

Magnificent School and Mill Stories & Two Easy Competitions Inside!

The GEM 2^D

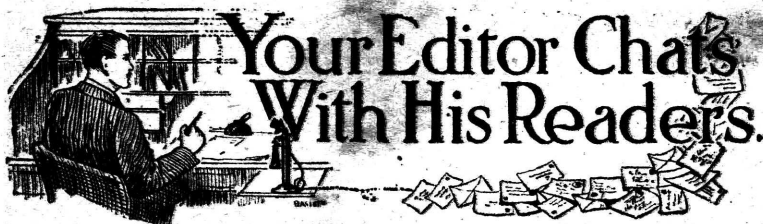
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LIBRARY
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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



A WARM RECEPTION FOR THE REWARD-HUNTERS!

(An Exciting Incident from the Grand, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!" contained in this issue.)



Address all letters: *The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.*

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
"THE MAGNET" Every Tuesday
"THE POPULAR" Every Wednesday
"CRUCKLES" Every Thursday
"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

My Dear Chums,—Next week's fine school story of St. Jim's is just the kind of thing to make the GEM even more appreciated than is the case now. That is saying a good deal, but there it is. I cannot do better than leave you to judge whether I am not right. Anyhow, look out for a surpassingly fine yarn!

"TRIMBLE'S AUCTION!"

By Martin Clifford.

That is the title of the story. Now, what on earth has the worthy Baggy to do with auctions? You will hear all about the matter on Wednesday, and you are bound to be amused, as well as considerably surprised. It falls out this way. A certain member of the Sixth who happens to be quitting St. Jim's sells off his effects, as is usual on these occasions. As a result, Baggy Trimble has a bright idea. Why should not he, too, have an auction, and make a bit? There is no reason against such a plan being put into execution—that is so far as Baggy is concerned—so, with masterly thoroughness, the fat fellow sets about

the business. I need not plunge into all the amazing details of the sale and the marvellous developments. Baggy is not above letting it leak out that he is in straits. That fact alone would not carry him far; but the taradiddling seion of Trimble Hall manages to get other strange reports afloat. There is a great deal of artifice in Baggy's methods, and the auction is a brilliant success. Just look out for some of the dreary old rummage items Baggy "lists." He would sell anything—or anybody for that matter! What happens? Does Baggy really leave the school as he hints is a likely contingency? What of the money the unscrupulous chap collects? These are questions which only the splendid story for next Wednesday can properly settle. But we all know Baggy, and we understand that his appetite is weird and wonderful. I shall not make any apologies for "rubbing in" this great yarn. It shows Mr. Martin Clifford in his brightest and most sparkling vein.

"THE ST. JIM'S NEWS."

Naturally, enough, the supplement for next week is devoted to cricket. Tom Merry & Co. have settled down in all earnestness to the theme of the hour. There is never anything but praise for the merry little supplement, and next week's issue has got the real spirit of the great summer game in it from the first line to the last. Can you picture cousin Ethel at the wicket? I recommend all Gemites to keep a sharp look-out for this special feature next Wednesday. It is tip-top. Tom Merry shines as a cricketer, likewise as an

Editor. He has a real knowledge of the ins and outs of the business, and his staff plays up in great style. I said just now that our supplement got any amount of commendation. So it does, too! But there is one thing my chums are always writing in their letters, namely, "Let's have more of the 'St. Jim's News.'" I am bearing this sage suggestion in mind, and hope to adopt it before so very long.

"DO-NOTHING-RIGHT' CHUMLEY!"

By Gordon Wallace.

This favourite author has written a brilliant yarn here. He depicts a fellow who is a bit of a square peg in a round hole. The scene is in far-away Alberta, and we get the Canadian atmosphere, the real gripping suggestion of the wilds. The action is fast and furious, and Chumley goes through some rough enough times. But there is usually a golden opportunity waiting at some odd corner for the chap who has failed dismally. Just what happens in this case you will see with deep interest. The plain facts are that Chumley has the stuff in him.

"THE SPIDER OF THE NORTH!"

By David Goodwin.

Tom Compton is not out of the wood yet. The sturdy youngster keeps at it, and manages, despite all the resource of the soundreilly enemy of the mills, to give a good account of himself. This dramatic serial is going well ahead, and next week's instalment will be set down as the strongest to date.

THE CRICKET COMPETITION.

There is no falling-off in interest in this feature. Just the contrary. It would not be the GEM without it. Next week's problem is fine. And our Tuck Hamper department! It tops the bill as usual!

Your Editor.

THE RESULT OF THE "QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS" FOOTBALL COMPETITION.

In this competition one competitor sent in a correct solution of the pictures. The First Prize of £5 has therefore been awarded to:

M. F. BREBNER,
83, Mid Street,
Fraserburgh, N.B.

The Second Prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following three competitors, whose solutions contained one error each:

J. R. Bowles, 34, Collins Cross, Bishop's Stortford; M. W. Barclay, 34, Comely Bank Avenue, Edinburgh; Jack Leeson, 87, Northampton Road, Market Harboro'.

Thirty-two competitors, with two errors each, divide the ten prizes of 5s. each. The names and addresses of these prizewinners can be obtained on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

Queen's Park Rangers have done magnificent work on behalf of Association football, but one cannot say that they have been pioneers in many directions. The start of the club dates from the year 1885. The Rangers did nothing startling till 1907-8, when they became champions of the Southern League.

BOXING	BEST BOYS' BOOKS!	SCHOOL
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MYSTERY	NOW ON SALE! BUY A COPY TO-DAY!	ADVENTURE



FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A Highly - Amusing and Extra-Long Story of the Famous Schoolboys of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER I.

Baggy Trimble's Luck!

"HEY, mister—you've dropped somethin'!" Baggy Trimble, the Falstaff of the School House at St. Jim's, stopped and glanced round as that announcement, uttered in a shrill feminine voice, assailed his ears.

Baggy happened to be ambling along the Rylcombe Lane towards the village, and he was not in a very cheery mood. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's; but Baggy was not on enjoyment bent. Knox of the Sixth had required a pair of shoes fetching from the village shoe repairer's, and Baggy had been the unlucky one charged with the task.

Baggy hadn't wanted to go. He regarded a two-mile walk on a pleasant spring afternoon as a task and a torment. His intention had been to spend the afternoon with pleasure and profit by investigating certain study cupboards in the School House whilst their owners were at cricket.

But Knox's request had knocked this attractive intention on the head. Knox was a prefect whose requests were commands to be obeyed—by juniors, at all events. So, after telling Knox what he thought about him—under his breath—Baggy had abandoned his proposed study-raiding expedition, and started out in a very disgusted mood for Rylcombe.

He glanced round with a scowl now at the sound of the voice.

It was a village kiddie—a girl of eight or nine, with a rather dirty face, but a cheery smile. She was breathless with running, and she held out something to Baggy Trimble.

Baggy met her smile with an elevation of his fat snub nose. "What d'you want?" he snapped ungraciously. "What d'you mean by shouting after me like that—eh?"

"It's this what I've found," the child said, opening a not over-clean hand. "I think you must 'a' dropped it, mister. I found it in the grass jest after you'd gone past."

"Ugh!" Baggy grunted and almost snatched the article from the village kiddie's hand.

It was a gold brooch studded with diamonds—at least, that is what it appeared to be to Baggy Trimble. His beady little eyes fairly goggled at sight of it. He rubbed it on his sleeve, blinked again at it, and then he turned a lofty look on the village kiddie.

"Yes, it's mine right enough, kid," he announced hastily. "Now I come to think of it, I remember hearing something drop distinctly."

And with a careless nod to the village girl, Baggy pocketed the brooch and rolled away. The kiddie gazed after him, a curious expression on her face. Possibly, poor as she was, she had been brought up to thank people for services rendered; and possibly it occurred to her that the fat St. Jim's junior might have thanked her—for her trouble, if not for her honesty.

