Wings grunted. "They're going to try to pick me off!" and, floating at the will of the

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wind, he yanked his Service revolver from its holster. "One thing, I'm a moving target, and errate!"

He was dropping all the time. He saw smoke-puffs snap from three rifles—and a bullet zipped above his head, tearing a hole in the parachute. A second did likewise, and Wings realised that those holes weren't helping his easy descent. Pure luck it must have been that sent a bullet snapping one of the strings, which, as it broke from the harness under his arms, flicked up into his face, just missing an eye. The parachute took a tilt—and probably saved his life, for Wings heard the whistle of a bullet seeming an inch from his head.

Then the unseen fingers of a changing wind snatched him, and rolled him sidewise, the envelope lying at an angle across the river. Suddenly it straightened up again, but the wind was carrying him over the stream—followed by some wild shooting. Then Wings felt his feet hit the water, and thought that, enveloped by the chute, he would be easy picking for the enemy. But the wind hauled at the chute and he was up again, finally to become entangled amongst the trees that fringed the creek bank.

The playful wind had done him good service in that it had carried him away from the enemy, and quicker than they could run, so that Welford was able to extricate himself from the harness and jump for cover before they had him in range again.

"Guess I'll creep along and see whether that poor devil's dead," Wings decided, now that he was on the bank where the shot man had fallen. "If he is, his rifle may come in useful!"

He moved silently and quickly, keeping a close watch on the other bank, but not seeing signs of the hidden men. So he came to where the fallen man lay. Wings peered at him from the shelter of the trees. There was not a movement on the man's part—at least, Welford thought not until presently his keen eyes caught the slow rise and fall of his chest.

"Not dead—unconscious!" muttered Wings, and waited—waited for the short time necessary now to allow the last rays of the sun to disappear. Then he crept out, dragged the unconscious man in amongst the trees, ran his hands over him, and located a bullet-wound high up in the chest. Welford plugged the wound—it was all he could do for the time being—to stem the blood-flow.

"Don't think it can be MacDonald," Wings told himself. "This fellow's got a knapsack on, full of grub and spare ammunition. MacDonald wouldn't be likely to have that if he managed to escape from those fellows. Just a little more mystery, anyway."

Wings had heard no sound from the other side of the creek. After some rapid thinking he decided to cross while the going was good. After all, it might be better to be there when Rawlings came up. He moved amongst the trees, down creek, away from the buildings, wrapping his revolver in a piece of the parachute which he had taken to use for a waterproof cover. Presently he halted, tied his clothes into a bundle and fastened it by a strap round his forehead, so that it bunched at his neck. Then he entered the icy-cold water. Fortunately, it was not deep, and he was able to wade, although nearly neck deep.

On the other side he briskly rubbed himself down and got back into his clothes. Then he moved silently up towards the buildings. All was darkness—darkness and silence.

"Have the beggars done a guy, after all?" Wings asked himself—and decided to await the coming of Rawlings.

CHAPTER 2.

Capturing the Post!

HAL RAWLINGS found the landing-place, and went down. He unshipped the machine-gun from his cockpit, and soon was headed towards the creek.

He had a little while of daylight left, and it served to help him find a trail. He reached the bank, and followed it down, sitting in and out amongst the trees. Came the time when, although he could not see it, he knew he could not be far from the post. He gave a three-time call of the owl—an arranged signal between him and Wings.

"Good! He's there all right," murmured Rawlings as the three-time call, twice repeated, came back to him.

He moved onward, and presently gave the signal again. But this time it was a three-time three, answered by just the treble-call, and a few minutes later the chums were together.

"Heard nothing, seen nothing," Wings whispered.

He had his plan of attack worked out and the chums forthwith carried it into execution. Rawlings set up his machine-gun, commanding the river front of the post, and

Wings sidled away to the rear. Suddenly the voice of the machine-gun chattered, and steel-jacketed bullets smacked into the stout timbers of the main building whence the original firing had come.

Promptly rifle shots rang out, aimed at the flame-spewing jaw of the machine-gun. But Rawlings had rolled to one side, out of danger, leaving the gun for the moment and firing his revolver, to suggest Welford's presence! Then he crept back for it, set it up at another spot, and spattered bullets once more.

