

YOUR LAST OPPORTUNITY OF OBTAINING A GRAND PICTURE—FREE SEE PAGE 15



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ESCORTING BAGGY TRIMBLE TO THE DENTIST!

(An Exciting Incident in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Number.)



The Editor's Chat.



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.
Address: Editor, The "Gem", The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

For Next Tuesday.

"THE SCHOOL HOUSE ALLOTMENT"

is the title of Mr. Martin Clifford's long story of St. Jim's, in which he tells with considerable humour the juniors' exciting experiences in connection with the tilling of their allotment.

The mystery of the disappearance of Mr. Ratcliff's watch is also described, and the allotment plays an important part in the restoration of the missing article.

To say more here about

"THE SCHOOL HOUSE ALLOTMENT"

would be to spoil the story for you when you read it, which you must not fail to do. Be sure to order your copy of the GEM in advance.

CHEERY WORDS.

Many thanks to "Nan," who writes from South Wales. She says the GEM has been a ray of sunshine through these last four years.

"I made it a habit," she writes, "to turn to the Chat first. I began to try and find the character of the writer through the sentences. I wanted to form a conception of my own of you, and at the first I was convinced of one thing, and that is the wonderful tact and philosophy with which you deal with everything—the word of advice here, the little bit of sympathy there that must necessarily be the outcome of careful consideration, and could never be written by one who was indifferent to the interests of his readers. Another thing is the absolute balance with which every sentence is marked."

After that there is nothing more to be said! I only hope that my sympathetic correspondent will continue to stand by the Companion Papers.

RIDER HAGGARD.

I have lately received numerous letters about the works of the author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," "Allan Quartermain," and so many more. Some of my friends would like to see these tales appearing in the Companion Papers. That cannot be done, but it is good to see how popular the stories in question remain.

"King Solomon's Mines" was first published more than thirty years since, when the world knew relatively little of the Dark Continent. Jules Verne when he carried his explorers by balloon across Lake Tchad was dealing with the unknown. Rider Haggard wrote his great book before the Matabele War, before the epoch of Cecil Rhodes and the visit of the late Lord Randolph Churchill to Mashonaland.

Africa has changed. Some of the romance of it seems to have slipped away quietly down the back staircase of Time, but writers have still good material in this part of the world.

LONELINESS.

This is what a correspondent complains about. He finds there is not enough variety in life; but, of course, the variety is there if you look for it, and is as pleasant as the Irish breakfast menu described by Irwin:

"Stirabout with some milk took father.
Mother took milk and the stirabout,
rather!
Paley took stirabout bread to be,
And Mary took milk by way of tea.
Then, nothing loth, they finally all took
a little of both."

Now, some fellows expect too much of life, and they want their wishes gratified by express post, all carriage paid, etc. That is not the way things are done. It would be a mistake were it so.

My chum is looking for a girl chum to whom he can tell his troubles, and he will have to wait his chance, and not worry in the meantime. Loneliness often enough implies that there is not enough work to do, and that matter can easily be remedied.

THE SPRING POET.

Yes, the worthy person blew into my room this morning, and these lines were picked up on the mat after he had flitted back into the stream of humanity in the street:

"I love to see the little lambkin playing—
Lambkin playing;
And I like to read the GEM as I walk
along the Strand.

It interests me as much as what the
waxlets keep on saying—
Keep on saying,

For the GEM without a doubt's the
brightest paper in the land."

M'yes! And then some folks wonder why poetry is so little appreciated!—But many thanks for the solid chunks of truth contained in the foregoing.

FROM THE SOUTH.

An Australian correspondent writes: "My dream in life is to be an authoress, my work in life is to be a nurse, and my object is to get all the fun I can out of everything, which last does not seem to tally with my statement that I like serious yarns. But both are true, and I think 'A Very Gallant Gentleman' was beautiful. Mr. Frank Richards is great, for he can make anyone feel sad over a story. I am not ashamed to say I cried. I think the Correspondence Column is a great asset. There is one thing you left out of 'Personal Recollections.' You did not tell us what our Editor was like, whether he has grey hairs. Lots of us want to know, and I was always a 'sticky-beak.' On one occasion Tom Merry had to fight Blake without a second, for no one

believed in him. But how about Talbot? Did not he believe in Tom Merry?"

Well, that was a long time since, and circumstances were all against the fellow who showed the stuff he was made of, despite everything.

WRONG IMPRESSIONS.

When you form an idea of somebody or other and the idea is good it is often best to let things stand at that. Say the character you have pictured in your mind is a magnificent person, six foot two inches in his stockings—only, of course, he is always seen in beautiful patent-leathers—with a Roman nose, a fine moustache, well-cut clothes, a head of hair to which the barber can add nothing, and a shiny toppler like D'Arcy's on his cranium, crowning the work; then, surely, it is wise to rest there, as the French say.

The reality may be an undersized, fish-eyed, flat-footed lump of ungainly eccentricity. You never know! Lots of my correspondents write to me about their ideals with respect to public men whom they have never seen, and are never likely to see. They had far better be content with the portrait imagination has served up.

CLOTHES.

Do clothes matter? Of course, a lot of folks think they do—that in short they are the most important things in life. Look at the extraordinary fashion-pictures one sees in some of the papers. You catch sight of individuals who obviously think of nothing else except raiment. They are wearing togs which unfit the possessor for work of any sort. Work would spoil the "sit."

This consideration is prompted by a letter from Dumfries. The writer says that cousin Ethel and Doris Laxison wear hats too small, blouses which hark back in style to the Year Dot, and their adds a few sharp criticisms of the artist. But, after all, neither of the characters in question gave herself out to be a fashion-plate. I am inclined to think this is a merry little grouse about just nothing at all.

RECITATIONS.

I was asked by a chum to tell him of a book of recitations, and in the hurry of the moment I mislaid his letter. Perhaps he will take this paragraph by way of answer. Messrs. Samuel French, Publishers, Southampton Street, Strand, issue a first-rate little volume of attractive recitations which would just meet the case.

Your Editor



THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BAGGY!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

Spoof!

"TRIMBLE!"

Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, snapped out the name and emphasized it by a sharp rap on his desk with a pointer.

It was Wednesday—a "half"—and very few fellows were paying much attention to Mr. Lathom's droning dissertation upon Roman history. Sad to relate, the thoughts of the majority were not of the old world and its worthies, but of the new world and—football.

And, needless to state, the thoughts of Baggy Trimble were also not centred upon Roman history, nor even upon football.

When Baggy was not actually eating grub he was thinking grub. Just then he was doing both.

Within his capacious mouth his active tongue was circumnavigating an aniseed-ball, while he thought out rather a knotty problem.

Reposing in Baggy's pocket was the sum of fourpence-halfpenny, and Baggy had already decided that the fourpence-halfpenny should be expended in Dame Taggles' shop immediately class was over.

But the question was, should he spend the whole of the fourpence-halfpenny upon jam-tarts, which were soon eaten, or upon a fresh supply of aniseed-balls, which lasted longer?

That was the question. It was a serious question to Baggy. And he had not yet arrived at a decision upon the deep problem when his reflections were rudely interrupted by the calling of his name and the sharp rap of Mr. Lathom's pointer.

He lumbered to his feet, hoping that his bulging cheek did not look as tremendous as it felt.

"Um-mum— Yes, sir!" he mumbled indistinctly.

"You are not paying attention, Trimble," said Mr. Lathom mildly. "And—bliss my soul—you are eating, Trimble!"

"Mum-mum— Nunno, sir!" mumbled Baggy, speaking truthfully on the first count, but lying on the second. "N—not at all, sir!"

"Then what have you in your mouth?" snapped Mr. Lathom severely. "I believe you are not speaking the truth, Trimble!"

Trimble blinked in trepidation at the master, debating in his fat mind whether to risk choking by swallowing the aniseed-ball whole, or to own up to the truth.

And then a sudden inspiration moved Baggy—an inspiration that was to have unpleasant and far-reaching results to the fat youth.

"P-p-please, sir, it—it's toothache!" he mumbled, turning a fat, shining cheek towards Mr. Lathom. "I—I'm suffering fearful agonies, sir!"

For a moment Mr. Lathom eyed the fat youth sharply.

But Trimble was nursing his fat, swollen cheek woefully, and certainly appeared to be suffering the pangs of toothache.

"You should have mentioned that earlier, my leeson, and I would have excused you lessons!" he exclaimed unsuspiciously. "Has the tooth troubled you for long, Trimble?"

"Nunno—I mean, yes, sir!" mumbled Baggy with a pathetic groan. "It—it's been aching off and on for ages, sir."

"H'm! A hollow tooth, I presume?" asked Mr. Lathom with sympathetic interest.

"Yes, sir; that's it!" gasped Baggy, quaking lest the master should request to inspect the tooth. "It's—it's— Oh, dear! It's very bad, sir!"

"Ah! Then if it is a bad one, you had better have it out, Trimble, my boy, or it will cause you endless trouble. If you will come to my room after dinner I will give you a note to take to the dentist in Wayland."

"Ow!" gasped Trimble in alarm.

"Meanwhile," went on Mr. Lathom kindly, "you may sit by the fire until the class is dismissed, Trimble."

And picking up his book again, Mr.

Lathom resumed his interrupted discourse upon Roman history, whilst the Fourth-Formers resumed their interrupted thoughts upon football—all, that is, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who gave the fat junior a very concerned and sympathetic glance.

"Bai Jove! Poah old Trimble!" he murmured in an undertone to Blake. "I noticed his face was frightfully swollen when he came in. I feel vewy, sowy for Trimble!"

"Rats!" snorted Jack Blake. "It's a chunk of toffee he's scoffing, I reckon. I don't believe the fat rotter's got the toothache at all. But it serves him jolly well right if he has. He shouldn't scoff so many—Shush!"

Blake broke off abruptly as he noticed Mr. Lathom's eyes fixed upon him suspiciously. He promptly assumed a look of rapt attention as though he were enthralled with that gentleman's remarks upon the vow of Coriolanus.

Baggy Trimble was the target for many envious and suspicious glances as he took his seat by the fire and made himself comfortable.

Unlike the tender-hearted and unsuspicious Arthur Augustus, they had no sympathy whatever with the lazy and greedy fat youth's sufferings—spoof or otherwise.

But Baggy really stood in need of little sympathy just then. Despite his dismal appearance as he crouched over the fire, hugging his bulging cheek, the fat youth was chuckling inwardly over the success of his "explanation."

A moment's reflection had decided him that Mr. Lathom's remarks concerning a visit to the dentist's were not a command, and he had no intention of going to the master's room after dinner.

The deep problem of how best to spend his fourpence-halfpenny had now been replaced by a more important problem. And that was how to make further use of his spoof attack of toothache.

And, from the fact that Baggy's eyes were gleaming cunningly when he left the Form-room that morning, it was fairly plain that he had arrived at a decision upon that problem.

But his podgy face wore an expression of intense agony as he joined D'Arcy in the passage a moment later. Evidently that noble junior's sympathetic glance had not been missed by the fat junior.

"—I say, D'Arcy, old fellow!" he mumbled dismally.

"Well, Twimble, how's the toothache, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus with a concerned look at Baggy's woebegone features. "Better, I twust?"

"Oh, dear! It—it's worse!" groaned Baggy. "I'm suffering fearful agonies, D'Arcy!"

"How feahfully wotten! I am vewy sorry to hear that, Twimble," remarked the kind-hearted, Gussy sincerely.

"Waal, though, I strongly advise you to go into Wa'and this afternoon and have the beastly thing out, deah boy!"

"Ahem! I—I wish I could!" gasped the sufferer pathetically. "But—but Dodd charges ten-and-a-tanner a time, and, you see, I haven't any money. If only some kind-feeling chap would lend me the—"

"'Bai Jove! If you haven't the cash, that is vewy awkward!" exclaimed D'Arcy, frowning thoughtfully as he felt in his pockets. "Unfortunately I am practically stoney until my next wewoinance comes, Twimble. Howevah, I have about six shillings—"

"That will do—ahem!—I mean, that is—six bob would help, of course!" gasped Trimble, striving to hide the eagerness in his tones. "I say, that's awfully kind and generous of you, old fellow."

"Not at all, Twimble!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, perhaps a little too candidly. "Toothache is vewy a howible thing, and I would help even fellahs I despise to get wid of it. Perhaps you will get the fellahs to wally wound and waise the wequired amount."

And handing over six shillings into the eager and grubby paw of the "sufferer," the kind-hearted Gussy passed on his way, very distressed on Baggy's behalf.

Baggy Trimble grinned a fat grin after the departing Good Samaritan.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled unmusically. "Six bob for nothing! Good! Hallo, there's that beast Talbot! I'll try it on him. Yaroop!"

Trimble nearly jumped out of his skin, and all but swallowed the aniseed-ball he was sucking as a hand fell with a hearty thump on his podgy back.

He turned, gasping and choking frantically, to meet the grinning faces of the Terrible Three.

"Shouldn't stand cackling in the middle of a public passage," said Tom Merry severely. "What's the merry joke, Baggybus?"

"Mum-mum-gug-gug! Oh, you heartless, unfeeling rotters!" wailed Baggy, his tongue at last having regained control of the aniseed-ball. "Now you've made my toothache worse! Oh, wow!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, with a remorseful glance at Baggy's shining cheek. "Have you got toothache, Trimble?"

"Awful!" groaned Baggy. "Suffering agonies, in fact!"

"Smells more like aniseed than toothache!" grunted Monty Lowther, sniffing suspiciously. "Besides, chaps don't stand in a passage cackling when they're got toothache, you spoofing rotter!"