But such a course never even occurred to Baggy Trimble.

He ambled on towards Rylcombe, his fat fist, with the brooch clutched tightly inside, stuffed into his trousers pocket. Once out of sight of the village kiddie, however, he stopped, and, taking the thing from his pocket, eyed it eagerly, and with no little excitement.

That he had claimed something which wasn't his wasn't troubling Baggy in the least. What was troubling him was the doubt as to whether the brooch was a genuine diamond brooch or a worthless imitation.

After a few moments' examination he inclined to the latter view, and once more his face became listless and disgruntled. The gold seemed just a little too bright, and the diamonds just a little too brilliant to be genuine—so thought Baggy.

"It's a blessed German imitation," grunted Baggy, in disgust. "Just my thumping luck! I bet it's only worth about ninnence. Blow it! And I thought—never mind, though; p'raps I'll be able to get some silly ass to give me a bob for—Yarooogh! Ow! Oh crumbs! Yoooop!"

Baggy ended his muttered remarks with those extraordinary exclamations as a heavy, sodden turf caught him full in the back of the neck. He sprawled headlong with a bump and a wild howl.

After a brief, awful second, the luckless fat junior imagined that an earthquake had taken place. He was soon reassured on that point, however, as a sudden yell of laughter rang out.

From the verdant-green hedge there sprang two youths wearing Grammar School caps and wide grins. They were Carker and Lacy, two by no means shining lights of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School. They ran up to Trimble, who resembled a great fat snail as he bent double, in his frantic efforts to scoop handfuls of soil from the back of his neck and his collar.

"Ow! Oh crumbs! Rotters!" gasped Trimble, his eyes glittering at the newcomers. "Ow! Ow-ow-ow! You—you beasts!"

"Well stopped, fatty! You'll simply have to wash your neck now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble staggered to his feet with a final shake, groaning. As he did so, Carker and Lacy stepped nearer, one on either side. At this, Baggy's glowering fury gave place to apprehension.

"I—I sus-say, you fellows," gasped Baggy, in alarm. "I'm in rather a hurry. You—you—"

"He's in a hurry," remarked Lacy, winking at Carker. "The fat, florid, flabby, and fatuous Baggy is in a hurry. Carker, old man. You're sure you are in a hurry, old grease-barrel?"

"I—I—I—"

"Cos if you are, I fancy we can help you there," resumed Lacy, with a chuckle. "What about rolling him into Rylcombe, Carker, old man?"

"Good wheeze!" assented Carker. "We'll trundle Trimble to save Trimble trotting. Much quicker, too!"

"Ha, ha! Yes! Matter of fact, Trimble, old top, we were just looking for a little diversion to pass the afternoon away. So glad you turned up!"

"I—I— Look here, you fellows!" gasped Baggy desperately. "Let me go. I—I say, Lacy, I think Skimpole was just in front of me. You—you'll get much more fun out of him, you know. If you hurry you'll just catch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammar School ragers roared at that. Baggy's ingenious suggestion reminded them forcibly of the scraggy monkey in the fable—the monkey that, to save his own skin, offered to lead the hungry tiger to where a fat donkey was tethered.

"Nothing doing, Baggibus!" chortled Lacy gleefully. "A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush, old top. You've got to take your gruel. Collar him, Carker."

"Here, I say—lemme alone, you beasts!" yelled Baggy, as the two Grammar School cads laid hands on him. "If you touch me, you rotters, I'll tell Tom Merry. He's gone to Rylcombe, and he'll— Ow! Yarooop!"

Bump!

"Whoooooop! Oh crumbs! Help! Rescue! Ow!"

Trimble yelled fiendishly as he went to earth again. And this time, the brooch, which up to now he had gripped within his fat fist, flew from his hand and rolled to the feet of Lacy.

Lacy caught the sparkle and glitter of the thing, and, stooping, he picked it up. As he looked at it he fairly blinked with amazement from the brooch to Trimble.

"My only hat, Trimble! Where on earth did you pick this up?" he demanded, his eyes gleaming curiously.

"What the thump—"

"Here, that's mine, you rotters!" howled Baggy. "Gimme my brooch!"

"Hallo! What is the thing?" asked Carker, grinning. He looked at the glittering brooch in Lacy's hand. Then his grin faded. "Why, great Scott! It's the very—"

"It's a blessed German brooch—a bit of cheap, rubbishy jewellery!" snapped Lacy, giving his chum a quick, warning look. "Carker, old sport, I think we ought to confiscate this, you know. We can't allow even St. Jim's cads to encourage German trade—you agree with me, Carker?"

"Oh—er—yes, rather!" assented Carker, suddenly grasping Lacy's game. "It wants stopping. Encourage home industries, y'know! Trading with the enemy sort of thing won't do!"

"Exactly!" agreed Lacy blandly. "Trimble, old chap—"

"Gimme my brooch back, you rotter—"

"I can't—matter of principle," said Lacy, shaking his head. "The war's over right enough; but I don't agree with buying German goods. Where—where did you get this, Trimble?"

"I—I bought it, you rotter!" mumbled Trimble sulkily.

"From—from old Godfrey's, in the High Street. Give it me back, you—"

"How much did you pay for it, Trimble?"

"Fuf—five bob!" stammered Trimble. "Look here, you—"

"Just what I thought," said Lacy. "You've been grossly swindled, Baggy! You'd better take the rotten thing back, and demand your five bob back!"

"Give it me back, then—"

"I would if I thought you'd take it back," said Lacy, shaking his head gravely at the rather bewildered Trimble. "I'm afraid we can't trust you to do that, though. We'd better take it ourselves—"

"If you take it, you'll be a rotten thief!" mumbled Baggy, glowering at Lacy. "You know jolly well it's mine!"

"Not at all!" remarked Carker blandly. "We merely—"

"Half a mo, Carker, old man!" said Lacy, eyeing his chum seriously. "Trimble's quite right there. We can't very well pinch it from him. I'll tell you what, though, Trimble. Just to show you that our motive is purely patriotic, we'll give you the five bob for it, and take it back ourselves."

"You—you will?"

"Exactly!" said Lacy generously. "We'll risk getting our money back. How's that?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Carker.

Apparently Baggy Trimble thought it a remarkably good idea, too. He could scarcely believe his own ears. But as Lacy took a handful of silver from his pocket, he fairly beamed upon him.

"That—that's a good wheeze, Lacy, old chap!" he said. "Matter of fact, I don't hold with beastly German goods myself. Five bob, did you say?"

"Five bob," agreed Lacy. "Here it is, Baggy, old chap!"

He handed over two half-crowns, and next moment they had vanished into the mysterious depths of Baggy Trimble's trousers pocket. Lacy pocketed the brooch, and turned away abruptly with his chum.

Both seemed to have forgotten their intention of giving Baggy "his gruel." Apparently, also, like Baggy, they had

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suddenly remembered they were in a great hurry to get to Rylcombe. Perhaps they were anxious to return the brooch to old Godfrey, the cheap jeweller in Rylcombe, without delay—and perhaps they were not!

At all events, they hurried away, and had Baggy been a little keener he might have seen something suspicious in their remarkable haste.

But Baggy did not. As a matter of fact, had he only thought a moment, even the obtuse Baggy would never have swallowed such balderdash—especially from such well-known shady tricksters as Lacy and Carker. But Baggy had scarcely had time to think until now. And now he had something else to think about.

He could scarcely believe his good luck. Instead of a doubtful bob for the worthless German trinket, he had little doubt—none at all, in fact—of that now, and he had got five bobs. And five bob, even in these hard times, will purchase quite a decent feed.

So Baggy gave vent to several fat chuckles, and, after hastily brushing himself down, he rolled on towards the village, now in quite a cheery mood.

CHAPTER 2.