In such a fashion did Hal work while Wings Welford moved along the rear of the building. His fingers groped in the darkness and found the iron chimney of the stove. It came through a hole in the timbers. It was hot, betokening a fire inside. The timbers were laid horizontally. Welford took off his boots. Then he climbed the timber wall, clutching with fingers-nails and feet, trusting to the chatter of Rawlings' machine-gun to deaden any sound he might make. He reached the top of the building, which was low-built. He stuffed into the chimney the large piece of the parachute he had used for his gun, and rammed it tight. Then he dropped lightly to earth and put on his boots.

Wings took up a position at the rear door of the building. No one would essay to emerge at the other side, in face of that rain of bullets. And very soon they would have to come out because the smoke would be suffocating!

"Only two rifles firing from inside," gritted Wings. "Wonder what that means? There were three."

Suddenly Wings slipped back to the chimney. An idea had come to him. The men inside would probably try to clear out the fire when the smoke began to flood from the stove. He remembered there was packing round the chimney at the hole in the timber. He pulled this out and stood peering through. He saw a silhouette of a man move in front of the stove—saw the front of the stove opened, and smelt the pungent wood smoke. In the dulled glare of the fire he plainly saw the man using a rake, and sparkling wood came out.

Wings Welford fired through the hole, and the raking man dropped the rake, tottered on his feet, and then fell forward a-top the almost red-hot stove!

Smoke burst into Welford's eyes now through the hole. Above the chatter of Rawlings' gun he heard an exclamation from an unseen man within. He blew at the emerging smoke, had a vision—a fleeting vision—of a second man not far from the stove. Wings let fly again.

He waited awhile. Rawlings was snapping occasional bursts of bullets at the building, but never did Wings hear a reply.

"There isn't a third man in there!" he gritted at last; and went racing to Rawlings, shouting as he went, lest his chum fire at him in mistake.

A few minutes later the pair of them were at the building, hacking at the door with their axes, which they had brought with them from the plane. Nothing happened from within the building to worry them, and at last they had broken down the door.

They were none too soon inside. Wood that had been raked out of the stove was still alight, and there had been danger of the place catching fire. Welford sprinted to the stove and yanked off the man lying over it. The stench of burnt clothing vied with the smell of burning wood.

Rawlings attended to the other man. He was making futile efforts with nerveless fingers to use the rifle he had dropped. Rawlings kicked the thing away, and snapped handcuffs on the fellow.

"This chap's not dead," came Welford's voice. "But I've plugged him pretty badly. Say, you"—Wings was at the other man now—"where's your other pardner? And where's MacDonald?"

"Find out!" the man mouthed.

The chums proceeded to investigate. They lighted a kerosene lamp and carried it through the building. They did not find the third man, but they found—Dave MacDonald! He was trussed hand and foot, and lying in a corner on a low bed. He was gagged, but when it was taken from him he said:

"I'll tell you where the other guy's gone—he's gone to get your plane. I heard 'em fix it. These two were to get ready my best pelts—there's silver foxes here worth a small fortune, besides other valuable skins. Also, they've gotten my cash—about three thousand dollars. Richards—that's the man who's gone—is to get the plane; he can work it—was a pilot, but went crooked. They know the only landing-place near here, it seems. These two were to fight it out with you. Reckoned they could down you both, and, anyway, if you went back to the plane Richards could machine-gun you, which would amount to the same thing. Then they were going to kill me, hump the stuff

to the plane, and make a getaway. Who was it firin' outside before you came?"

"Don't know—he's alive," said Wings hurriedly. "I'll go fetch him over. Got a boat anywhere, Mac?"

"I'll go get him!" snapped the trader, who had been released. Handcuff this unconscious crook—Mason his name is—his pal's Chapman. They came up friendly like, took me by surprise. My Indian servant, Ok-kie, got away—must have, because I didn't hear any firing. He wasn't in the building when the gang came up."

"Reckon it was he who started the message," said Wings, and told MacDonald of the relayed smoke-message.

"That 'ud be him," said MacDonald. "Over the other side. But you chaps 'ud better get going after your machine. I'll handle this end of things!"