"Tain't aniseed!" mumbled Baggy indignantly. "You can ask D'Arcy. And—and, I say, you fellows, you might lend me the ten-and-a-tanner to pay the dentist—"

"You mean, you want us to help you to have what is causing that swelling?"

in your cheek extracted?" queried Tom Merry innocently.

"Why, yes, of course! Ten-and-a-tanner—"

"Then we're the chaps to do it!" grinned Tom Merry, winking at Manners and Lowther. "Up-end him, you chaps!"

Next moment three pairs of hands grasped Trimble, and the yelling and struggling Fourth-Former found himself standing on his head on the passage floor.

There was a brief moment's loud gasping and spluttering, and then a round object dropped with a pop from the fat youth's open mouth and rolled along the passage.

"There," chuckled Tom Merry, as the Terrible Three sat Baggy with a resounding bump on the floor, "you're cured, Baggybus! Mind you don't have toothache again. Ta-ta!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, laughing heartily, Tom Merry & Co. strolled on, leaving the astounded Baggy gasping and spluttering frantically on the linoleum.

CHAPTER 2.

A Shock for Trimble.

READY, you chaps?"

The cheery faces of Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther looked into Study No. 6 on the Fourth-Form passage immediately after dinner. The Terrible Three were in Norfolk's, and Blake, Herries and Digby were similarly clad. Evidently the two famous Co.'s of the School House at St. Jim's were going for a cycle spin that afternoon.

But, unlike Tom Merry & Co., Blake, Herries and Digby were not looking cheery—in fact, they were looking extremely exasperated.

"Ready? Of course we're ready!" grunted Blake in reply to Tom Merry's question. "But that silly chump—"

"Then come along!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What the merry dickens are you standing there for, like a trio of moulting owls? And where's Gussy?"

"Up in the dorm, changing."

"Then we're going to be late," said Tom Merry. "Show starts at half-past two. Mean to say that tailors' dummy hasn't changed yet?"

"Yes; but we're waiting for the burbling chump to change his change again," explained Blake. "Silly ass came down dressed like a fashion-plate—best topper and Etons—topper and Etons, mark you, for cycling!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Said it was infra dignitatem to appear at a public performance in Norfolk's," added Dig, with a chuckle. "But he decided to change again when we pointed out that cycling would ruffle the crease in his bags and take the shine from his topper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just like Gussy!" grinned Tom Merry. "But it would do him good to go without—Hallo, here's the potty duffer now!"

An eyeglass gleamed in the doorway, and the noble and aristocratic swell of the Fourth followed it into the room. This time he was suitably attired for cycling—in Norfolk's, woollen scarf, and gloves.

"'Bai Jove! I fesh I have kept you fellahs waitin'," he remarked serenely. "Perhaps I ought to apologise for my wudeness in bein'—"

"Get a move on!" snapped Blake wrathfully. "We've wasted enough time without stopping to listen to a Chesterfieldian apology!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come along!" roared Blake. "If it wasn't for the fact that you're standing the study's expenses this afternoon we'd jolly well bump you, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus gave a quick start. "'Bai Jove!" he ejaculated in dismay. "Weally, I had forgotten all about you fellahs bein' stoney!"

"What does that matter, ass?" snorted Blake. "Didn't you say you'd got six bob, and would stand expenses for the four of us, dummy?"

"Yaas. But—but—" stammered Gussy, eyeing his study-mates in great distress. "I fesh, deah boys, that unless Tom Mewwy comes to our rescue we shall be uttally unable to accompany him and his fwends to the Wayland Cinema, atfah all!"

"Why?" roared Blake.

"Weally, I do wish you would not woah at me, Blake! The wetgettable fact is that I also am stoney at the present moment."

"What!"

"I gave my last few shillings to Twimble—"

"Trimble?" shrieked Jack Blake.

"Yaas. The poah fellah was suffewin' fwightful agonies with seveah toothache, deah boys. He was twying to waise the cash to pay the dentist's fee. And fwom motives of common humanity I had no other wewource under the—"

"You—you—you—" Blake broke off and glared speechlessly at his noble study-mate.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Mean to say you were ass enough to give that fat rotter six bob, Gussy?"

"Certainly, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed D'Arcy, turning his monocle frigidly on the grinning juniors. "I atfah fail to see any wewason for this wild hilarity at my action in goin' to poah old Twimble's wewscue. I considah—"

"Why, you ass," laughed Tom Merry. "Trimble's toothache was all spoof! It was just one of his swinding dodges for raising the wind, you innocent old ass!"

"He tried it on us, but we bowled him out!" chuckled Manners.

"But his cheek was fwightfully swollen, deah boys—"

"Yes, with an aniseed-ball!" grinned Monty Lowther. "And we extracted it and took down the swelling by standing the fat spoofster on his fat head!"

"'Bai Jove, the fwightful wottah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, starting for the door in great excitement. "I will give the spoon' wascal a feahful thwashing!"

"Some other time, then!" growled Blake, gripping the wrathful Gussy by the arm. "Yank hold of the dummy, Dig!"

Digby obeyed his leader promptly, and despite his struggles Arthur Augustus was gripped and rushed through the doorway into the passage.

"Yoop!"

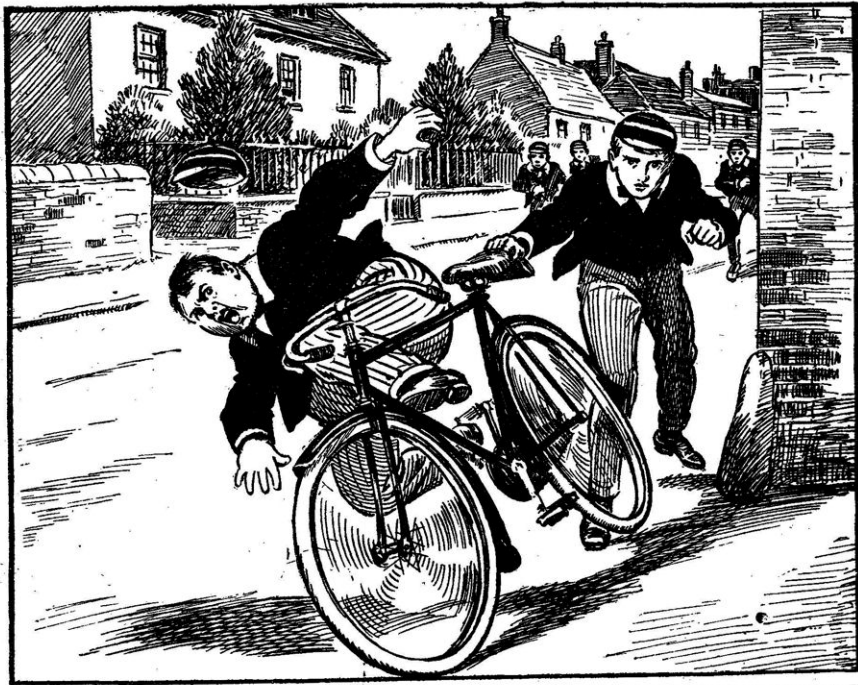
From the passage came the sound of a bump and a wild yell as the three chums collided with a fat junior, who was on the point of entering the study.

"'Bai Jove! It's Twimble!" gasped D'Arcy, struggling to free his arms. "Wewase me, you fellahs, and I will administrah a feahful thwash—"

"Leave him to me, noble warrior!" said Blake grimly. "I'm here getting that six bob out of Trimble in cash or in bump!"

Jack Blake broke off, and, making a sudden dash, gripped Trimble by the collar as the fat junior was scrambling to his feet in alarm.

Trimble had been about to enter No. 6 in the hope of getting further subscrip-



Tom Merry's hand gripped the back of the saddle, and almost pulled the bike to a standstill. "Leggo! Oh, crums!" panted Baggy. "You'll have me off— Oh, my hat! Yaroooh!" The luckless Trimble's voice was raised in a wail of anguish as the bike toppled over. (See Chapter 3.)

tions to his spoof toothache fund, but Blake's words decided him to abandon that intention.

There was a smear of jam on Baggy's shiny features, and it was plain to Blake & Co. that Gussy's six shillings had already gone the way of all Baggy's cash—to the tuckshop.

"Now, you fat swindler!" said Blake, taking a tighter grip of the squirming, wriggling Baggy. "I suppose you've bleeded that six bob, but you're going be—"

"Leggo, Blake, you rotter!" wailed Baggy, screwing his flabby features into an expression of acute agony. "Ow, wow! You're making my toothache worse! Ow! You—"

The fat junior stopped abruptly as his eyes fell upon the grinning faces of the Terrible three. His hand dropped from his swollen cheek as he eyed the three apprehensively.

"Yes, it's little us, you spoofer!" grinned Tom Merry. "I see you're still carrying on the toothache stunt, Baggy!"

"I see his face is swollen again," said Manners, with a shake of the head. "I'm afraid our cure wasn't complete, you chaps. Better stand the poor fellow on his head again— Hallo, he's extracted it himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared as Baggy gave a gasp of alarm and hurriedly removed the aniseed-ball from his mouth, and his bulging cheek resumed its usual dimensions.

"Quick and painless dentistry!" chuckled Herries. "He's cured himself!"

Monty Lowther shook his head gravely.

"That's only a temporary relief, I'm afraid," he murmured, winking at the juniors. "I suggest we take the poor fellow to Wayland with us, and see that he has the tooth extracted at Dodd's."

"Good idea!" said Blake heartily. "Come along, Trim!"

"Here, I say," gasped Baggy, in great alarm. "I'm jolly well not going! Leggo, you beasts! Oh, crums!"

Baggy's protestations ended in a yell of alarm, as numerous hands gripped him and he was hauled along the passage, struggling frantically.

That the juniors only intended to give him a fright Trimble was not aware, and he was getting a fright without a doubt. The laughing chums released the fat junior suddenly, however, as Mr. Lathom rustled towards them along the passage.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated in astonishment. "What is all this com-

motion? Blake, what are you doing with that boy?"

"Ahem! We're just—that is, we were just taking him—" gasped Blake helplessly.

"Well, proceed, Blake!" demanded Mr. Lathom, with a frown. "Where were you taking Trimble, Blake?"

"To—to Wayland, sir!" stammered Blake. "That is—I mean we were talking of taking Trimble to Wayland with us, to—to the dentist in Wayland. You—you see—"

"To—to the dentist! Ah, yes! I remember now! Trimble was suffering from the toothache in the Form-room this morning," said Mr. Lathom. "That is a very thoughtful and kindly act on your part, boys! But apparently Trimble does not wish to go—"

"No fear—I mean, nunno, sir!" stuttered Baggy hurriedly and hopefully. "My toothache's quite better now—quite, sir!"

"I'm glad to hear that, my boy! Nevertheless— Bless my soul! The swelling certainly does appear to have completely gone," said Mr. Lathom, eyeing Baggy's cheeks in surprise.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Trimble eagerly. "There's no need to go at all now, is there, sir?"

"Certainly there is, Trimble!" said

Mr. Latham kindly, but firmly. "The swelling and the pain may have gone, my boy, but you will still be liable to attacks until you have had the troublesome tooth extracted. You certainly must go! There's nothing to be afraid of Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble did not look so very certain about that. His greasy, podgy features had gone white, and his fat knees fairly knocked together with fright.

"Oh, but I say, sir, I—I daren't! It wasn't toothache at all, sir. It was—a-a-gumbol!" he burred.

"Nonsense!" rapped Mr. Latham testily. "I insist upon you accompanying these boys at once, Trimble! I will get on the 'phone immediately with Mr. Dodd, and explain the circumstances as no appointment has been made."

"Oh dear!" groaned Baggy. Mr. Latham turned to Jack Blake with a grim smile.

"Blake, I will place Trimble under your charge," he exclaimed. "Will you see that the foolish boy reaches the dentist's surgery safely. I will explain to Mr. Dodd that Trimble is reluctant to have the tooth extracted, and that he must—ahem!—exercise firmness, if necessary. I presume you are aware as to the situation of the surgery, Blake?"

"Yes, sir—ahem! In Wayland High Street, on the right-hand side. "That is it. His rooms are above Mason's the grocers, and next door to Watkins' the jeweller's," said Mr. Latham. "The surgery closes at 4.30. I may add, and as the premises are lock-up premises, I would suggest that you do not dally by the way."

And the Fourth Form-master rustled away to his study, leaving the juniors looking at each other blankly.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unwilling Patient.

"WELL, I'm blessed!" gasped Herries at last, in disgust. "We've let ourselves in for it now, and no mistake. Fancy being saddled with that fat merchant!"

"Mucked up the whole afternoon!" grunted Digby. "I suppose we'll have to take the beggar now?"

Blake nodded. "Can't disobey orders!" he growled, glaring at the quaking Baggy. "I ought to have shown up the fat, swindling

rotter—sneaking or no sneaking! Anyway, Gussy gave him six bob to get a tooth extracted, an' we'll jolly well see he does have a tooth out now!"

"But what about the cinema?" grunted Herries. "We're late already!"

"To see Baggy have a tooth extracted will be a moving picture in itself—very moving. There'll be weeping and wailing, and losing of teeth. Baggy's antics will beat Charlie Chaplin into a cocked hat, and his orchestral accompaniments will beat the Wayland orchestra into fits!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Here, I say, you know," howled Baggy. "I'm jolly well not coming! Hang Latham! He's no right to—"

"Yes, you are, my pigeon!" said Blake grimly. "Trot along and get his cap, Herries, old bean!"

Baggy's alarm increased as Herries hurried along to Study No. 2. He returned a minute later with a cap, and waving hands helped the unwilling head of Baggy into it.

"Now, quick march, you fat worm!" said Jack Blake. "We've wasted enough time on you already."

"What about a bike?" grinned Monty Lowther. "We can't let this barrel of lard trot behind us like a dog! He wouldn't last a mile!"