Disappointment!

"GREAT Scott! What a dashed stroke of luck!" "Simply amazin', begad!" agreed Lacy gleefully. "My hat! Fancy that fat idiot thinking this was a blessed German trinket! I spotted straight away that he didn't know what it really was!"

"Can't have seen the reward, either!" chortled Carker. "Great pip! Fifty dashed quid—for five bob! Oh, the awful ass!"

Thus Lacy and Carker, once they were out of sight of Baggy Trimble.

The shady young rascals dropped their air of solemn concern, and fairly waltzed with unholy joy.

"Buck up!" exclaimed Lacy, at length. "The sooner we claim that reward and get our hands on the fifty quid the better."

"Yes, but it's just struck me!" said Carker, a trifle uneasily. "That flabby fool is bound to spot the reward notice sooner or later. And if he does—well, he'll pick up a frightful fuss—p'raps go to a master about it! If—if he does—"

"Don't be a funk!" sniffed Lacy. "We can easily swear he's lying! Everybody knows what a shocking fibber he is. Our word will be as good as his—better, a jolly sight better! We've got the goods, and—"

"You—you're sure it is the real goods?" asked Carker. "It seems too good to be true! Let's have another squint at the thing!"

"Not here—when we get through the village!" grinned Lacy. "It's the real thing right enough, old top! I saw the notice in old Godfrey's window. Well, have another squint at that, to see if the description tallies with it."

They were in the village street now, and presently Lacy called a halt in front of the shop window of the local fancy goods dealer. In the window was an array of cheap German toys and an assortment of glittering imitation jewellery.

But Lacy had not come to look at these; his eyes turned to a printed notice in the window. It was headed "Fifty Pounds Reward!" and ran as follows:

"LOST!

A GOLD BROOCH, SET WITH DIAMONDS!

Fifty Pounds Reward will be paid to whomsoever shall find the above. It was lost in Rylcombe Lane, somewhere between St. James' College and Rylcombe Manor, on the Fifth of this month. The reward will be paid by Mrs. Blunt, of Rylcombe Manor, Rylcombe, Sussex."

"Well, what about it now?" grinned Lacy. "If this brooch we've got isn't the identical brooch, I'll swallow my boots! All we've got to do now, my pippin, is to trot along to the manor, and— Phew! Look at that, Carky, old son!"

Carker looked. On a card in the window was an array of glittering brooches—whose gold was gilt and diamonds glass. They were marked at the sum of eighteenpence each.

But what was remarkable about them was that they were almost the same size and shape, and looked—at a little distance—exactly the same as the brooch reposing in Lacy's pocket.

"Gold brooches, set with diamonds—eighteenpence each," read Carker, with a chuckle. "Jove, what a coincidence! But what about it, Lacy?"

"What about it! Can't you see, dummy?" breathed Lacy witheringly. "Weren't you worrying just now about the possibility of Trimble seeing the reward notice and demanding the blessed brooch back. Well, we're going to be ready if he does. And we'll give him a brooch back, right enough."



Baggy Trimble turned round as he heard a voice hailing him. "I think you must have dropped this, mister," said the little girl, holding up a brooch. Baggy's eyes fairly goggled at the sight of the glittering object. "Yes, it is mine," he announced hastily. "Now I come to think of it, I remember hearing something drop!" (See page 3.)

We'll be good, honest little boys. But it won't be the brooch Trimble handed to us—oh, dear no!"

And, without waiting for his chum's approval of the scheme, Lacy opened the little shop door, and marched inside. Next second Carker followed him inside. Happening to glance round just then, he had seen the fat figure of Baggy Trimble ambling along the village street, and he thought it just as well not to let Baggy see them there under the circumstances.

But Baggy never glanced towards Godfrey's. He stopped before he reached that establishment, and plunged inside the village tuckshop, a little higher up the street.

In a very few seconds Lacy's five bob had passed into the till, and five bob's-worth of tarts and cakes had vanished into Baggy's interior.

When he had polished off the last crumb, Baggy dropped from the high stool, and gave a satisfied grunt.

"That's better!" he murmured. "My hat! That beast Knox has done me a good turn, after all! Better go and see about the rotter's shoes now!"

And Baggy was rolling towards the tuckshop door, when his eyes happened to fall on an announcement pinned to the back of the door. As he scanned it carelessly he gave a convulsive jump.

It was a brief notice, and it was headed, "Fifty Pounds Reward!" It was, in fact, a similar notice to that in Godfrey's window.

Baggy fairly blinked at it. He stared at it as if mesmerised. But as the full purport of the words began to filter into his fat brain, Baggy's podgy breast fairly rumbled with indignation.

"Oh—oh, the villains! The awful beasts!" he groaned. "They've done me brown! Must have known all the time what it was! Oh dear! Fifty blessed quid! Oh, the brutes! They—they've swindled me! I won't be robbed like that,

though—no jolly fear! And I thought it was only a blessed imitation! Oh, the thieving cads!"

For a brief second Baggy stood, fairly seething with rage and dismay; then he wrenched open the door and bounded out.

There followed a sudden yell from the pavement. Three youths, wearing St. Jim's caps, happened to be sauntering past just then, and Baggy's weighty form barged full into them.

The three were Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners of the Shell, and they staggered back wrathfully under the force of the impact.

"You—you silly, clumsy dummy!" howled Tom Merry, grasping Baggy by the collar. "What the thump do you mean by barging about like a mad elephant?"

"Bump the silly ass!" gasped Monty Lowther wrathfully. "He bashed my chin with his silly fat head!"

"Ow! Here, I say, leggo, you chaps!" gasped Baggy desperately. "I'm after those rotters, Carker and Lacy! I—I've been robbed, you chaps!"

"Robbed?"

The Terrible Three released Baggy and echoed the word in astonishment.

"I say, it's a fact, you fellows!" panted Baggy. "Those awful cads Carker and Lacy have stolen a valuable brooch from me! They— Why, there the rotters are!"

It was the two scheming Grammar School fellows right enough. They stood several yards away—almost as if they were waiting for Baggy.

As Baggy Trimble dashed towards them, his eyes glittering with rage, Tom Merry & Co. gazed after him in amazement. Then they strolled after him.

"Better look into this," grunted Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Never know what those Grammar rotters are up to!"

Lacy and Carker stood their ground a trifle uneasily as Baggy dashed up to them. As a matter of fact they had been waiting for Baggy. But the appearance of the Terrible Three on the scene rather upset their nerve.

But they realised from Baggy's agitated state that he knew the truth now, and they felt that the sooner he was pacified the better.

"Here, I say, you know!" muttered Lacy, with a rather nervous grin. "What's the matter, Trimble?"

"Matter, you rotten swindler!" yelled Trimble. "Gimme my brooch back, you rotters! You've spoofed me, you cads!"

Lacy shook his head firmly. He was only too anxious to get the brooch—the imitation one—into Baggy's hands, but he did not mean to arouse the fat junior's suspicions by being too eager to hand it over.

"My dear man," he exclaimed calmly, "why should we hand it over? We bought the dashed thing, and it's ours now."

At that moment the Terrible Three strolled up, and Lacy eyed them rather anxiously. He knew that if they knew about the lost brooch and the reward they would smell a rat at once.

But Tom Merry's first words reassured him upon that point.

"Look here, Lacy," said Tom curtly, "Trimble says you've pinched a rotten old brooch, or something, from him. That the truth?"

"Pinched!" gasped Carker. "Oh, what a whopper!" "What a fib!" remarked Lacy indignantly. "We gave the fat beast five bob for the thing. It was a dashed swindle at that—a blessed bit of rubbish! If the fat ass wants it back he can have it quickly enough!"

"You hear that, Trimble," said Tom Merry. "Lacy's willing to hand your brooch back if you aren't satisfied. Did he give you five bob for it?"