"Good—we're off!" snapped Wings Welford.

CHAPTER 3.
The Last Man!

THANKS to the fact of having travelled along the trail, Hal Rawlings was able to make speed on the return journey. He and Wings took turns carrying the machine-gun. They came at last to the place where Rawlings had left the plane. Its white wings showed in the darkness, and, best of all, in the front cockpit gleamed what could be nothing else than the end of a cigarette.

They reached the tail of the plane, and, one each side, crept up to the fore cockpit. A loose stone shot from beneath Hal's foot and made a noise seemingly sufficient to awaken the dead. There was a sharp exclamation from the man in the cockpit, a shout of: "That you, Mason—Chapman?" and as neither of the chums answered a revolver cracked and a bullet sped in the direction of Rawlings. It missed him because he had doubled up and was sheltered by the plane. There came a quick, rip-snorting roar. The crook had set the self-starter going, and the machine was on the move!

Rawlings and Wings hurled themselves at it, one on either side. They sprang for the high wall of the cockpit, unable to see their man, who was crouched low. The plane seemed to shoot like an arrow between them. Rawlings jumped and clutched at the coaming, just behind the pilot's seat. A butt-ended revolver crashed down on his head, and he dropped, sprawling to earth.

Wings Welford knew nothing of this, the roar of the engine killing the sound of Hal's fall. Welford missed the coaming he sprang for, and tore alongside the plane. By a miracle he grabbed the coaming of the rear cockpit as the machine rose from the ground. Wings found himself clinging perilously with one hand. His other thrust his revolver into its holster, and then Wings was swinging himself aboard.

Richards knew by the swaying of the plane what was happening. He half-turned, and let fly with his revolver.

The flash of it momentarily blinded Welford, but he flopped over into the cockpit as the bullet sped over him.

Up and up went the plane, climbing rapidly.

And then, suddenly, Wings Welford's air-sense told him something.

"The blighter's going to loop!"

That was what Wings felt—knew! Richards intended to loop in the almost certain hope of sending the Mountie hurtling through space to death!

It was then that Wings Welford acted. What he had not dared to do before he must dare now—he must get control of the plane before it went into the loop.

The nose of the machine was pointing at an angle of thirty degrees, and still climbing—climbing and going up towards the "over." Wings Welford took his gun from Richards' back. He did not stay to reverse it. He brought the blue-steel barrel down with all the strength of his arm on the head of the crook, and Richards slumped forward in the cockpit. Wings Welford flopped over on top of him and grabbed the joystick!

He could see the faintly different patch of earth that told of the landing-place provided by Nature. He circled it for a while, going down gradually as he did so.

Hazardous though it was in the darkness, the Mountie made a good landing.

"Thought it was maybe all up with you, Wings," gasped Rawlings, when Welford stepped out of the cockpit. "What happened?"

"I'm leaving the machine—we'll take Richards to the post and sort things out. What happened? Tell you as we go. Give a hand!"

So they got the crook out, bound him hand and foot, and carried him as if on a stretcher all the way back to Free-for-All Creek.

There explanations followed.

Said Wings Welford:

"MacDonald, I'll want a signed statement from you. I'm taking these three crooks back with me, and we'll hold 'em for trial until your trading's done. Then you'll come down and we'll try 'em. You, too, Lake. Know who they really are, either of you?"

"Only from what I picked up while I was tied down," said MacDonald. "Seems they met up together at beginning of winter and agreed to go on a fur-raiding expedition. Chose me first 'cos I was such a way offen civilisation. Didn't reckon on the Mounties having Wings, I guess, any more'n I did. Pretty slick, that idea, Welford."

"Thanks!" Wings grinned.

And the following morning, having jettisoned as much petrol as he dare to save weight, he piled two of the prisoners into the plane, flew them to Edmonton, returned to Free-for-All, and took Rawlings and the third crook aboard.

(Another victory for Wings and Hal! Gee, they're some lads! Next week's issue will contain another rip-snorting yarn of the flying Mounties!)

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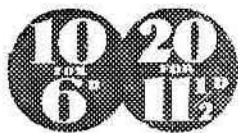
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