"Ha, ha! No!" smiled Tom Merry. "Tell you what. He can have my bike, and I'll borrow Talbot's. I'm running a big risk, as my bike isn't guaranteed to stand even a ton weight. Still, it's in a good cause!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" A moment later Tom Merry was hurrying away, leaving his chums to drag and hustle the unhappy Baggy into the quad.

Fortunately, Tom Merry had no difficulty in persuading Talbot to lend his bike, and five minutes later, the seven juniors, by means more forcible than polite, had helped Baggy to mount.

Then the laughing juniors jumped into their saddles, and forming a cordon round Baggy, started at a fair speed for Wayland Town.

Several times on the journey, Baggy Trimble made frantic efforts to escape, but the seven active juniors hemming him in, soon taught Baggy that escape was hopeless.

It was just four o'clock as the party reached Wayland, and dismounted outside the dentist's. And there Baggy Trimble, perspiring and gasping, made a last desperate bid for liberty.

The seven juniors were fixing their bikes against the kerb, when, with surprising agility considering his bulk, Baggy swarmed into the saddle again, and his feet pressed the peddles frantically.

"Hallo!" shouted Blake, looking round suddenly. "After him, you chaps!"

Barely had he gone a hundred yards along the street when Tom Merry caught him up. His hand gripped the back of the saddle, and with a tremendous effort the junior captain of St. Jim's almost pulled the bike to a standstill.

"Leggo! Oh cream!" panted Baggy, as the bike wobbled perilously. "You'll have me off— Oh, my hat! Yar-oooh!"

"Bump! Crash!" The luckless Trimble's voice was raised in a wail of anguish as the bike toppled over, and his anatomy smote the ground, and he rolled over and over on the muddy street.

"Got you, my pippin!" said Tom Merry, nouncing on the fat junior. "Now, come along, you podgy funk! I'm about fed-up with this game!"

A moment later Baggy was hauled to his feet and rushed, protesting and struggling furiously, back along the street, to the private doorway adjoining the entrance to Mason's the grocers.

The juniors had undertaken the task of taking the sufferer to the dentist's, half-reluctantly, and half-jokingly, but they had not anticipated so much trouble with the fat youth.

"Up the stairs with him!" grunted Blake, looking exasperated. "We'll have a blessed crowd round soon!"

But it was easier said than done. With a breathless gasp of terror, Baggy allowed his legs to slide from under him, and he grovelled on the pavement, struggling in the junior's grasp.

Mr. Mason came to the doorway of his shop, and eyed the scene in amusement, and so did Mr. Watkins the jeweller next door. While a crowd of jeering errand boys and yokels began to gather.

"We'll have to carry the fat funk!" gasped Jack Blake, with a wrathful glance around. "Collar his legs—"

"Here—leggo! I won't be carried!" howled Baggy, kicking wildly. "I'm jolly well not—"

"Hallo! What's all this about?" boomed a commanding voice suddenly.

The juniors looked up with a start as three cyclists dismounted and approached the scene.

"It's only that silly chump, Grundy!" snorted Blake. "My hat, what cheek! Giving us orders!"

It was the great George Alfred Grundy, right enough, and behind him were his loyal henchmen, Wilkins and Gunn. The great man of the Shell leaned his machine against the kerb, and pushed his way through the grinning crowd.

"Aha!" he said, with a frowning glance at the kicking Baggy. "Bullying! I'm surprised at you, at least, Tom Merry, bullying a youngster in the Fourth."

"B-b-bullying?" stammered Blake. "Why, you silly ass—"

"Who's bullying?" said Tom Merry, grinning in spite of himself. "You keep off the grass, Grundy, you burbling chump! Of course we're not bullying—only carrying out—"

"It's a clear case of bullying!" boomed Grundy. "You fellows know I'm down on bullying. Let that boy go at once!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "You silly ass, Grundy! Can't you see we're trying to take this fat chump to the dentist's—Mr. Latham's orders!"

Grundy's lofty glance fell upon the grovelling Trimble, and he sniffed as he

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With a dark frown Mr. Watkins stepped forward and hauled the quaking junior into the open. "Wha-what on earth is the meaning of this?" he ejaculated in an amazed tone. "Who-who are you, boy?" (See Chapter 9.)

noticed the look of terror on that youth's flabby countenance.

"Hi'm! Well, of course, that alters the case!" he said, with a nod. "Why, he's nearly blubbering! Looks to me as though the funk is afraid!"

"It does, indeed!" said Blake, with heavy sarcasm. "Perhaps you'll lend a hand, Grundy? I'm blessed if I know how we're going to get the baby elephant up those stairs!"

"Leave it to me!" said George Alfred Grundy loftily. "I'm taking this business in hand now! Up you get, you fat funk!"

And Grundy took one of Baggy's fat ears twist finger and thumb, and, heedless of howls, literally hauled him to his feet.

"Good old Grundy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "No bullying about Grundy's methods."

"Don't talk rot, Lowther!" snorted Grundy severely. "Now, Trimble, up-stairs you go!"

And Baggy Trimble went—he had no choice in the matter.

And, amid the tramp of feet and sundry grunts and muffled yells from the luckless Baggy, Grundy led him squirming and writhing up to the dentist's rooms.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared as Grundy and his unwilling captive disappeared up the narrow staircase.

"Like a lamb to the slaughter!" chuckled Lowther. "That's not the first time Baggy's fat ears have led him to trouble."

"What are we to do now?" growled Herries, looking at his watch. "It's too thumping late for the pictures."

"Better wait for Baggy," said Tom Merry. "The poor chap will want carrying home, I expect."

"Bai Jove, yaas!" murmured D'Arcy, a little remorsefully. "We must wait and see the poor old chap home again, deah boys!"

And the grinning juniors waited.

CHAPTER 4.

An Unfortunate Error.

"O H dear, Grundy, you beast! You might let me g-g-go!"

Thus Baggy Trimble as he sat on the extreme edge of a chair in the dentist's waiting-room, nursing a red, fat ear, and quaking with fear.

Opposite to Baggy sat Grundy, but, unlike Baggy, the great G. A. G. seemed quite at home. He sat with legs crossed and body swaying perilously on the two rear legs of a chair, as he chuckled over the contents of a humorous

periodical chosen from the litter of papers and magazines on the table.

"Shurrup, you funk!" exclaimed Grundy, looking up with a grin. "Face it bravely! Be a man! Old Doddy's a good man, and won't hurt you—"

Grundy broke off with a startled gasp, and almost overbalanced as a sudden piercing yell, followed by sundry moans and groans, sounded from the next room. Very plainly Mr. Dodd's efforts at extracting teeth were proving decidedly painful to someone.

And Baggy's flabby face went green with terror as he heard the sounds of woe. But George Alfred Grundy grinned cheerfully as he regained his equilibrium and resumed his reading.

A minute passed, and then the noise of a door opening and closing, and the sounds of unsteady footsteps descending the stairs, told Baggy that the last unfortunate patient had departed, and that his own turn drew nigh.

And at the thought Baggy glanced frantically round for a way of escape.

Baggy was by no means a bright youth, but just then desperation acted on his muddled faculties like a dose of Pelmanism. Grundy was still swaying on the back legs of the chair, chuckling over

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the jokes in the paper, and Baggy's eyes gleamed as he saw his chance, and took it.

He stepped forward swiftly, grabbed Grundy by the ankles, and lifted with desperate energy.

There was an alarmed gasp as for a brief second the unfortunate Grundy hung, with convulsively waving limbs, and then followed a terrific crash as chair and junior toppled over, and a fendish yell as Grundy's head struck the carpet with a crack.

But Baggy didn't wait to see what happened after that. He shot to the door, dragged it open, and, dashing out, pushed it to with a slam.

At the top of the stairs he halted a second, his brain working rapidly. Escape downstairs was hopeless, with the juniors waiting below. And, with a desperate glance around, Baggy dashed breathlessly down a dark passage in the opposite direction.

At the left of this passage was an open door, and through this Baggy rushed, and a second later the door closed upon him.

And then almost simultaneously the doors of the surgery and waiting-room opened, and two figures emerged hurriedly into the passage.

One was the white-jacketed form of the dentist, and the other was Grundy.

He dashed out, cap in hand, and glared wildly around. Then, with a howl of wrath, he shot for the stairs.

But barely had he reached them when the dentist gave a couple of quick strides, grabbed Grundy by the collar, and hauled him back.

"Loggo, you chump!" howled Grundy frantically. "He's gone! I'll smash the fat rotter! Lemme go after him!"

"One moment, my friend," said the dentist smoothly. "Who—Aha!"

The dentist's eyes fell upon the St. Jim's cap in Grundy's hand, and he smiled knowingly.

It was pretty plain that Mr. Dodd had had previous experience of prospective patients whose courage had forsaken them in the waiting-room, and who had mysteriously disappeared from thence.

"Will you step in here, Master Trimble?" he asked, still smiling.

Grundy gave a start.

"I tell you I'm not—" he began.

"Come, come! You need not be afraid, my boy!" smiled Mr. Dodd. "I shall not hurt."

"Leggo! You—you idiot!" howled Grundy, struggling fiercely. "I tell you—"

But the dentist did not "leggo." He strode into the chamber of horrors, and Grundy followed him.

Mr. Dodd was a six-foot giant, whose grip was a grip of iron, and the great George Alfred, hefty as he was, had no choice in the matter.

"Now, my young friend," said Mr. Dodd, closing the surgery door grimly, and releasing Grundy, "open your mouth, and let me see the troublesome tooth, please! I won't hurt you, sonny. Open!"

"I tell you you're making a dashed mistake!" roared Grundy wildly. "I'm not Trimble. The young rotter—"

"Ahem! Just so," smiled the dentist urbanely. "But that tooth must come out, Master Trimble! Your master gave me explicit instructions on the telephone that I was on no account to let you go without extracting your tooth. Come, my boy!"

"You—you—you—"
The unfortunate Grundy broke off agitated as Mr. Dodd took a step towards him. In a flash his peculiar and unfur-

tunate position dawned upon him, and he backed towards the door in alarm.

The mistake, though unfortunate, was natural enough, in view of the master's telephone message.

It was indeed a most unfortunate mistake; but Grundy did not intend to suffer by it—if he could help it.

He turned swiftly, and, making one frenzied dash, dragged the door open, and rushed straight into the arms of a grinning assistant.

"Bring the young rascal here, John!" said Mr. Dodd irritably. "I'm afraid he's going to be troublesome!"

Grundy was. He kicked and struggled and yelled wrathfully; but his efforts availed him little, for all that.

He was whirled off his feet, plumped into the padded chair, and, before George Alfred knew where he was, his hands and feet were secured by the assistant, the chair was toppled backwards, and he found himself glaring dazedly at the ceiling.

"Ah! Second tooth from the back on the right upper," said Mr. Dodd crisply, poking about inquisitively into poor Grundy's open mouth. "That will be the one. Rather a bad tooth, too! You'll be glad to get it out and done with, sonny. Open your mouth wider!"

"Mum-mum—You—you—I tell you you're—m-m-mum—"

A wad of cotton-wool stemmed Grundy's last desperate attempts to explain matters, and then he was writhing under the forceps.

Those few strenuous moments were like some awful nightmare to Grundy. Instead of letting the dentist carry on with the good work unhindered, he writhed and wriggled furiously.

Again and again the pincers slipped off the illused tooth, but at last the exasperated dentist got his grip, and then it was soon over.

He took mechanically the bewildered Grundy took the glass of water handed to him, and a minute later he staggered dizzily to his feet.

"Oh, oh, crickey!" he mumbled feebly.

"Oh, m-m-mum-my hat!"

"That's a good job done, Master Trimble," smiled Mr. Dodd, as he opened the surgery door. "Cheer up! That tooth will never trouble you again."

George Alfred did not reply to that statement. For a brief moment he glared at the dentist as though he contemplated assault and battery. But evidently not feeling quite up to a scuffle just then, he turned, and, clutching at his jaw convulsively, tottered out of the room.

As he staggered down into the street the juniors crowded round him. They eyed his dishevelled appearance and wildly-rolling eyes in astonishment.

"M-m-m my hat, Grundy!" gasped Blake. "What on earth's happened?"

"M-m-m-mum—"

"You don't mean to say you've also had a tooth out?" asked Wilkins in astonishment. "What on earth—"

"Can't you see I have?" spluttered Grundy, glancing fiercely up and down the street. "Where's that fat toad Trimble? I'll wallop him! I'll smash the rotter! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

George Alfred fairly gibbered with rage as he glared round in search of Trimble.

"But what's happened?" queried Gunn in astonishment. "We haven't seen Trimble since."

"What's happened?" roared Grundy. "Can't you see what's happened? That fat frog's spoiled me—me! He pitched me over and bolted; and then that brute of a dentist thought I was Trimble, an' yanked one of my blessed teeth out! Oh, won't I just—"

"Wha-a-at!"
"The brute took me for that fat rotter—me!" raved Grundy. "And he yanked a tooth out against my will! Oh, won't I just smash Trimble when I catch him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The juniors simply howled with laughter as they began to get an inkling of the tragedy that had taken place.

But it was the last straw for Grundy. With a howl of fury Grundy made a savage rush at them, and they scattered, yelling with laughter. Breathing threatenings and slaughter, he chased the hilarious juniors to the end of the street, and then, realising the hopelessness of a capture, he returned to the row of bikes against the kerb.

A moment later he had mounted his own machine, and, with one hand clasping his sore and aching jaw, and vengeance gleaming in his eyes, he rode towards St. Jim's at top speed.

Grundy hadn't much doubt but that Baggy Trimble was already well on the way to St. Jim's, and he meant to catch him up if possible.

Certainly, Baggy Trimble had escaped one painful experience, but it looked as though he was booked for a far more painful experience than a tooth extraction when Grundy struck his trail!