"I—ye-e-ss!" gasped Baggy. "But—but—"

"Then hand him the five bob, you ass!"

"I—I can't! You—you see—"

"Oh, let him keep the blessed five bob!" grunted Lacy, with a fine air of carelessness. "Here's your blessed brooch, you fat swindler! Take the dashed rubbishy thing!"

And, talking a glittering object from his pocket, Lacy stuffed it into Trimble's pocket. Then he strolled away with his chum. Both of them wore rather curious expressions on their faces.

The Terrible Three looked after them rather puzzled. It wasn't at all like Lacy and Carker to give five bobs away, especially to a fellow like Trimble.

"There's something queer about this," said Tom Merry, turning his attention upon Baggy Trimble. "What's the little game, Baggy? You ought to know better than to deal with those cads. What brooch is it?"

"And where did you get it?" chuckled Lowther. Trimble did not answer. Anxious to make sure that the object Lacy had stuffed into his pocket was indeed the brooch, Baggy had snatched it out and was eyeing it feverishly.

One glance at the glittering thing was enough. His fat heart fairly leaped with joy.

"Let's have a squint at it, Baggibus," said Lowther. He snatched the precious object from Baggy's fat hand, and as he did so he gave a yell.

"Well, my hat! Mean to say you had the nerve to take five bob for this, Baggy?"

"Gimme my brooch, you rotter!" shrieked Baggy, making vain clutches at the brooch. "Give it me. It's mine."

"Oh, give it him, Lowther, you ass!" laughed Tom Merry. "Looks to me like a blessed trinket out of a cracker!"

"It is," grinned Lowther. "At least, it's a cheap, rubbishy thing made in Germany, I'll bet. You can get 'em from old Godfrey's for less than a couple of bob. Where did you get it from, Baggy?"

"I say, you know, hand it over," pleaded Baggy. "It—it's jolly valuable—an heirloom!"

"A—what?"

"An heirloom," said Baggy eagerly. "It—it's been in my family for generations, in fact. We've got heaps of things like that at home—Trimble Towers, you know."

"Rats!"

"It's a fact," said Baggy desperately. "I say, Tom Merry, make him give it me."

"You don't deserve it for telling such whoppers," said Lowther. "Why you're making such a fuss about such rubbish beats me. I wouldn't be found dead with it on me! Here you are, though."

And with that the humorous Lowther stuffed the brooch down the back of Trimble's neck, and sat him down on the pavement with a bump. Then he turned away, grinning, with his chums.

But, though he also grinned as he strolled away, Tom Merry was feeling rather puzzled. Obviously the brooch was trash—a cheap foreign imitation. Yet why had a keen,

crafty fellow like Lacy given Trimble five bob for it in the first place, and why was Trimble so desperately anxious to get the thing back again? It was quite beyond Tom Merry.

He gave the problem up, however, as the trio reached the door of the tuckshop. As he turned to close the door Tom Merry's eyes fell on the notice pinned thereon. But he never troubled to read it. Had he done so he might possibly have gained an inkling of the truth.

CHAPTER 3.

Nothing Doing!

FIFTY quid—fifty quid—fifty quid—fifty quid!" Thus Baggy Trimble as he rolled along at top speed en route for Rylcombe Manor, to claim the fifty pounds reward.

The fat junior was in the seventh heaven of delight, as it were. He chanted the words in a sort of triumphant refrain as he ambled along, his fat head in the clouds, visions of wealth and unbounded, sumptuous feasts floating before his eyes. He felt as if he were walking upon air.

"Fifty blessed quids!" murmured Baggy, licking his lips. "Why, it's a blessed fortune! All for nothing, too! Perhaps I'll be able to wangle a bit more, too. The old Colonel Blunt's a bit of a fire-eater, I believe; but Mrs. Blunt's O.K. My hat! I expect she'll insist on my staying to tea. Jove! I'm in luck, and no mistake!"

And Baggy hastened his footsteps at thought of the triumph in store, the brooch clutched tightly in his fat fist.

That the brooch was not the same brooch he had found—or, rather, the little village kiddie had found—Baggy never dreamed for one instant.

But Baggy Trimble was about to have a very rude awakening.

As he approached the gates of the Manor, Baggy was very much surprised, and not a little alarmed, to see the figures of Lacy and Carker walking along towards him.

Even then he had not the slightest suspicion of the truth. He supposed that the two Grammar School juniors had gone on though the village for a walk and were now returning. His only fear was that they would accost and capture him again.

But, to his great surprise, the two cads of the Fourth Form at the Grammar School merely grinned at him and passed on. They were both looking a little excited, and Baggy wondered a little at that; but he wondered much more why they had chosen to let him pass unmolested.

But they had done so, and Baggy continued on his way much relieved.

In a very few moments he was hurrying along the well-kept drive, and on reaching the imposing front entrance he summoned all his dignity, and, mounting the steps, rang the bell firmly.

After a moment's wait a pompous footman answered the door. He gazed inquiringly at Baggy.

"I wish to see Mrs. Blunt," said Baggy haughtily. "Mrs. Blunt has been called away unexpectedly," said the man. "Colonel Blunt is at home, though. If your business is urgent, sir—"

Baggy Trimble's face fell a trifle. He would much have preferred to deal with Mrs. Blunt rather than the fierce old colonel. In any case, he couldn't imagine Colonel Blunt requesting his presence to tea. The free tea was off, at all events.

"It is urgent—extremely urgent and important," said Baggy, with dignity.

The footman gave rather a sniff, as his eyes wandered over Baggy's podgy, dusty form.

"The colonel is not well to-day," he said hesitatingly. "But—but if you'll give me your name—"

"My name's Trimble—Bagley Trimble!" snapped Baggy. "And I've called in regard to—"

Baggy paused. Glancing past the footman's form, he had caught a glimpse of an old gentleman stumping painfully across the hall. One of the old gentleman's feet was bulky with bandages, and he was leaning heavily on a stick.

Baggy recognised the somewhat florid features, and walrus-like moustache in a moment. He guessed that Colonel Blunt was suffering from one of his periodical attacks of gout, and he began to feel a trifle nervous.

At that moment the colonel spotted Baggy, and he came stumping, gasping, and snorting towards the door.

"What—what's that, James? Who's that fellow? What's he want?" he demanded testily.

"He—he wishes to see you, sir," said the footman nervously. "He says his business is—"

"Bring him in, and shut that confounded door!" roared the old gentleman. "Now, young man, what's your business—hey?"

Baggy pulled himself together and ambled forward. After all, he told himself, wasn't he bringing good news? Wasn't he a welcome visitor—or would be when he had stated his business? As he blinked into the choleric old gentleman's eyes, Baggy felt thankful that his business was what it was.



As Baggy Trimble pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket a small object, glittering and sparkling, dropped to the floor. Like a flash, Racke stooped down and snatched it up. With a great show of alarm, Baggy jumped forward, and pretended to grab at it. "I—I say," he gasped, "that's my brooch! Be—be careful with it for goodness' sake, Racke!" (See page 10.)

"It—it's about Mrs. Blunt's diamond brooch, sir," said Baggy, with an agreeable smile. "I understand that Mrs. Bl—"

The colonel interrupted him, with a snort.

"Brooch! That confounded thing again!" he roared. "What d'you mean, begad? What the deuce d'you mean by pestering me about the dashed thing like this—hey?"

Baggy gave a start. He had scarcely expected this.

"But—but, look here, sir," he stammered. "I've called to tell you I've found it—"

"What!"

Baggy fairly jumped this time. Why the colonel should explode like that on hearing the brooch was found, he could not imagine.

As a matter of fact—though Baggy didn't know it—the gallant old soldier was "fed up" with the subject of the lost brooch. After losing the thing, his wife had been called away to a sick relation, and had left him to deal with the matter. And in his present state, tortured by his old enemy, gout, Colonel Blunt did not look upon the task with any degree of pleasure—quite the reverse. Indeed, he had been scarcely less amiable to Lacy and Carker, who had returned the genuine brooch to him less than twenty minutes ago.

Perhaps, in view of the latter circumstance, it was no wonder the colonel greeted Baggy's statement with an explosion.

He fairly glowered at the fat youth.

"You—you've found the brooch?" he stuttered.

"Sus-sus-certainly, sir," stammered Baggy uneasily. "I fuf-fuf-found it in Rylcombe Lane this afternoon, sir. Here it is, sir!"

Baggy took the precious brooch from his pocket. Almost mechanically the colonel took it. As he blinked at it, his face grew purple with rage.

"You—you young rascal!"

"I—I say, sir—"

"So—so this is the brooch, is it, begad?"

"Of—of course, sir. I fuf-found it!"

"And you—you hoped to claim the fifty pounds reward by

foisting this rubbishy thing on to me—hey?" thundered Colonel Blunt.

"Eh? I—I don't understand you, sir," mumbled Baggy, aghast.

"Then I will make it my business to make my meaning plain to you, sir-r-r-r!" rapped out the colonel. "In the first place, my fine fellow, the genuine brooch, lost by my wife, was returned safely to me less than twenty minutes ago; it now reposes in my safe, sir!"

"Oh dear!"

"You may well make that absurd ejaculation, my boy!" thundered the enraged and scandalised colonel. "And, in the second place, this—this brooch—this trumpery thing which you hoped to foist upon me is nothing less than trash. It is not worth twopenny, sir? You are a young scoundrel! A rascally swindler!"

"But—but—"

"Don't attempt to deny it, boy!" thundered the colonel, twisting his features into extraordinary shapes as sudden twinges reminded him of his gouty leg. "I am well aware of your motive—your intended trickery, sir! By gad! Yow! Dash this confounded gout! Yes, sir. I wonder how you can dare—how you had the astounding nerve to—to attempt such a swindle, begad! False pretences—nothing less! Huh! I have a good mind to call in the police—"

"The—the police!" gasped Baggy.

"Yes, sir, the police! And, but for your youth, and the fact that you belong to my old school—a school whose good name I have at heart, sir, I would hand you over to the police, begad! Huh! By James! Such duplicity amazes me!"

"But—but, I say, you know—" began Baggy shakily.

"Not a word! Get out, you depraved young rascal!" thundered Colonel Blunt. "And be thankful that I am allowing you to escape scot-free. James, show him out—turn him out, begad! Yow!"

The colonel gave a yelp as an unusually vicious twinge struck home.

But, strange to say, Baggy Trimble was not, in a hurry to

depart. Baggy was struck with a sudden suspicion. An unscrupulous young rascal himself, he was quick to suspect others of trickery. The peppery old colonel still had his brooch in his fist, and a sudden amazing thought occurred to Baggy's fat mind.

Of course—that was it! It was all bluff! The colonel had got the brooch, and he was trying to do him out of his fifty quid—trying to get out of handing over the reward!

As the astonishing explanation occurred to Baggy, his fat breast fairly swelled with honest indignation. Indignation, in fact, quite overcame his terror of the choleric old gentleman.

"I—I say, sir!" he stammered warmly. "You—you can't do that, you know! It—it's a bit thick—"

"Eh? What's that, boy?"

Colonel Blunt was turning away, but he right-about-turned with surprising quickness at the tone of Baggy's remarks.

"What's that?" he gasped. "You—you dare to—"

"I—I don't care!" mumbled Baggy desperately. "I'm not going to be done of my fifty quid!"

"What?"

"That's what it amounts to," stammered Baggy, a little alarmed at the glitter in the old gentleman's eyes. "You—you can't deny you offered fifty quid reward for—the brooch. You—you can't back out of it! I sus-sus-say—"

Baggy backed in alarm at the strange look on the colonel's face. He looked at it as he was on the point of apoplexy.

He had suddenly realised that he still gripped Baggy's brooch, and he had suddenly grasped the drift of Baggy's remarks. Baggy, quite suddenly became terrified at the result of his own recklessness.

"I—I say, sir—I meant to sus-say—"

"You—you rascal! You—you impudent, insolent young jackanapes!" stuttered the colonel. "You—you dare to suggest that I—that I— Bless my soul! You have the confounded nerve to suggest that I would stoop to—yow!—to—begad! This is tuf-too much! Wow! So you think I'm backing out, as you call it—hey? You—you—"

Headless of his gouty leg, the angry, astounded old gentleman grabbed at Baggy.

"Here, I say— Ow! Leggo! I didn't mean— Yaroooh! Yooooop!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, help! Yow! Stoppit! Oh crumbs! Yaroooh!" howled Baggy, in anguish. "Stop! I didn't— It wasn't a— Yoooo!"

"Back out—hey? Me!" spluttered Colonel Blunt, laying on with his stick. "I'll—yow!—confound this gout!—teach you!"

Whack, whack, whack!

The angry old gentleman did not spare his stick—or Baggy; he fairly raised the dust from the luckless fat youth's trousers and jacket.

"There, you young rascal!" he panted at last. "Let that—yow!—be a warning—yow!—and a lesson—yow-ow!—to you! If it wasn't for this—yow!—confounded gout—oh gad!—you would have—yow!—suffered dearly for this—wow! James—wow!—kick this young scoundrel—ow!—out!"

James, who, like his master, was an old Army man, was quick to obey. Hiding his grins with admirable fortitude, he grasped the almost weeping Baggy by the collar, and swung the luckless reward hunter round. Then he planted a heavy boot behind Baggy.

"Yaroooh!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Crash!

Baggy Trimble landed at the foot of the steps outside with a bump and a yell. As he lay there roaring, something whizzed past his head and fell with a tinkle on the gravel.

It was the brooch—the glittering trinket which Baggy had fondly hoped and dreamed was going to bring him wealth and joy, but which, alas! had only brought him pain and woe.

"Ow! My hat! Oh crumbs! Yow! Oh, my napper!" groaned Baggy.

For several seconds Baggy lay where he had rolled, groaning and gasping like a freshly stranded fish. He was still bewildered, and felt as if the whole world had fallen about his ears.

But as his eyes suddenly fell upon the brooch he staggered dazedly to his feet. Stooping painfully, he picked up the brooch and fairly glowered at it.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "Fancy the old chap turning up rusty like that! Oh, what an awful swiz, though! This can't be the right brooch, after all. Phew! That awful beast's nearly killed me. Yow! What an ass I was to cheek the beast! Oh dear! And I thought I was going to get fifty quid! Grough!"

And with a deep groan, Baggy stuffed the unwanted brooch into his pocket, and, limping along to the gates, turned his face towards St. Jim's. He was aching all over, and almost weeping with disappointment. But he had no illusions now with regard to the value of his brooch. And his only

consolation was that it had cost him nothing, that he had already got five bob for it, and that he still had the hope left of persuading someone as soft as Lacy to give him another five for it.

CHAPTER 4.

Knox is Generous!

"OH, here you are, you young scoundrel!" The above impolite greeting was made by Gerald Knox of the Sixth Form, as he poked an angry face inside Study No. 2 of the Fourth Form passage at St. Jim's.

Baggy Trimble and his study-mates, Wildrake and Percy Mellish, were seated at tea. Wildrake merely grinned and went on with his tea; apparently he concluded the remark was not for him. Mellish half rose from the table, but on seeing that Knox's gleaming eyes were not fixed upon him, he sat down again in great relief. But Baggy Trimble had no doubts at all as to whom Knox was addressing.

As he blinked at the prefect in the doorway an extraordinary expression came over his fat face.

"Oh dear!" he mumbled.

"You—you lazy, fat little toad!" resumed Knox, striding into the room. "What about my boots—eh? Didn't I tell you to bring the dashed things straight to me when you got back, Trimble?"