CHAPTER 5.

Looking for Trimble!

"POOR old Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Still yelling with laughter, the seven juniors returned to where their bikes were standing, when the sorry figure of George Alfred Grundy had vanished towards St. Jim's. "Oh, crickey," chorled Tom Merry feebly. "What price old Grundy as chaperon?"

"And Baggy as strategist?" gurgled Monty Lowther. "But he'll need all his strategy to escape Grundy's next move, I guess. There'll be a dead scion of the House of Trimble lying about when Grundy strikes his trail!"

"Yaas, wathah!" laughed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But wathah is Twimble, dash boys?"

"Must have bodged out when Grundy was chasing," said Blake thoughtfully. "But, I say, what if old Latham asks how Trimble went on?"

"Tell him Baggy had the tooth out by proxy," suggested Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, my bike's still here!" gasped Tom Merry, as they came to a stop outside the dentist's. "So the fat merchant must be still hanging round. I can't see that fat slacker walking back to St. Jim's—ever to escape Grundy!"

"It's jolly mysterious," said Blake, looking round perplexedly. "I shouldn't think—Hallo! Here's somebody now!"

Blake and the rest looked expectantly towards the doorway as they heard the sound of footsteps descending the stairs.

But it was not Trimble. Down the stairs appeared Mr. Dodd and his assistant, and after a curious glance at the group of juniors, the dentist banged and locked the door, and the two men departed along the street.

"That settles it," remarked Blake grimly. "The dentist has shut up shop, so the fat beast must have beat a strategic retreat when we were flying from the wrath of Grundy."

"Then what's our next move?" asked Herries. "I suppose it's no use going to see the tail end of the pictures—"

"Blow the pictures!" snorted Blake. "I vote we trot along to the nearest bupshop for tea. I'll smash that rotter

Trimble for this. He's mucked up the whole afternoon and done us brown in the end."

"That's, how I feel about it," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "I suppose I've got to push my own bike all the way back myself, now."

The juniors got their bikes, and, with Tom Merry wheeling his own and Talbot's machine, walked along towards the nearest bunshop.

They had not gone many yards when they observed six youthful forms approaching. They were Wally D'Arcy, Jameson, Carly Gibson, Reggie Manners, Levison minor, and Trimble minor—six shining lights of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

"Hallo!" said Blake, nodding his head with a grin. "Here comes young Wally and his stalwarts! Better look out, Guss! They've got old Pongo with 'em!"

Arthur Augustus gave a start. "Bai Jove! Pway do not stop for the young wascals!" he gasped, in great alarm. "That wotten dog, Pongo, has no respect whatever for a fellah's trowsahs!"

"I vote we ask Teddy Trimble if he's seen his brother!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Perhaps they've met him on the way."

The cheery Third-Formers moved out into the roadway as Tom Merry beckoned to them.

"Hallo! What do you old fogies want?" asked Wally, with a cheeky grin. "If you're going to stand us a feed in the bunshop, we're your men!"

"Then you're not our men," remarked Blake blandly. "We're not a Starving Fags' Benevolent Society. Suppose you haven't seen your brother within the last half-hour, Teddy?"

Teddy Trimble grinned.

Save for his large, round spectacles, and his bright, fearless, blue eyes, Trimble minor was a smaller edition of his brother, so far as appearances went. But in other respects—in character and attainments—he was as dissimilar from his egregious brother as two brothers could possibly be.

"Alas, my poor brother!" he ejaculated. "Here's another of 'em after Baggy's blood. It's only five minutes since Grundy asked us that question. What's the fat rotter been up to now?"

"Never mind what he's been up to!" snapped Blake. "Have you seen him, kid?"

"Only once—this morning!" said Teddy Trimble, with brotherly candour.

Blake was turning away with a grin, when a sudden yell of alarm came from Wally, as Pongo snatched the lead from his hand and darted up the street.

Pongo's sharp eyes had spotted something evidently more interesting than the discussion going on around him.

From the doorway of the grocer's higher up, a large tabby cat had emerged with dignified mien and leisurely tread.

But his dignified mien and leisurely tread quickly gave place to instant alertness and electrified action as he observed Pongo tearing towards him.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wally, rushing in pursuit.

The tabby cat shot along the street and down the first opening like a streak of lightning.

"Oh, my hat!" panted Wally D'Arcy. "He'll get him yet!"

But fortunately Pongo did not "get him." The chase led Wally round the backs of the High Street houses, and about half-way down the chase ended.

When Wally came up, breathless with running, he found the tabby cat seated sedately on a back-yard wall, washing

himself, as if serenely unconscious of the fact that below him the disappointed Pongo was making frantic efforts to reach him.

"Good dog!" gasped Wally, approaching Pongo cautiously. "Come here, Pongo, old boy!"

"Pongo, old boy" ceased his futile efforts, and crept humbly to his master, and next moment Wally had him safe by the lead.

The junior was turning away with a

No. 47.—GEORGE CORE.



At one time one of the worst cads at St. Jim's. Now a much better fellow, though still inclined to be something of a bully. Ows a great debt of gratitude to Talbot, for whom he would do more than for any other fellow in the school. Shares Study No. 9 in the Shell passage with Talbot and Herbert Skimpole, the genius of the Form.

gasp of relief, when his eyes happened to stray up to the windows of the house facing him, and he gave a startled jump.

There were no curtains to the windows, and Wally had obtained a momentary glimpse of a face pressed against the window-pane.

"M-m-my hat!" ejaculated Wally. "If that wasn't Baggy Trimble, I'm a Dutchman! What the dickens—"

The junior stared hard at the window for a full minute, but as the face did not reappear he turned away.

"Must have been mistaken!" he muttered.

And, dismissing the incident from his mind, Wally trotted back to the High Street, and a few seconds later was leading his henchmen down Wayland High Street towards St. Jim's.

Meanwhile, the chums of the Shell and Fourth had repaired to the nearest bunshop, and after fortifying the inner man at Tom Merry's expense, they also started back for St. Jim's.

It was growing dusk, and the lights were beginning to twinkle in many windows as the juniors arrived at the gates and dismounted.

As they passed through, a figure detached itself from the shadows of the porter's lodge and barred their path.

"My hat—Grundy!" remarked Tom Merry, in surprise. "What's the matter

with the potty ass? He looks mad as a hatter!"

It was Grundy. He was still hugging his cheek, and his wrath was a sight to behold.

"Just a minute, you kids!" he exclaimed darkly. "Have you chaps seen that load Trimble yet?"

"We have not, O King!" replied Tom Merry, with becoming humility. "But you don't mean to say he hasn't turned up yet?"

"No, he hasn't!" snorted George Alfred. "But just you wait until he does—I'll smash the cad!"

But the seven juniors did not wait. With many chuckles, they passed on to the School House, and left George Alfred Grundy to nurse his wrath and keep his vigil in solitude.

CHAPTER 6.

The Adventures of Baggy!

MEANWHILE, Baggy Trimble had found himself in a very awkward position.

When the fat Fourth-Former had shut himself in the room at the end of the passage, he had done so with a vague idea of hiding there until Grundy had gone, in the hope of escaping unseen as soon afterwards as safety would permit.

And with this end in view, Baggy, after a quick glance round the room, fixed his beady eyes to the keyhole to watch developments.

He saw the wrathful Grundy's dash towards the stairs, with a deep sigh of relief; but what followed between the dentist and Grundy surprised him more than it did the great G. A. G. himself.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Baggy, as the door of the surgery closed on the dentist and the struggling and wildly-exploding Grundy. "What the dickens—"

Baggy Trimble gave a sudden start, and a broad and delighted grin spread over his podgy features as the truth began to dawn upon his none too brilliant understanding.

"He, he, he! What a blessed scream!" cackled Baggy softly. "He's taken that beast Grundy for me, and is going to yank a tooth out. Oh crumbs! I hope he pulls his blessed head off!"

And with this kindly thought Baggy Trimble withdrew his eye from the keyhole, and placed a fat ear there in its stead.

Though he was not out of the wood himself yet, Baggy, nevertheless, intended enjoying to the full the sounds of Grundy's howls when Mr. Dodd started in with the forceps.

But though he heard howls of wrath in abundance proceeding from the surgery, the howls of pain he expected did not materialise.

Had Baggy been in Grundy's place at that moment he would, doubtless, have howled right heartily. But George Alfred Grundy was made of sterner stuff than Baggy Trimble.

"Taking 'em a jolly long time to get to work," mused Baggy impatiently. "Hallo!"

The sound of a door opening along the passage came to his ears, and Baggy replaced his eye to the keyhole.

He was just in time to see Grundy emerge from the surgery, with one hand clutching his jaw convulsively. Then came the sound of unsteady footsteps descending the stairs.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" murmured Baggy, turning pale suddenly. "The beast looks jolly wild! I—I think I'd better wait a bit. I wonder what he'll say when he sees me? Oh dear, I never thought of that!"

And Baggy began to quake with

sudden trepidation as the thought struck him that, quite possibly, Grundy would say and do quite a lot when next they met.

For quite five minutes Baggy waited and listened intently. And at the end of that time he decided to make a dash for it.

But barely had he grasped the handle of the door when the sound of voices and footsteps approaching along the passage outside made Baggy glance round frantically for a hiding-place.

In the far corner was a large packing-case, and as his eyes fell upon it, Baggy darted across and crouched behind it with a palpitating heart.

Next second Baggy heard someone stop at the door outside, and he gave a startled jump as the key grated in the lock. Then came the sound of departing footsteps.

"Oh dear!" gasped Baggy, in alarm. "Wha—what's that?"

Hardly realising what had happened yet, Baggy dashed to the door and listened intently. From along the passage he heard the dull murmur of voices and the sound of footsteps descending the stairs. Then came the sharp slam of a door closing below, and after that—silence!

And then, on realising what it all meant—that the premises were lock-up premises, and that unless a miracle happened he was doomed to be a prisoner in that room until the dentist returned the next morning, the luckless Baggy began to shout and thump frenziedly on the door of his prison.

But it was useless. And after thumping and shouting to no purpose for fully five minutes, the fat Fourth-Former gave it up, and began to look around him.

The room was in a wing of the main building, and was evidently used as a store-room, though, save for a couple of packing-cases and an old supernaturated padded chair, it was empty.

Though small, the room had two windows, one facing the door and overlooking the back yard, and the other facing the wing of the house next door.

Baggy moved across to the former and looked out.

The glass was grimy, but by pressing his face close to the pane, the junior could see into a dingy yard below, piled high with cases and boxes.

The outlook was not encouraging, and, unfortunately, for his chance of liberty, Baggy did not even glance beyond the rear wall.

Had he done so, he would have beheld a St. Jim's junior standing in the narrow passage, and staring up at him.

It was Wally D'Arcy, who had just at that moment run the erring Pongo to earth.

But Baggy turned away with a deep groan of despair, and, thinking he had been mistaken, Wally also turned away and trotted back to the High Street with Pongo at his heels, and with him went poor Baggy's last chance of rescue.

"Oh dear!" gasped Baggy, dropping into the chair, with a groan. "I shall have to stop in this beastly place all night! What am I to do?"

There were several things Baggy might have done, things that a more enterprising and plucky junior would have done. But Baggy gave up hope without a struggle.

A glance at his watch told Baggy that it was past five. It was already growing dusk, and the prospect of darkness filled the unhappy junior with terror.

Baggy was also hungry, very hungry. And he reflected, with a deep sigh, that the fellows would have already had tea

by now at St. Jim's. Even tea in Hall of dish-water and doorsteps would have been a feed of the gods to Baggy just then.

But presently a happy thought made him dig into his pockets, and, producing a paper bag, he extracted from the sticky interior a couple of aniseed-balls.

Baggy lay back in the chair and sucked these noisily and miserably while the shadows deepened in the room. And then, tired out from his exciting afternoon, Baggy's head fell forward, his cap slipped from his fingers, and he fell fast asleep.

It was fully three hours later when he awoke with a start, shivering in every limb, and famished with hunger, and as he realised where he was he groaned aloud.

It was pitch dark outside, but from the small side window a shaft of bright light half-lit up the room.

With fearful glances into the dark corners, Baggy staggered to his feet, and looked out.

The light came from a window facing him in the wing of the house next door. The lower sash was open, and as the blinds were not drawn Baggy could see right into the room, and what he saw made his eyes gleam greedily.

The room was evidently a dining-room, for Baggy's keen eyes caught the glitter of silver and glass on the table, and though he couldn't see the contents of the dishes on the table, he had no doubt they held things good to eat.

And the room was unoccupied! "M-m-my hat! I'm jolly well famished!" groaned Trimble. "Oh dear, don't I just wish I was over there! I wonder—"

Baggy broke off with a start as his eyes fell upon a wide ledge running some three feet below the opposite window.

He gazed at it reflectively for a moment, then he pressed back the window catch, and, with infinite caution, peered over the sash. Glancing down, he found, as he expected, that the ledge also ran round the two angles of the building and below the window he was standing at.

"I—I wish I dare," murmured Baggy, glancing down into the darkness below.

"But—supposing I fell?"

Baggy hesitated. The room opposite not only held prospects of a good feed, but of a haven from the terrors of a night alone in that horrible shadowy room. But Baggy was no hero, and at any other time he would never have dreamed of attempting such an undertaking.

And then something happened that settled the matter for Baggy in an unexpected way.

From the next room came a slight creak like the opening of a door. It was followed by the sound of stealthy footsteps in the passage outside, and every hair on Baggy's head rose as he heard it.

"Wha-a-at's that?" he quavered. "Oh dear!"

With chattering teeth the fat junior stood listening intently.

And then, as the door-knob rattled, he hesitated no longer. With a stifled gasp of terror, he slipped through the window, and dropped on to the ledge outside.

And a moment later, with back and hands hugging the wall convulsively, he was edging his way sideways, step by step, round the two angles of the wall.

Now Baggy reached the lighted window he never knew. But he did reach it safely at last, and clambered through into the room beyond.

Then, after one terrified glance behind him, he collapsed limply into the nearest chair.

After a moment, however, he felt

better, and began to look around him. His first impulse had been to rush to the door and trust to luck to find a way out of the house unseen.

But as his eyes fell upon the table his hunger returned, and overcame fear.

With eyes blinking greedily, he tipped to the door, and, after listening for a moment, he returned to the table.

"My hat!" he murmured. "Pickles, cold meat, ham, and—yes, biscuits. Good! There's no one about, and I'm jolly well not going to starve with all this grub at hand! Here goes!"

And drawing a chair up to the table, Baggy Trimble sat down and got busy.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

"H AS that fat frog come in yet?" George Alfred Grundy asked that question as he looked into Study No. 6 that evening.

Blake, Herries, Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked up from their prep and grinned as they noticed the wrathful expression on Grundy's face—and especially the fives bat in his hand.

"Blessed if I know, old fruit!" chuckled Blake. "He didn't answer his name at all-over, if that's any help to you, noble avenger! But how's the face, Grundy?"

Grundy glared as he stroked his cheek tenderly.

"Never mind my face, you grinning rotters!" he snorted angrily. "I jolly well believe you chaps are hiding the young rotter!"

"We're not hiding him, Grundy," said Blake darkly. "But when he does turn up, we intend to give him something in the hiding line—a jolly good hiding!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Grundy gave a deep growl, and after glaring at the laughing juniors, departed, banging the door after him.

"I believe the silly ass thinks we've got him hidden in the coal-scuttle, or up the chimney!" chuckled Digby. "I wouldn't care to be in Trimble's shoes when he does turn up, though. He's in for a high old time!"

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned D'Arcy. "But wherevah can the fat wotah be, deah boys? It's not like Twimble to miss tea, much less call-ovah. It is vevy remarkahle!"

Blake grunted.

"I expect the frog's keeping out of the way," he said, with a sniff. "He knows he'll get it hot from us, besides Tom Merry and Grundy, for this afternoon's business. Anyway, let's get on with prep, and hang Trimble!"

And the chums of No. 6 chuckled, and went on with their prep.

But as eight o'clock came and went without any signs of the fat junior, even Blake began to have doubts.

It was extremely unlikely that Trimble would risk certain trouble with the House-master, even to dodge trouble with his schoolfellows.

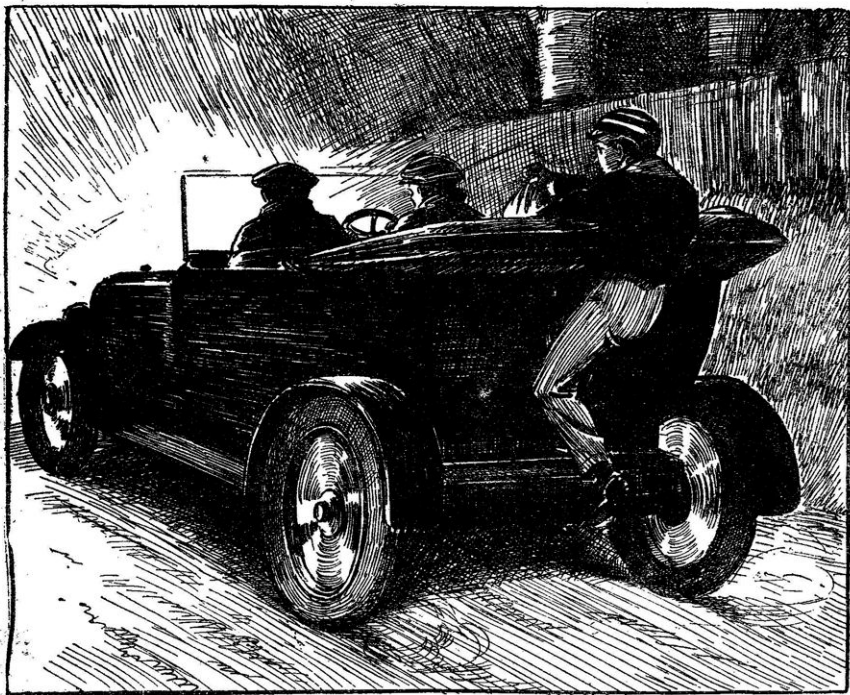
By now it was generally known among the fellows that Trimble was missing, and there was a great deal of speculation as to the whereabouts of that junior.

A little after eight Mr. Railton sent for Jack Blake.

With Mr. Railton was the Fourth Form-master, and both were looking very grave.

"Ah, Blake! Mr. Latham tells me that Trimble of your Form has not yet reported," exclaimed Mr. Railton. "I also understand that you escorted Trimble to the dentist's this afternoon. Can you account for this junior's absence, Blake?"

"No, sir. We took him to the den-



With his eyes fixed intently on the men in front, and ready to slip back at the slightest movement, Wally reached cautiously and gripped the nearest bag. (see Chapter 11.)

tist's, but haven't seen him since," replied Blake.

"H'm! Then do you know if any other boy has seen Trimble since then?"

"No, sir—that is, only Grundy," said Blake. "But that was at the dentist's, and he hasn't seen him since either."

"Grundy?" echoed the Housemaster in surprise. "But what was Grundy doing there?"

Jack Blake hesitated, but there seemed no help for it.

A moment later he was briefly relating the story of Trimble's dash for liberty, of the dentist's mistake, and of it's regrettable result for Grundy.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom with a cough. "What—what an extraordinary affair!"

Mr. Railton smiled slightly.

"Then neither you nor Grundy actually saw Trimble leave Dodd's?" he exclaimed grimly.

"No, sir. You—you see, Grundy was—ahem!—a little annoyed because we laughed at him, and he came after us up the street," explained Blake meekly.

"And Trimble must have been hiding somewhere and bunk—I mean, slipped out while we were away!"

"It is most extraordinary," said Mr. Railton, exchanging a bewildered glance with Mr. Lathom. "However, if the foolish boy does not put in an appearance before bed-time, it will be advisable

to organise search-parties from the Sixth. Meanwhile, I will get on the phone to Wayland and make inquiries. You may go, Blake!"

Mr. Railton turned to the telephone, while Blake retired to Study No. 6. There he found Teddy Trimble of the Third, and for once that cheery fag was looking gloomy and anxious.

"Hallo, Teddy, my bonnie boy, what have you done with your major? The beaks are getting quite anxious about him."

"That's just what I've come to see you fellows about," said Teddy quietly. "I heard you chaps were the last to see my brother, Blake."

"That's right enough, but I'm afraid we can't help you much. We haven't seen the merchant since he gave us the slip at the dentist's," said Blake kindly, as he noticed the distress on the fag's face. "Anyway, don't you worry about him, Teddy old scout! He'll turn up before bedtime, never fear!"

"I'm not so jolly sure about that," growled Teddy, blinking round through his large spectacles. "These fellows have been telling me all about it. But I cannot help feeling he never left the dentist's place at all. Something's happened to him, I think. It's not like Baggy to stay out late on a dark night like this on his own."

"Oh, but that's rot!" laughed Blake.

"Why, we saw old Dodd shut up shop ourselves."

"Yes, but that doesn't prove he left there," said Teddy stoutly. "Anyway, if he doesn't turn up soon, I'm jolly well going out to look for him. I know you chaps don't think he's worth it—that he's a fat snob and a greedy pig. But he's my brother, all the same, and it's up to me to look after him."

"Bai Jove, Teddy!" began Arthur Augustus in alarm.

But the fag did not wait to hear D'Arcy's remarks on the subject. He rolled out of the study with a grave, determined expression on his plump features.

A minute later he joined Wally D'Arcy and several other fags in the Third Form quarters.

Neither Wally nor the rest of his chums had the slightest love for Baggy Trimble. But they liked Teddy Trimble no end, and felt for him in his trouble.

"Well, any news of Baggy?" asked Wally.

"He hasn't turned up yet." said Teddy gloomily. "But I've heard something that's jolly suspicious."

And Teddy told his chums what had happened at the dentist's, as he had heard it from Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, and the fags roared as they heard it.

"Oh, my hat! Poor old Grundy!" grinned Wally. "But what is there suspicious about that, old top? It's a scream, I think!"

"It's funny enough, I know," growled Teddy. "But what strikes me as suspicious is that not one of those old fogies actually saw my brother leave the blessed dentist's, and no one's seen him since!"

"Oh, but that's—" Wally was beginning, when he gave a jump and his eyes gleamed. "M-m-my hat!" he gasped excitedly. "I believe you're right, Teddy. Well, of all the rummy things!"

"Why, what's that?" asked Teddy eagerly.

"I'd forgotten all about it until now," said Wally thoughtfully. "But you chaps remember when old Pongo gave me the slip this afternoon?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, I caught the little beggar down the entry at the back of the High Street shops. And just as I was coming away, I spotted a face at a top window just like your brother's fat, ugly mug!" said Wally candidly. "But as I only caught a glimpse of it, I thought I must have taken, and said nothing about it. And—"

"My hat!" cried Teddy quickly. "Which house was it, Wally?"

"I can't be sure," said Wally, frowning. "But I think—yes, by Jove, I remember now! The back yard was piled high with bacon boxes and things. So it must have been Mason's, the grocer's. And old Dodd has his dentist-rooms above."

"Well, I'm blessed! Look's as though your suspicion is right," gasped James, yes!"

"I'm jolly well certain it is," said Teddy grimly. "Anyway, I'm going to Wayland now to see about it."

"What?"

"You silly ass! You'll get sacked, going out of gates at this time of the night! Besides, you haven't a bike—"

"Well, I've got two legs," said Teddy obstinately. "Unless—unless one of you chaps will lend me a bike?"

"I'd lend you mine like a shot," said Wally grimly, "but if you're really bent on going, then I'm coming with you, Teddy!"

"Comes to that, there's no reason why we all shouldn't go. Anyway, it'll be a lark!" said Curly Gibson.

"I can look after myself," said Teddy triumphantly, "and I don't want anyone to come."

"Rats!" said Wally warmly. "You don't know the way, for one thing. All the same, one's quite enough, and I'm going to be that one. You chaps can give us a hand with the bikes over the wall."

"And so it was settled; and, as usual, Wally had his way.

And a few minutes later the young rascals were making their way, by devious routes, to escape observation, towards the cycle shed.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Trail.

"THAT'S the window where I saw the face, Teddy!"

As he spoke, Wally D'Arcy pointed up to the window above them, dimly seen in the darkness.

The two fags, Wally D'Arcy and Trimble minor, after a hard ride through the darkness and the rain, had entered Wayland High Street just as a near-by clock sounded the half hour after nine.

And now they were standing together in the dark passage at the back of the High Street houses, on the spot where

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Wally had that afternoon captured the erring Pongo.

Teddy Trimble leaned his bike against the wall and blinked up at the window his chum pointed out, without speaking.

"Well, now we're here, what's the next move?" went on Wally, in a whisper.

"I'm handed! I know what we can do now we've come—unless we do the burglar stunt and break in."

"Burglary or no burglary, that's just what I'm going to do," said Teddy determinedly. "I'm jolly sure my brother's in there, and I'm going to get him out. But you stay and mind the bikes! No need for you to risk trou—"

"Rats!" muttered Wally, with a chuckle. "Think I'm going to stand here in the rain like a dummy while you get all the fun? Not much! Up you get, old son! We're wasting time!"

Teddy Trimble grunted, and a moment later he was astride the low wall.

"Hand up one of those lamps, Wally!" he said. "We shall want it inside!"

D'Arcy minor immediately handed up a lamp, and a minute later both the daring young rascals were the other side of the wall.

"Carefully," warned Wally, peering round the untidy yard. "These blessed boxes are all over the place!"

Teddy blinked up at the window above them thoughtfully.

"They are just the things we want," he said quickly. "By piling 'em up we can easily reach the roof of that outhouse, and from there we ought to be able to get through that small window."

"Yes, if we don't get spotted," murmured Teddy. "Luckily, it's a dark night, or we'd stand a good chance of spending the night in the local police-station. Anyway, let's get those boxes up!"

Moving cautiously in the darkness, they soon gained the roof of that outhouse.

The window was open a couple of inches, and very gently Teddy raised the sash, and they hauled themselves through.

"Now, for solving the giddy mystery," said Wally. "But if Baggy is a prisoner here, then he's not making much of a song about it."

Teddy struck a match, and, shielding the light with his hand, glanced around.

"The whole business seems jolly queer," he said. "But—Hallo! This is a bath-room!"

"Yes, old Mason used to live over the shop before the war," said Wally with a grin. "But now he's a man of wealth and lives in a villa outside the town."

The fags passed out of the bath-room, and, closing the door after them, Wally struck a match and lit the lamp.

"Blessed if I don't feel a regular Bill Sykes," he chuckled, somewhat nervously. "Here's where the giddy cinema orchestra plays slow music. Hallo, that looks like the door of the room we want!"

Wally flashed the light on the door of a room on the right of the passage, and Teddy turned the knob.

"Locked!" he muttered, rattling the door. "That settles it! I fancy I can guess what has happened. The poor old chap must have collapsed from want of grub. Better smash the lock, I think."

Wally chuckled softly. The thought of anyone collapsing after a fast of two or three hours struck him as funny—though apparently the podgy Teddy Trimble considered it a serious matter.

"What's the use of smashing the lock when the key's in it?" he grinned, pointing.

"Oh crumbs, so it is!" ejaculated Teddy.

And next moment Teddy turned the key in the lock and swung open the door.