"I—I sus-say, Knox—" gasped Trimble.

"Does this mean that you haven't been, Trimble—that you've dared to disobey me?" snapped Knox angrily.

"Nunno! Of course not, Knox!" gasped Baggy hastily.

"The—the fact is, I—I forgot—"

"Then you didn't go?" ground out the prefect, his eyes glittering.

"Oh, yes, Knox! But—but the fact is, I—I forgot to call. You—"

"Then you can trot along to my study, my lad, and I'll give you something that will improve your memory. Cut along—sharp!"

"Oh dear!"

Baggy Trimble groaned. Was there to be no end to trouble for him that afternoon? From the moment of quitting the village tuckshop that afternoon he had completely forgotten that he had been sent to the village to fetch Knox's boots. He remembered well enough now.

"Better go!" advised Wildrake in a whisper.

The hapless Baggy stumbled from the table, and slunk out under the prefect's watchful eye. With Knox bringing up the rear, Trimble ambled to the Sixth-Former's study, and a moment later the door closed upon them both.

Without leaving Trimble for a moment in doubt as to his intentions, Knox crossed at once to the bookcase, and took therefrom a cane. Baggy eyed it apprehensively. He had tasted that cane more than once, and he didn't like the taste.

"Now, you little sweep," began Knox grimly, "this is better than any of the much-advertised memory systems. After you've had one lesson, I rather fancy you won't forget again—not my orders, at all events. Hold out your hand, Trimble!"

"I—I say, Knox—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered the prefect.

Baggy groaned and shoved out a fat, not over clean hand. He held it as though his elbow were glued to his side. The bullying prefect was about to raise the cane, when a thought seemed to strike him.

"Here, half a minute!" he snapped sharply. "I'd almost forgotten the cash. I gave you four-and-sixpence to pay for the boots. Where's the money?"

"It's all right!" stuttered Trimble eagerly. "I've got it in my pocket, Knox!"

"Then hand it over! I know what a fat thief you are, Trimble!"

"Oh, really, Knox—"

Trimble dived his hand into his trousers-pocket. He had forgotten that he had the cash as completely as he had forgotten his errand.

He withdrew his hand at last. It held several articles. One was a huge chunk of Everton toffee, and to this were stuck a half-crown, a florin, a piece of string, a couple of foreign stamps, and other small articles.

"Here you are, Knox," mumbled Trimble.

Knox fairly blinked at the mess.

"You—you filthy little beast!" he hissed. "Do you think I'm going to pick my money out of that—"

The prefect paused. His eyes had suddenly fallen upon one of the "other" articles stuck to the chunk of toffee. It was Trimble's "gold and diamond" brooch.

Knox looked at it; he bent down and looked at it closer. Then, heedless of the risk of soiling his slim, well-kept fingers, he plucked the brooch from the sticky conglomeration.

"Trimble," he gasped rather breathlessly, "where on earth did you get this—this brooch?"

"Oh, it's only a blessed—"

Trimble paused, and a curious gleam came into his eyes.

As he blinked at the prefect's eager face he caught his breath.

Once before that afternoon he had seen that same eager, greedy look on the face of Lacy of the Grammar School. Was it possible that Knox also had seen the "lost and reward" notice? And was it possible that Knox, likewise, took this to be the genuine article?

A sudden glimpse of a local newspaper lying on the tea-table settled those questions for Baggy Trimble.

"Oh, that!" he remarked, with an assumed air of carelessness. "That's a brooch, Knox—a brooch I picked up in Rylcombe Lane this afternoon! Pretty, ain't it?"

"It—it's not bad. You—you say you picked it up in Rylcombe Lane, Trimble?"

"Exactly! Mind how you handle it, Knox, old chap. It—it may be worth a mint of money, for all I know. Looks to me like a jolly valuable bit of jewellery—though I'm no judge of that, of course," said Baggy cautiously.

Knox was no judge of that, either—or he would have seen at once that the brooch was not "worth a mint of money"—far from it. Had Knox seen the thing reposing on the card with the others in the shop-window, he would have spotted the cheap, imitation rubbish it really was at once, perhaps.

But he hadn't. In it's present state—sticky, with the dust from Trimble's mysterious pocket adhering to it—it might have been anything. Moreover, hadn't Trimble found it in Rylcombe Lane?

Knox scarcely doubted it for a moment. It seemed to him an amazing coincidence. Less than five minutes ago he had read the notice inserted in the "Wayland Observer" by Mrs. Blunt, and he had wished that he could be lucky enough to find the lost brooch. And now, here it was in his hand. Trimble, that fat fool, had found it—and didn't know what it really was!

"Look—look here, Trimble," muttered Knox, striving to hide the tremble in his voice, "it's only a cheap, rubbishy thing, of course; probably worth half-a-crown. But—but it's quite pretty! Just the sort of thing my—my sister would like, too. You—you don't want to sell it, I suppose?"

Trimble shook his head. He seemed suddenly to become alarmed.

"Here, I say, you know, Knox—gimme my brooch!" he said warmly. "Sell it? No jolly fear! I'm not parting with it until I know what it's worth. I'm going—"

"You young ass! It's worth about half-a-crown!" said Knox, biting his lip. "The—the fact is I've promised to get something for my—my sister's birthday. I—I thought this would just be the thing, and save me running over to the town to get something suitable. Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do. Leave this little trinket with me, and I'll let you off the licking, and let you keep the four-and-sixpence into the bargain. How's that?"

Trimble shook his head quite firmly. "Not good enough, Knox!" he said, striving to hide a temptation to grin. "I'll tell you what, though. I'm going over to Wayland to-morrow to get the thing valued. I might possibly think of selling when I get back—and possibly not. Why, the thing may be worth a quid or more! Quite likely!"

This last was quite a stroke of genius on Baggy's part. He knew that a pound would be about Knox's limit. And, as he expected, Knox swallowed the bait at once. Knox did not intend Trimble to take the brooch to be valued if he could help it.

He made a great show of examining the brooch carefully. Then he looked up.

"Well, I don't know but what you may be right, kid," he remarked thoughtfully. "I hardly think it can be worth a quid; but you never know. I'd be willing to risk it, anyway. Yes; what if I give you a quid for it, Trimble? I hardly think it's worth it; but it will save me bothering to get anything for my sister—I hate buying presents—and it'd save you bothering to get the thing valued. How's that?"

Baggy appeared to hesitate.

"I don't know. I'm afraid not, Knox," he said, shaking his head. "You—you see—"

"Very well, then," snapped Knox, suddenly changing his tone. "If you will be a fool, it's your own look out. Here's your blessed trash! Now give me my four-and-six and hold out your hand."

So saying, Knox held out the brooch with one hand, and raised his cane with the other.

Trimble hesitated no longer. He knew perfectly well that Knox was bluffing, that he had no intention of handing over the brooch. But Baggy wanted to lay his fat fist on the pound note.

"It's all right, Knox," he said hastily. "I'll do it. Hand over the quid and the brooch is yours."

Knox threw his cane down and pocketed the brooch. His eyes were gleaming with triumph, and he could scarcely contain his joy. Hardly trusting himself to speak, he took out a pocket-wallet and threw Trimble a pound note.

Trimble took it with an inward chuckle, and stuffed it in his pocket. Like Knox, he could scarcely trust himself to

spcak, so great was his joy. And a moment later he had taken his departure.

Out in the passage his fat face broke into a broad grin, and he chuckled loud and deep.

"Oh, crumbs! What a scream!" he murmured. "Five bob and twenty-four-and-sixpence for a measly old brooch worth eighteenpence! My hat! I almost wish now that I hadn't let it go for that, though. Talk about business! If only I had a few more brooch— My hat! I wonder—"

Baggy rolled on along the passage chuckling deeply, his eyes shining at the sudden scheme that had just occurred to his fat mind. He was still wondering two minutes later as he passed out of the School House en route for the tuck-shop under the old elms. But before he reached Mrs. Mimbles' establishment he had reached a decision.