"Well I'm handed!" gasped Wally, in astonishment, as he glanced round the shadowy room. "The blessed room's empty! Then—then it's all a mare's nest! Baggy isn't here at all!"

"But he's been here!" snapped Teddy suddenly.

Aid pouncing on an article lying by the padded chair, he held it up to the light streaming in from the side window.

It was a red and white St. Jim's cap, and a glance inside at the name told them that it was indeed the property of Baggy Trimble.

"Then where is the fat beggar?" exclaimed Wally in astonishment.

"Gone through that window, I fancy," said Teddy, moving to the open window and gazing out. "I expect—Oh, my only hat! Look there!"

Wally D'Arcy joined his chum at the window, and he got a start as his eyes beheld the scene in the room opposite.

"Well!" he gasped in amazement.

"Baggy I'm handed! Looks as though he's scoffing old Watkins' supper! What a nerve!"

Teddy snorted angrily. The sight of his brother safe and sound, apparently enjoying himself, banished all his anxiety, and also his rarely-shown attitude of brotherly affection.

"The thieving rotter!" he murmured wrathfully. "But whose place is it—who's Watkins?"

"The Wayland jeweller, next door," grinned Wally. "He's not a bad old chap, but I expect he'll raise Cain and hand Baggy over to the police if he catches the silly idiot."

"Then we've got to get the burgling rotter out of that!" snapped Teddy promptly. "I expect he has crawled along that ledge, though I'm blessed if I thought the funk would have the nerve to do that—even if he was dying with hunger."

"Looks jolly slippery and jolly dangerous," said Wally, eyeing the now wet and glistening ledge doubtfully. "Anyway, what that fat funk can do we can do. Lead on, old sport!"

But Teddy Trimble was already through the window, and Wally joined him on the ledge. Slowly, and with infinite care, the two fags wormed their way along that dangerous ledge, and fortunately accomplished the journey in safety.

Baggy Trimble's eyes were fixed alertly upon the door, as he heaved through a plate of ham and cold meat. But a slight sound made him drop his knife and fork with a clatter, and turn a white, startled face to the window.

And then his terrified expression changed abruptly to a petrified stare as Wally D'Arcy and Teddy Trimble dropped into the room.

"M-m-my hat!" he stammered feebly. "Is that really you, Teddy?"

"Yes, you thieving rotter!" hissed Teddy quickly. "Come along out of this, you idiot!"

And with the aid of a table-napkin, Wally swiftly obliterated as much as possible the traces of Baggy's inroads on Mr. Watkins' supper.

"Oh, I say," said Baggy, with a long eye on the table. "I'd only just started, and I'm jolly well famished!"

"Why, you don't mean to say you've got permission to stay here and scoff that stuff?" asked Wally in astonishment.

"Of course not!" gasped Baggy, with an alarmed glance at the door. "Don't make so much row, you asses—you'll have someone coming. I say, Teddy, how did you chaps find me—"

Baggy's mumbling words ended in a gasp as Teddy grasped the fat Fourth-Former by the collar, and literally dragged him to the window.

"Never mind how we got here, you howling chump! I can have all explanations afterwards. Out of that window you get!"

Baggy gave one glance at the glistening ledge, and the blackness beyond.

"Oh, I say, you know, I haven't!" he wailed. "Oh sure I shall fall!"

"Why, you fat fink," whispered Wally ferociously, "you've done it once! Out you go, or we'll chuck you out!"

Baggy gave another glance over the sill, and hesitated; but in that moment of hesitation their chance of escape went.

There came the sound of quick footsteps approaching outside the door, and all three juniors started as they heard it.

"Someone's coming!" hissed Wally tensely, with a sharp glance. "Quick, behind this screen!"

And, like a flash, Wally D'Arcy darted behind the screen that hid one corner of the room, and scarcely a second behind him went Teddy Trimble.

Baggy, however, had lost his head for the moment, and stood hesitating.

And then, as the door-knob rattled, he gave an alarmed gasp, and dived underneath the table like a frightened rabbit.

CHAPTER 9.

Caught!

A MOMENT later the door swung open, and someone entered, bringing a pleasant smell of hot coffee into the room.

Wally D'Arcy placed his eye to a chink in the screen in time to see a stout, matronly woman, evidently Mr. Watkins' housekeeper, rest a tray on the table and take from it a steaming coffee-pot.

Breathlessly Wally watched her as she placed the coffee-pot on the table. But she noticed nothing wrong, and the fog breathed freely again as she turned away. But the junior's relief was short-lived, for her next movements struck the hiding juniors with dismay.

Stepping to the window, she pulled down the sash, and, swinging together the old-fashioned shutters, raised the iron bar and dropped it into its slot.

Then, after picking up the empty tray, she rang the bell on the table, and left the room.

"Now's our chance!" hissed Teddy, as the door closed. "Let's make a dash for it!"

But even as Trimble minor moved Wally gripped his arm fiercely.

"Hold on, you silly ass!" he breathed. "It's too late now! Before we can get the shutters open old Watkins will be in for his blessed supper! Besides, there's Baggy!"

Teddy grunted. But a moment's reflection told him that Wally was right. Now the window was shuttered the chance of escape, even without Baggy, was slender enough. But with the cowardly Baggy to persuade into making the journey along that perilous ledge, it was hopeless indeed.

And an instant later Wally's warning was justified, as shuffling footsteps sounded in the passage without, and Mr. Watkins himself entered and seated himself at the table.

The Wayland jeweller was an elderly bachelor with iron-grey hair and moustache and keen, grey eyes. He was well-known to the St. Jim's fellows as a stern and exacting business man.

And Wally wondered vaguely as he peeped through an aperture in the screen

what the old man would do if he caught them on his premises.

That he would hand them over to the police was quite possible. But that he would, failing that, telephone to St. Jim's and create a tremendous fuss was almost a certainty.

But they were not caught yet, and both Wally and Teddy were grimly determined to stick it out until an opportunity of escape presented itself.

To the watching juniors that meal seemed endless.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Teddy Trimble at last. "I can't stand much

a moment later the housekeeper left the room with a cheery "Good-night!" to her master.

What followed seemed like a horrible nightmare to the boys behind the screen. Their legs and backs ached from continuous standing in one position, and they were soon thankful to sink gently to the floor and remain there.

But poor Baggy Trimble was in a worse plight.

Hardly daring to breathe, much less move, he grovelled on hands and knees, with eyes fixed in a fascinating gaze on Mr. Watkins, and expecting that gentleman every second to turn his head and discover him.

But the minutes slipped by, and the jeweller remained deeply immersed in his papers, and not once did he turn his head.

Eleven chimed from the clock on the mantelpiece, and even then Mr. Watkins did not move. Evidently the jeweller was no believer in the "early to bed" theory, whatever his views upon "early to rise" might be.

And then, just as the weary juniors were feeling they could stand the strain no longer, the jeweller flung his paper down with a rustle, and, rising to his feet, with a yawn, he glanced at the clock.

"Bless my soul!" he muttered aloud drowsily. "Half-past eleven! I'd no idea it was so late! Good gracious!"

The jeweller started violently as his roving eyes fell upon the unfortunate Baggy beneath the table, and for a brief moment he stared through his gold-rimmed pince-nez, as if petrified.

And then, with a dark frown, he stepped forward and hauled the quaking junior into the open.

"What—what on earth is the meaning of this?" he ejaculated, in an amazed tone. "Who—who are you, boy?"

Baggy was too terrified to reply had he wished. But at that dramatic moment Teddy and Wally realised the game was up and stepped boldly from behind the screen.

There was a tense silence for quite a minute, and then Mr. Watkins' eyes fell upon the juniors' caps, and his face grew grim.

"Ah, St. Jim's boys!" he said slowly. "This is getting interesting! And to what, might I ask, do I owe the honour of this nocturnal visit?"

Wally grinned feebly—more out of sheer bravado than anything else.

"That fat rotter came after your grub, and we came after him!" he replied recklessly.

"I dud-dud-didn't!" gasped Baggy, finding his voice with a desperate effort. "I came because—because—"

"One moment!" interposed the jeweller politely. "One at a time, please!" He indicated Wally D'Arcy. "Perhaps it will be advisable, before telephoning for the police, if this young man will explain this—this unusual visit."

At the word "police" Baggy Trimble began to shake like a jelly, while even Teddy looked a little startled. But only Wally saw the twinkle in the jeweller's eyes, and it gave him courage.

The next moment he was telling his version of the affair, and after it had been supplemented by Baggy's tearful recital of his adventures Mr. Watkins' grim features relaxed.

"What an extraordinary chapter of accidents!" he exclaimed drily. "However, when paying me visits in future kindly choose a more suitable hour, and oblige me by entering by the front door."

The juniors gaped and eyed the jeweller in astonishment. They had expected



more of this! That chap doesn't deserve good grub—playing with it like that! Bur-r-r!"

"Shurrup!" hissed Wally. "He's nearly finished now, and will be toddling off to bed soon."

But Wally D'Arcy was wrong.

The Wayland jeweller rose at last from the table and rang the bell. But, to the juniors' dismay, instead of leaving the room, he pulled an easy-chair to the fire.

Then he produced a pipe and tobacco, and, taking a couple of newspapers from a side table, he settled himself comfortably in the chair.

"Oh crumbs! Looks as though he's settling down for the night!" breathed Wally, in disgust.

Teddy nodded gloomily.

And just at that moment the housekeeper entered and began to clear the table.

And then quite suddenly a startled gasp came from beneath the table, whilst Wally clutched Teddy's arm convulsively.

The housekeeper, having cleared the crockery away, had swept the tablecloth from the table, and Baggy's hiding-place was a hiding-place no longer.

But, happily, neither Mr. Watkins nor his housekeeper heard that gasp. And

trouble—serious trouble. They certainly did not expect the jeweller to take things so coolly.

"Then—then you're not going to—take any action?" gasped Wally.

"Fortunately for you!" said Mr. Watkins, smiling grimly at the relieved Baggy. "I was a witness of this boy's unwilling visit to the dentist's next door this afternoon. And, therefore, I see no reason to doubt your statements, or—to call the police. And now, will you depart by the way you came, or shall I show you out by the back door?"

"The—the back door, if you don't mind," stammered Wally feebly. "And I say, Mr. Watkins, thanks for letting us go! It's awfully decent of you!"

Mr. Watkins smiled as he opened the door. The three boys followed him out of the room and across the landing to the head of the stairs.

He barely had the jeweller taken three steps down the stairs when he stiffened suddenly and held up a warning hand for silence.

From the regions below came a faint sound like the rasping of a file on metal—a sound which, at that late hour, could only have one meaning to the jeweller, and indeed to the juniors.

"M-m-my hat! Burglars!" breathed Wally tensely.

"Back!" whispered Mr. Watkins, his eyes gleaming. "Get back, boys, and not a sound!"

The juniors stepped back from the stairs as Mr. Watkins, moving noiselessly in his slippers, passed into an adjoining room; and when he reappeared a moment later he held a shining revolver in his hand.

"You boys go back into the dining-room at once!" he ordered quietly. "I will soon deal with these marauders!" Only Baggy obeyed, however; he scuttled back into the dining-room in great relief.

But the other two were made of sterner stuff.

"No fear!" exclaimed Wally stoutly. "We're coming to lend a hand, Mr. Watkins!"

"Nonsense!" muttered Mr. Watkins harshly. "This is no game for children. Go, I tell you!"

And the next moment the elderly jeweller was stepping swiftly and noiselessly down the carpeted stairs.

The two fags exchanged a quick, meaning glance.

"Plucky old boy, if you like!" muttered Wally. "But—children, eh? Burr! Come on, Teddy! We'll show him!"

"What—ho!" said Teddy.

And with hearts beating faster than usual, the two Third Form fags followed on the heels of the plucky Mr. Watkins.

CHAPTER 10. To the Rescue!

AT the bottom of the stairs Mr. Watkins paused a moment, listening intently. And then, with firm and silent tread, he moved swiftly along the passage towards the door leading to the shop, and from behind which the suspicious sounds were proceeding.

Arrived there, he hesitated again. The door was ajar a few inches, and, peering through, his face set grimly at the scene that met his gaze.

On the glass-case covered shop-counter stood a skilfully-shaded lantern, that lit up half the shop with a bright white light, in vivid contrast to the darkness around.

On the shop-counter stood also a pile of emptied trays, obviously taken from THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 631.

the window, the small door in the back of which swung open.

And, standing by this, with a half-filled tray of gold rings before him, was a tall, masked man. With quick fingers, he was deftly transferring the rings to an open handbag on the counter.

Even in the brief moment that Mr. Watkins stood watching, the fellow plucked the last of the rings from the tray, dropped them carelessly into the bag, and closed it with a snap.

And at that instant Mr. Watkins flung wide the door, and, wheeling suddenly with a muttered imprecation, the fellow found himself covered.

"Hands up!" the jeweller said, in cool, level tones. "Do not move, or I'll—"

He paused ominously, and the masked man, without a word, slowly raised his arms above his head.

And then, in that instant, a startling thing happened.

Kneeling before the open door of the small safe in a corner behind the counter, and hidden from view, a second man had been at work.

The first intimation either the jeweller or the juniors had of his presence was when a masked face rose suddenly above the glass, a hand shot up, and something whizzed viciously across the room.

It was a small steel tool. It struck the plucky old jeweller's wrist with a soft thud, and the revolver dropped from his nerveless fingers and exploded harmlessly on the shop floor.

"Rush 'em!" came a harsh voice swiftly.

What happened after that neither Mr. Watkins nor the fags had any clear recollection.

Mr. Watkins' numbed arm had scarcely dropped to his side, when the tall crackman grasped his bag and swung it round his head.

It came down with great force, and the jeweller collapsed limply on the shop floor.

And then, before the startled juniors had realised what had happened, the rascals were upon them.

A fist like a leg of mutton sent Wally with a crash against the counter, while a single powerful swing of the arm by the second crackman sent Teddy spinning across the shop.

The next moment the scoundrels had gone.

As the juniors scrambled to their feet again, a flood of light filled the room, and they found Mr. Watkins awaying dizzily on his feet with one hand on the electric-light switch.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wally breathlessly, rubbing an aching head. "That brute nearly knocked my blessed head off! And the blighters have got away, after all."

"And with hundreds of pounds' worth of valuables," said Mr. Watkins bitterly, pointing to the empty safe. "They've beaten us, my boys!"

"Not yet!" said Wally, with a ghost of the reckless grin his chums knew well. "They're gone right enough, but we're going after 'em! On the ball, Teddy!"

And before the jeweller could raise a detaining hand, Wally, with Teddy Trimble at his heels, was out of the door and flying along the passage in pursuit.

There was a good chance still of getting on the trail of the rascals, and Wally was determined to make the most of it, whatever the danger to themselves.

Out through the dark kitchen and into the yard beyond dashed the excited boys, and a moment later they reached the entry.

There Wally stopped, and looked up

and down helplessly. The rain had ceased, but the darkness was intense.

And then, quite suddenly, a watery moon slipped from the heavy clouds and lit up the entry with an uncertain light.

Wally gave a gasp of astonishment. At the end of the passage was the dark outline of a motor-car, and towards this the dimly seen form of the second crackman was running.

Now they could plainly hear the soft, rhythmic running of the engine.

"Well, I'm blessed! They've got a car!" said Wally quickly. "Buck up!"

And he led the way at top speed along the narrow passage. Ahead of them they saw the man reach the car, and, flinging the bag he carried on to the rear seat, he jumped up by his accomplice at the steering-wheel, and the juniors heard the starting-clutch driven home.

And just then, to Teddy's amazement and alarm, as the car began to move, Wally D'Arcy did a plucky though certainly a reckless thing.

With a sudden rush and a wild leap, the young rascal of the Third clutched the lowered canvas hood, and hung on convulsively.

A brief moment his legs threshed about wildly for a footing, then they found a rest on the wide luggage-rack, as the car gained speed and shot away into the night.

Hardly realising yet what had happened, Teddy Trimble gazed dumb-founded as the car swung round the corner and vanished.

Teddy rushed up the opening, and, gaining the corner, glanced anxiously along the dark High Street.

Already the red twinkling rear-light was a pin-point in the distance, and Teddy watched it until it disappeared altogether and the faint hum of the engine faded away.

Then, with a heavy heart and grave misgivings, the Falstaff of the Third, his podgy face grim and determined, hurried back, to find Mr. Watkins waiting at the yard door, bare-headed and agitated.

"What has happened, my boy?" he inquired anxiously. "Bless my soul! Where is your friend?"

"Gone!" said Teddy hoarsely.

"What?"

"The silly old chump jumped on the back of the car," he explained briefly.

"And I'm jolly well going after them!"

And Teddy rushed to where the bikes stood against the next door wall, and striking a match, he lit his lamp with hasty and trembling fingers.

"But my boy, you must not!" said the jeweller sternly. "You have already run into enough danger. I will at once phone the police. Stop, I tell you!"

But Teddy, with a savage tug, hauled his machine round, and rode with frantic haste along the passage.

He turned into the silent and deserted High Street, and in a very few minutes had left the quaint old market town far behind.

With head bent over the handle-bars and eyes staring grimly through his round spectacles at the fat Third, Teddy plugged away with savage determination.

The hopelessness of catching up with the car, the junior realised, of course, but the white arc of light from his lamp showed up plainly the double track of motor-tyres on the wet road.

And Teddy Trimble was grimly determined to follow those tracks wherever they led until he found Wally—or dropped from sheer exhaustion.

Teddy, being a practically late-comer to St. Jim's, was not very familiar with the roads thereabouts; but he soon realised, with relief that the route the

car had taken would lead him past the gates of St. Jim's; though why he felt relieved he scarcely knew, since it would make no difference to his resolve.

But when the dark pile of St. Jim's loomed ahead, a sudden thought struck the fat junior.

Supposing he did come across the car, of what use was he, a Third Form youngster, even if Wally was in a position to help, against full-grown men—and ruffians to boot?

And then an idea struck Teddy Trimble.

"Blessed if I don't do it!" he muttered reflectively. "Blake and the rest of 'em will come like a shot, I know."

And dismounting a few yards past the gates, Teddy leaned his bike up against the wall.

With the aid of the old tree, he swarmed over the wall, and dropping on the other side, darted across the dark quad.

Fortunately for his purpose, Teddy was acquainted with the quickest method of entering St. Jim's in the still hours of the night, and soon he had gained the box-room window.

Inside he quickly removed his boots, and creeping noiselessly along the silent and deserted passages, arrived at the Fourth Form dormitory a minute later.

There, he hesitated in doubt as to the beds of the fellows he wanted. The dormitory was dark, and save for the soft breathing of the Fourth-Formers, was silent.

Quite suddenly a dim form sat up in one of the beds.

"Bai Jove! Who is that?" came a

well-known voice drowsily. "Is that you, Baggy?"

"It's Teddy Trimble!" whispered the fag breathlessly. "Shush! Not so loud, D'Arcy! Wake Blake and the others quickly!"

"But weally, Teddy, deah boy, what are you doing heah? I thought it was youah bwothah Baggy. Has he returned yet?"

"No, but I know where he is!" whispered Teddy.

And in low tones he briefly told the astounded D'Arcy the night's happenings. And long before he had finished Gussy was out of bed and shaking Blake, Herries, and Digby vigorously.

At first all three growled sleepily, but when they grasped what was afoot, their amazement was great, and they jumped up and dressed quickly.

The thought of young-Wally being in danger was enough for them, without the additional incentive of an adventure that appealed to them strongly.

"Better let Tom Merry into this!" muttered Blake, as they were passing the Shell dormitory. "The more the better in a case like this. You chaps wait for me in the box-room!"

And as Jack Blake advanced into the Shell dorm, the others passed on to the box-room and began to put their boots on.

They had just finished when Blake appeared. Behind him were Manners, Tom Merry, and Monty Lowther, their faces showing the amazement and excitement they felt.

But barely had the group reached the

quad below, when Blake stopped suddenly with an exclamation of dismay.

"My hat!" he gasped dismayfully. "What about the bikes? Shed's bound to be locked!"

Teddy Trimble chuckled. "I'll soon put that right!" he answered.

And, moving to the side window, Teddy opened it and clambered through. And a moment later the cycle-shed door had opened from the inside.

"You young rascal!" said Blake. "I suppose that's how you and Wally got your bikes out to-night?"

"Right on the wicket!" grinned Teddy Trimble. "Takes us fags to show you old fogies a few wrinkles!"

Willing hands made light work, and in five minutes the bikes and their owners were over the wall, lamps were lighted, and all made ready for the start.

Then, after Teddy had pointed out the tyre-tracks on the road, the juniors mounted and started on the trail of Wally D'Arcy.

Where that trail would lead them to they knew not—nor cared. But, like Teddy Trimble, they were grimly determined to follow to the very end—or at least until the missing fag was found.

CHAPTER 11. Wally's Triumph.

"A II, my hat! Now I've done it!"

Wally D'Arcy breathed the words to himself in dismay as the car whirled through the rain-soaked streets of Wayland and on into the open country.

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And, indeed, it looked as though he had "done it."

He had made that reckless leap for the car, thoughtlessly, on the spur of the moment. And when he did realise the unwisdom and apparent futility of his action, the car gained speed, and to drop off then was to risk a broken neck.

Nevertheless, the prospect of being whirled miles away from St. Jim's, in such dangerous company, was not a pleasant one.

Grimly determined to make the best of a bad job, Wally made himself comfortable on the luggage-rack—or, at least, as comfortable as the jolting of the car would allow.

By now Wayland Town had been left far behind, and very soon Wally realised from many dimly-seen but familiar landmarks, that they were rapidly approaching St. Jim's.

And a few seconds later, as the car shot past the grim old buildings, now dark and silent, Wally could not help grinning to himself as he wondered what the sleeping inmates, and especially Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, would think if he could see him flashing past with two crack burglars as travelling-companions.

Swiftly the miles flew by, and Wally, tired out from his exciting adventures, was dozing slightly, when something unusual brought him to instant alertness.

The car was slowing down.

Gripping the hood above him, Wally hauled himself up, and peered cautiously over the top.

Long ago, when well clear of Wayland, the headlights had been switched on. And in the white light the junior could see a long, steep hill stretching ahead.

If the car would only slow down enough to enable him to drop off in safety, he might escape yet.

Slower and slower the car climbed, while the hum of the engine grew louder.

And then, just as Wally was preparing to take the risk, his eyes dropped on the bags on the seats in front of him.

"My hat!" murmured Wally, with a thrill. "What a chance! Blessed if I don't do it! Here goes!"

With his eyes fixed intently on the men in front, and ready to slip back at the slightest movement, Wally reached cautiously and gripped the nearest bag.

He lifted it slowly and carefully, and, holding on to the hood, he lowered it out as far as he could reach and let it go.

It struck the ground with a dull thud, and was instantly swallowed up in the darkness.

A minute later the second bag had followed it, and then, without a second's hesitation, Wally released his grip and jumped.

His feet had scarcely touched the earth, when they were swept from under

him by the force of gravitation, and he rolled over and over on the muddy road.

"Ow! Oh crumbs!" gasped Wally. Scarcely knowing whether he was on his head or heels, the irrepressible Third-Former staggered dazedly to his feet and blinked around him.

Far up the hill the twinkling red light of the car was still climbing slowly.

Then, to the junior's ears, came the sharp grating of changing gear, the car shot forward, topped the rise, and vanished, and Wally found himself alone on the dark, country road.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wally again. "I'm blasted if I know where I am—unpleasant miles from anywhere, I expect! Anyway, I've got the swag, an' done 'em brown, and that's something!" And now where are those blessed bags?

After a few minutes' groping about in the darkness, he found the first of the bags, and a little farther on he stumbled over the second.

Both seemed none the worse for the fall, and though his hands were cut and bruised he gripped the bags firmly.

He hadn't the faintest idea where he was, and his only guides were the tyre-treads dimly seen when the moon came fitfully from behind the clouds.

Quite suddenly there came the swish of cycle-tyres through the mud, and round a bend in the road ahead swept a number of lights, and Wally's heart leaped with sudden hope.

Was it possible that St. Jim's fellows were already out in search of him?

And then, as the foremost rider's lamp lit up his form and features, Wally knew that it was not only possible but the fact, as a sudden delighted yell rang out on the night air.

"Wally! Stop, dear boys! Bai Jove, huwaha! It is weally Wally!" There followed a chorus of ejaculations, a grinding of brakes, and the fog found himself surrounded by the familiar, welcome faces of Blake & Co., the Terrible Three, and Teddy Trimble.

"Bai Jove, so we've found you, Wally!" gasped Arthur Augustus thankfully. "But—Why, you young wascal, you are covahed with mud and sweatatches?" And pway what have you got there?"

"Only gold and silver and precious stones!" grinned Wally feebly. "But if you old fogies want 'em you can have 'em. These blessed bags are jolly heavy, you can take my word for it!"

Willing hands took possession of the bags, and after Wally had briefly and cheerfully recounted his adventures, the bikes were turned round.

And then, with Wally on his brother's bike, and Gussy himself standing on Blake's back step, they started back, and an hour later arrived at the gates of St. Jim's.

"Now, you fellows, are we all to go to Wayland, or just a couple or so, to take this stuff to old Watkins and to bring Baggy back?" Tom Merry asked.

"I vote we all go," said Blake. "Might as well make a night of it. 'I'm feeling better now, and I'm jolly well coming!" said Wally grimly. "Old Watkins called Teddy and me children. Brrr! I want to see the old chap's face when we hand him the bags!"

So a little later the cheery party rode, muddily and breathless, into Wayland, and at the jeweller's they found the local police, in full force, hunting for "clues."

But when the juniors crowded in, and Wally handed over the two bags with their contents safe and sound, the delight of Mr. Watkins knew no bounds, and his lavish praises almost overwhelmed that cheery young hero.

Then Mr. Watkins' housekeeper appeared with hot coffee and other refreshments—a proceeding that, with Teddy and Baggy Trimble well to the fore, strained Mr. Watkins' larder to the utmost.

And at last, with Baggy Trimble mounted on Wally's recovered bike, the return to St. Jim's was made.

In the small hours of the morning, ten tired but happy juniors stealthily entered the School House, and crept to their respective dormitories to sleep the sleep of the just, and—for two fags, at least—the sleep of utter exhaustion.

The amazement of the rest of the Fourth-Formers when they arose at rising-bell that morning to find the missing Baggy Trimble safe and soundly asleep in his bed, was great.

In the full story, which it became known, caused a tremendous sensation all over St. Jim's.

Naturally, Baggy and all the actors in the drama, underwent a somewhat trying interview with Dr. Holmes; and to him was told in detail the story of that night's adventures. But not one of the juniors was punished for breaking fags. For one thing, the Head was only too relieved at the safe return of the missing Baggy Trimble, and the juniors had a strong suspicion that a visit that morning from Mr. Watkins, the Wayland jeweller, had a great deal to do with their escaping 'nook free.

The cracksmen were never traced, nor was the car; and it was apparent that they had managed to reach London before dawn, and become lost in the rush and roar of the mighty metropolis.

THE END.

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QUINTON'S HERITAGE

397

Anthony Thomas



THE KING'S DECISION.