"I'll do it, blessed if I won't!" he murmured, coming to a halt. "And why not? Lots of the chaps would jump at it, just like that ass Knox did. I'll get a supply of brooches from Godfrey's and a few 'Wayland Observers' with that reward notice in. I won't tell the chaps, of course, that the brooches are the genuine thing; that wouldn't be honest. If they choose to think they are, like Knox did, it's their own look out, not mine. Let's see, just time to get there and back before lock-up. Good! I'll take D'Arcy's bike; he w n't mind—if I don't tell him, that is. Jove! It's the blessed wheeze of a lifetime. Here goes!"

And with—for Baggy—remarkable self-denial, he turned his back on Mrs. Mimbles, and his face towards the cycle-shed to "borrow" D'Arcy's bike, and a minute later he was riding hard for Rylcombe.

He was not troubled with scruples as to the honesty or otherwise of his little scheme—not at all. He certainly was far from realising what it really amounted to. Baggy had a very accommodating conscience, and he had already satisfied himself that what he had done and was about to do was merely a bit of good business—tricky, perhaps, but good business. Nor was Baggy troubled with fears as to the outcome to himself of his "deals." Knox, for instance, imagined he was on to a good thing now; but when he discovered he wasn't it was highly probable that he would want to talk seriously to Baggy Trimble about it.

But in his blissful enthusiasm Baggy never even thought of that possibility. The fat junior rarely looked ahead—rarely looked before he leaped. And he cycled away cheerfully towards Rylcombe with no thoughts—or fears—of the morrow.

CHAPTER 5.

Success and Failure.

"I SAY, you chaps, just listen to this!"

Aubrey Racke of the Shell was the speaker, and he addressed his study-mate Crooke, and Scrope of the Shell, who was also in Study No. 7.

It was prep time at St. Jim's, but none of the three black sheep of the Shell were attempting to do prep. Crooke and Scrope were discussing sporting matters which had no connection with school sports. Racke was reading a newspaper whilst lounging on the couch.

That newspaper was the current copy of the "Wayland Observer."

"Just listen to this," repeated Racke, as his chums glanced up.

Racke cleared his throat and proceeded to read an announcement from the paper. It was quite short, being an offer of fifty pounds reward for the recovery of a certain diamond brooch which had been lost in Rylcombe Lane. It was, in fact, the same notice which had been of such deep interest to Baggy Trimble, and later to Knox of the Sixth.

"Bit of good luck for someone there—what?" remarked Racke, as he finished reading. "Phew! Fifty quid for nothing! Don't you wish it would come your way, Crookey, old top?"

"No such luck," said Crooke, with a yawn. "Expect the dashed thing's been found by now. Where was it lost, did you say?"

"In Rylcombe Lane—between Rylcombe Manor and—Here, outside, you fat toad!"

This last remark Racke addressed in anything but kindly tones to Baggy Trimble, who looked into the study at that moment.

But Baggy Trimble ignored Racke's request. He rolled into the study and closed the door carefully behind him. On opening the door Baggy had just been in time to hear Racke's last few words, and he felt he really could not have arrived at a more opportune moment.

Racke glared at him.

"Getting deaf?" he inquired, with ominous sarcasm. "I think I told you to get out, Trimble."

"I—I say, just a minute, Racke—"

"Get out, you fat worm!" snapped Crooke. "What the thump d'you mean by barging in here as if you owned the

dashed place. Cheek! Sling that cushion at him, Racke old man."

Racke felt behind him for the cushion.

"Out with it—quick!" he remarked, raising the cushion.

"What d'you want, you greasy worm?"

"I—I would you lend me your—your Latin Grammar?" stammered Baggy hastily. "You see—Hallo! Did I drop something?"

Baggy had "dropped" something without a doubt. While speaking he had taken out his handkerchief, and with it he had dragged something—quite by accident, of course—from his pocket.

It was only a small object, but it glittered and sparkled as it dropped and rolled on the floor. It was a "gold and diamond" brooch.

It rolled quite close to the couch, and leaning over, Racke snatched it up with a grin. With a great show of alarm, Baggy jumped forward and pretended to grab at it.

"I—I say," he gasped. "That's mine. Hand it over, Racke. Oh, be—be careful with it for goodness' sake, Racke!"

Racke easily evaded Trimble's clutch, as the crafty Baggy intended him to, grinning at Trimble's apparent distress.

"Why, what the thump is the dashed thing? Phew!"

As his eyes fell on the brooch Racke's grin vanished.

"I—I say, Trimble," he muttered, striving to hide the excitement in his voice. "Where on earth did you get this?"

"Gimme my brooch," said Baggy warmly. "Nothing to do with you if I did find it in Rylcombe Lane, Racke. Findings keepings, and—"

"You—you found it in Rylcombe Lane?" said Racke, exchanging glances with the astonished Crooke and Scrope.

"That'd be telling," said Trimble, with a fat smirk. "No good you thinking of saying it's yours, Racke, lots of chaps know it's mine. In fact, I've only just refused an offer of thirty bob for it. I'm not selling for less than two quid, though. It's worth that, don't you think so, Racke?"

Racke gave Baggy Trimble a very sharp look. But Baggy's fat face was quite innocent of guile. That the dropping of the brooch from Baggy's pocket was no accident Racke had no suspicion. Nor did Racke trouble even to examine the brooch after that first glance. It was the very brooch without a doubt. Trimble had found it and was quite ignorant that it was valuable and that a reward of fifty pounds was offered for it! Racke hadn't the slightest doubt about that.

He took a deep breath.

"I—I hardly think it's worth that much, Trimble," he answered, pretending to examine the article closely. "It looks more like gilt and glass to me. But it's jolly pretty. My hat! Just the sort of thing my sister would like—don't you chaps think so?"

Racke handed the brooch to Crooke, who glanced at it gravely, and handed it to Scrope.

"She'd like it no end!" agreed Scrope, catching Racke's meaning look. "It's pretty enough; but I hardly fancy it's worth more than thirty bob!"

"Your sister's fond of diamonds—even imitation ones," added Crooke. "I must say it's pretty—fairly sparkles, y'know. Funny thing you were only talking about buying a diamond brooch for her this morning—for her birthday—weren't you, Racke? I say, why npt do a deal with Trimble?"

"Just what I was thinking," remarked Racke thoughtfully. "It will save me trotting over to Wayland, and I must say this is just the sort of thing she'd like. Couldn't think of paying more than thirty bob for it, though!"

He took the glittering object from Scrope's hand, and looked it over again.

"Well, think of selling, Trimble?" he said, with assumed indifference. "Thirty bob, cash down! How's that?"

Baggy shook his head.

It was all he could do to prevent himself showing his glee; he was inwardly bubbling with joy and mirth. It was really remarkable how many people seemed to take a striking fancy to those brooches.

But Racke was rich. He could afford to pay two quid, and Baggy intended to stick out for that figure.

"Nothing doing, Racke," he said firmly. "You know jolly well it's worth more than that. Two quid's my figure. If you don't want to pay it, hand me my brooch back. I'll jolly soon sell it elsewhere!"

Racke felt certain he would, too; so did Crooke and Scrope. The thought of losing such a chance made them shiver. Fifty quid for a paltry outlay of two quid—it was the chance of a lifetime.

"Well, I don't know—" began Racke slowly.

"Oh, give the fat jay his two quid!" urged Crook quickly. "Ten bob's nothing to you, after all!"

"Yes; not worth quibbling about!" agreed Scrope, giving Racke a warning glance.

Racke appeared to weaken.

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"Oh, very well, then!" he said. "Here you are, Trimble, here's your two quid! I'm paying you more than the thing's worth, though!"