ERIK led Jim and Dick a little farther round the inside of the stout boma or fence, away from the narrow entrance, which for the present was unguarded. That was probably an accident, as Erik knew, and it was better to find a fairly safe spot for the two until he had learned just what the situation was.

A small heap of stakes and brushwood, which were evidently intended to be used in repairing the boma at some time or other, provided a fairly secure shelter. Jim Quinton and Willoughby, acting on Erik's suggestion, sat down on one side of this. From their place they could see practically everything that was going on around the great central fire, while they themselves were well in the shadow.

"We shall come back soon, Bazar!" Erik told him; and he and Ranallah went forward towards the fire.

Already a change had come over the big gathering. Some of the Karradon boys had hurried in to greet their friends, and their return had evidently been told to the king. An order had quickly gone forth, and, as Erik and Ranallah approached the platform, the noise of the beating of drums and old cans, and the wailing of the weird pipes, died down.

Everyone was watching the two now, and it was evident that their appearance had created something of a sensation. Some of the men about the king had risen to their feet, and their voices could be heard crying out the orders which the king himself had given.

"Old Kerzon looks fairly excited now!" Willoughby whispered to Jim. "I'll bet young Braester is beginning to wish he was out of it! This rather queers his pitch!"

"Hope so!" Quinton agreed grimly.

"What's the idea now?" Several of the natives had run forward, and, as Jim and Dick watched them, they saw them make swiftly for Erik and Ranallah. The two were seized in no gentle manner, and then the whole mob, the prisoners and their several captors, swept on towards the platform.

For some time neither Quinton nor Willoughby spoke to each other. They were too intent on following every incident of the drama before them, and trying to comprehend what took place.

The two were carried right up to the platform, and a space was cleared so that, with their guards, they could stand just before the king. For a few moments the king himself questioned them. Quite near him stood Cyrus Kerzon, and the strangely-ornamented native who seemed to be his friend.

Dillon Braester still sat quite stiffly on

his chair, but even at the distance they were. Quinton and his friend could see that he kept turning to Kerzon for advice.

The weird-looking native had taken up the cross-examination of Erik and Ranallah. Suddenly Kerzon sprang forward and seized Erik. The little man was evidently taken by surprise, and the next moment he was flung to the floor, while Kerzon stood towering above him, calling upon others to bind the little man.

"Erik will win!" Willoughby whispered the words to Quinton, but it was the expression of his hope rather than any feeling of certainty. "He's made Kerzon lose his temper. Look! They're helping Erik to his feet now!"

The king himself had risen, and was banging with the great white stick he held on the floor of the platform. Kerzon stepped back, and everything became quiet again.

He addressed some question or other to Erik, and Quinton would have given anything to have heard and understood it. He judged that Erik was hesitating in his answer, for the king leaned forward

and again banged the floor with his stick while he repeated his question.

It may be that he added a threat as well, for this time Erik only hesitated the fraction of a second. He turned round from the king, and his guards closed in upon him instantly; but Erik waved them back. Then his right hand went above his head, and he began to beckon in violent fashion towards the place where Quinton and Willoughby were sitting as unseen spectators of this play.

"He wants us to come to him!" Jim said quickly. "Come along, Dick! Or do you think you'd better stay here while I go and see what the game is!"

"I'm coming with you!" Willoughby answered definitely. "Let's put on a turn of speed! Old Erik is still waving for us to come!"

Even in his excitement, Quinton did not forget the pack he had brought with him. In it were one or two of the smaller gifts which he had brought to present to the king. They might be very useful, he imagined, at this particular juncture!

The two ran forward now towards the platform beyond the great fire. Dillon Braester saw them, and stood up, but Cyrus Kerzon forced him back again quietly.

"Sit down!" he whispered. "Leave this to me!"

Braester sat down, but still stared at the two who were racing along with the same old swing he had seen so often along the towing-path below Harmood's school. But what a change was this!

Quinton slackened down as he came nearer the platform, and began to walk in a more dignified way. He knew that the eyes of all the natives were fixed on him, but whether in friendly fashion or not it was impossible to tell. Nor did he know just then what were the real difficulties he had to face.

Cyrus Kerzon smiled scornfully as the two youngsters ascended the rough steps which led to the platform. Just as Quinton passed him, he turned and spoke to his native friend, but Quinton's knowledge of the dialect was not yet sufficient for him to grasp what was said.

Nor had he any time to waste with Kerzon at present. The king was already growling something out, and whatever it meant, it was obviously intended for Quinton.

After that, Erik acted as interpreter, and very quietly kept Jim informed of the different interruptions which came from other people gathered around.

"Who are you? Why have you come here?" was the first question Jim was called upon to answer, and Erik added

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 631.

READ THIS FIRST.

Jim Quinton of the Sixth Form at Harmood's, Bigglesdale, by the will of John Quinton, his father, is to succeed to a great position at Karradon in Africa. A great deal of mystery is attached to the position which John Quinton really held, but he is supposed to have been almost as powerful as the king himself. Mr. Matlock, the late John Quinton's solicitor, makes known details of the will to Jim Quinton, who at once decides to carry out his father's wishes. He is then introduced to Tin Daly, Erik, and Nijallah, a negro, who are to be his servants.

In their presence the solicitor hands to Jim a sealed packet of papers, which John Quinton had left solely for his son's perusal.

Jim has enemies in Dillon Braester, another Sixth-Former at Harmood's, Braester senior, Cyrus Kerzon, and a fellow named Plaxman, who call themselves the Karradon Syndicate.

Later, Daly and Nijallah are captured by Braester and his followers. Erik discovers their whereabouts, but is unable to help them. Daly, however, gives Erik orders to proceed to Africa.

On their arrival at Karradon, Jim, Dick, and Erik are astonished to see a celebration in progress, and Dillon Braester sitting next to the native king on a platform.

(Now read on.)

the information that the king believed Dillon Braester was the great Bazar Quinton's son, and that Jim and Erik had hidden, or killed, Meljor Daly.

"I am Bazar Quinton's son," was Jim's answer. "He sent word by Meljor Daly that I was to come to you. These people"—Jim waved his hand towards Cyrus Kerzon and Dillon Braester—"wounded Meljor Daly, and took him away with Nijellah and others. That is all I know."

Erik repeated the information, but all the time the eyes of the king were fixed on Jim Quinton, and, in turn, Jim watched the great native chief carefully. He had heard from Tim Daly a good deal about Bazara (king) Malkura, chief ruler of the Karradons, who, as a young man broke the traditions of his race by making friends with a white man. That man was Jim's father, and in the course of time, he had been raised to the position of practically joint ruler with this king.

Malkura was now over fifty years of age, but was still a powerfully built, though not very big, handsome man. His eyes were more deeply sunken than most of his tribe, and he lacked the stare which Jim had found so trying at times in the case of Nijellah and Ranallah. His views and his outlook were still far removed from those of any white man, but as a native ruler Bazara Malkura was famed among the tribes of Central Africa for his wisdom and power.

One or two other questions he put to Jim, and Erik, as he interpreted, added each time some other item of information.

"The king is puzzled," he said. "See! He looks at Braester. The king will see that Bazar Quinton speaks true!"

There was some reason for Erik's faint show of excitement. Cyrus Kerzon, standing only a few feet away, saw the king turn to Dillon Braester, and stare at him; then turn back to stare equally hard into Jim Quinton's face. Kerzon had counted on the fact that, to the native, most white faces are very similar, but he began to doubt whether Malkura was not a trifle too intelligent to be deceived. It was time for Kerzon to act!

A strange quietness had fallen over the whole assembly, a quietness which was only accentuated by the faint murmurs of the natives gathered around the great fire. They were whispering to each other that the king was puzzled.

In all that concourse, everyone knew now just what the situation was. For both the white and the black men, these silent moments were full of dramatic possibilities. By the king sat the young Bazar who had come all the way from England to take his father's place, and guide the king in his great plans.

Yet before the king stood Erik, Bazar Quinton's old servant, who, it was said, had murdered the Meljor Daly, and done many wicked things. He had come back again, and with him was another white man, very young, but very big and strong, and he called himself Bazar Quinton. So the king himself would decide this mystery.

Even Cyrus Kerzon was impressed by the quietness, and stood very stiffly by his native friend, watching the king closely. Kerzon knew something of the workings of the native mind, but he had to allow Malkura a wider range, and for a moment he feared to interfere lest he should arouse the Bazara's anger to his own undoing.

The old native by Kerzon kept very

still, too, for a time. He had on a strange headdress made of an old pith helmet ornamented with odd pieces of copper wire and beads, all twisted into some sort of ludicrous design. He wore a queer little armless shirt, and a kind of striped kilt or skirt, and like the king, he had a huge stout staff in his hand, but in his case, it was ornamented with splashes of red paint, and had little brass bells attached to it so that when he moved, it made a queer tinkling sound.

Jim recalled now that Daly had told him about this man. He was the medicine-man, a member of the king's council, but of late he had lost something of his importance, for the natives had more faith in the white man's medicines. Yet Bazar Quinton had wisely kept him in power, and even aided him to put his business on a more enlightened footing.

It was this man who first broke the

concentrated on the hope that Ranallah and Erik would gain a hearing.

The king himself settled the matter. He banged his stick violently three times on the floor, and the expression on his face suggested that his temper was reaching its limits.

Erik and Ranallah drew back at once, while Kerzon and his friend with the tinkling staff ceased to jabber and gesticulate. Not until there was absolute silence did the king speak.

He turned to some of the men who were sitting near him and gave a brief order, then turned again to those who had been disputing before him. His speech to them was quite brief, and he emphasised the end of it with another firm bang of his stick on the floor.

Its effect on everyone was remarkable. Even Kerzon seemed at a loss to under-



Suddenly Kerzon sprang forward and seized Erik. The little man was evidently taken by surprise, and the next moment he was flung to the floor. (See page 17.)

silence amongst those on the platform. He spoke to the king and then to Kerzon.

Instantly Kerzon jumped forward and began to make a speech. Both Jim and Dick Willoughby marvelled at the way in which the man carried out the queer antics which evidently impressed his hearers.

But his speech did not last long. Erik was determined to say something, and even Ranallah, who stood a little farther away than Erik, became anxious to protest against some of the statements which Kerzon was making.

Just for a few moments there was something in the nature of a competition. Erik and Ranallah were struggling to tell the king their version, while Kerzon was insisting upon his, supported by the ornamented medicine-man. In different circumstances Quinton would have laughed at the queer performance, but at present his whole interest was

stand it, and spoke very quietly to the medicine-man, who in turn shook his head with doleful slowness, and then, as though the proceedings had no further interest for him, very carefully squatted down on the floor once more.

Erik was apparently too puzzled even to inform Jim of the king's decision. Quinton touched him at last, and asked what was being done.

"The king is puzzled, Bazar," Erik answered slowly. "He does not understand, and we cannot talk to him again. He has sent for his mother to come to him."

"For his mother?" Jim repeated, thinking he had misunderstood.

"Yes, Bazar!" Erik answered. "She is very old now. Your father was kind to her, and taught the king to be good to her. He has sent for her to come and see you and that Braester person. It is her word which will decide. That is the king's decision."

Malkani Speaks the Truth.

THE two men who had been commanded by the Bazara to bring his mother to him had gone, and for ten minutes afterwards nothing of any importance had happened.

Down below the platform the natives had resumed their revel to a mild extent. More wood was being thrown on to the fire, and even the smaller fires which were dotted about here and there were being tended again.

Kerzort had recovered from his first perplexity, and was now engaged in discussing the situation with Dillon Bracster, the medicine-man, and two other natives who were in a place of honour on the king's dais. Jim Quinton, with Dick Willoughby and Erik, followed the same example, and tried to understand just what the outlay was and what idea lay behind the king's plan to bring his mother forward as a judge.

Even Jim was well aware of the fact that in this part of the world a woman's opinion has very little weight. Erik explained that the present king had always regarded his mother differently from most natives, and the great Bazar

Quinton had encouraged him, until to-day Malkani, Malkura's mother, had a special hut set aside for her use, and had women to attend to her wants. And every day, when the Bazara was not away on some expedition, he went to see his mother.

"So that if she decides I really am Bazar Quinton's son, Bracster will be thrown out?" Quinton inquired. "And if she says Bracster is the right fellow we shall have to make a bolt for it?"

"We shall not run away, Bazar," Erik answered; and Jim felt both the hint of reproach and the touch of respect which Erik contrived to put into his voice. "You are the son of Bazar Quinton. You are the big man now, and will fight till you win, whatever happens!"

"You're right, Erik!" Jim agreed cheerfully. "We are not going to finish just yet. You'll keep behind me, Willoughby?"

"I shall be with you, Jim," Willoughby answered. "Hallo, is this the old lady they're bringing along now?"

The two men who had gone to bring Malkura's mother were now coming towards the platform, and between them was an old Karradon woman, clothed even more strangely than the medicine-

man on the dais. A braid was about her closely-cropped head, and to this were fastened, just over her ears, a number of shining brass rings. About her neck were at least a dozen strings of beads, of different lengths and made of different materials.

A great piece of brilliant yellow material composed her dress, and this was tied with a sash of crimson; while on her arms were bands of coloured cloth and thin circlets of brass. She walked very slowly, but was unsupported by anyone, though the messengers kept by her side, and just behind her came a much younger woman, not so gaily attired, who evidently acted as her handmaid.

She mounted to the dais with some little difficulty, and a low seat of blankets and odd rugs was quickly prepared for her near the Bazara. No one moved or spoke, and in turn Malkani took no notice of anyone. Even her son did not speak until she had settled herself with some degree of comfort on the rugs.

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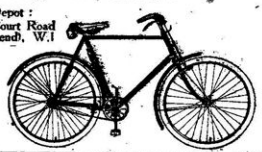


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