Trimble quite agreed with him there; but he didn't tell Racke so.

"Thanks, old man!" he remarked, taking the two pound notes from Racke's trembling fingers. "You've got a good bargain there, Racke. Matter of fact, I'd rather sell the thing to you than anyone—fact! Well, I'll get along now!"

And Trimble "got along." He hardly dared to trust himself in the study longer. With the brooch clutched tightly in his hand, Racke saw him out, and the door closed, and then his pale face became flushed with exultation.

"Oh, great pip!" he chortled, fairly hugging himself with glee. "What a priceless ass! Two quid for fifty, begad! Oh, what a thumpin' bit of luck! Fifty quid! Oh, great Scott!"

Crooke and Scrope jumped up from the table.

"I—I say, Racke," muttered Crooke, in a low tone.

"Thirds, you know! That's only fair—eh, Scrope?"

"Yes, rather! Look—look here, Racke—"

"It's all serene, you asses!" grinned Racke. "Of course it's thirds! That's sixteen quid odd each. Oh, hear me gloat!"

And Racke gloated, as also did his shady chums, now they knew it was to be "thirds."

But could they have seen Baggy Trimble at that moment, they would, perhaps, have stopped gloating, and done a little thinking. Racke & Co. imagined they had been crafty; but Baggy had beaten them there.

Once out in the passage, the fat schemer executed an ungraceful, but none the less vigorous, dance of glee. Like Racke & Co., he fairly hugged himself with unholly joy.

Baggy, in fact, was beginning to think that life was, indeed, worth the living.

Within fifteen minutes of returning from the village with his supply of eighteenpenny brooches, Baggy had already sold two—one to Gerald Cutts of the Fifth, and now one to Racke & Co.

Cutts had swallowed the bait even quicker than Knox had done, earlier in the evening. Knowing Cutts' character, Baggy had tackled him first of all and found him a surprisingly easy victim.

By means of his cute, simple handkerchief dodge, Baggy had introduced the brooch, and the rest had worked like a charm. Within five minutes of entering Cutts' study, Baggy came out again with one brooch less, but the richer by thirty shillings.

"My hat, it's great—simply great!" murmured Baggy, with a soft chuckle. "That's how much? Five bob from Lacy, a quid from Knox, thirty bob from Cutts, and now two quid from that chump Racke—four pounds fifteen. Good! My hat, I'll soon be rich at this rate!"

For a moment the fat young rascal reflected, and then he rolled along to Study No. 9 on the Shell passage.

"Cardew's a sharp beast," mused Baggy. "But he's not so particular as some chaps. Anyway, I'll try him. Here goes!"

And without troubling to knock—Baggy was like that—he pushed open the door and rolled into the room.

Cardew was there, with his study-mates, Clive and Levison. They had just finished prep and were sitting on the table chatting cricket matters. They greeted the appearance of Baggy with a simultaneous:

"Outside!"

Baggy didn't heed.

"I say, you fellows," he began, "I—I was wondering if one of you could lend me—"

"Yes, we can!" said Cardew, with a nod. "Here it is, Baggy, old top!"

And dropping from the table, Cardew lent Baggy his boot. "Yaroooogh!"

Baggy went through the doorway like a football, howling fiendishly, and collapsed on the linoleum outside. Cardew closed the door after him, and joined his chums to resume the subject of cricket.

Evidently it wasn't much use trying Cardew.

After that, Baggy had quite a run of bad luck.

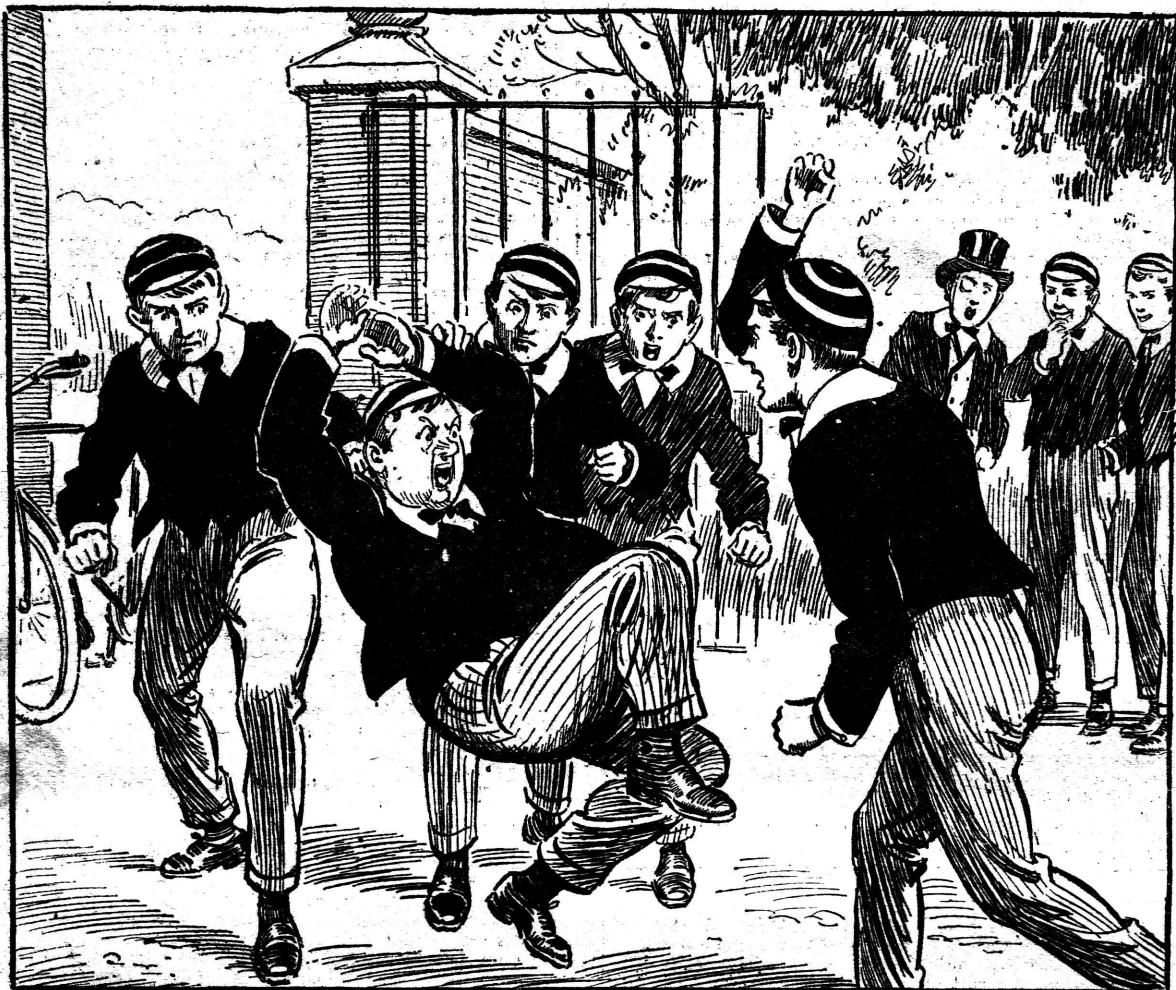
He tried study after study, but with rather disheartening results. Most of the occupants did not give him the time to introduce his brooches, or to begin his "selling talk."

Before Baggy had spoken a dozen words, they introduced their boots into the conversation, and Baggy had departed hurriedly.

It was all very disappointing and painful for Baggy. But he was by no means dismayed.

"I'll just try old Grundy, and then chuck up for to-night," mused Baggy, after an unsuccessful visit to Study No. 11. "After all, I've not done so badly. Won't do to overdo it, either."

And, limping a little now, Baggy Trimble ambled along to Study No. 3 to try Grundy. But had he only known it, Baggy had already very much "overdone it."



As the four cyclists entered the gates, they caught sight of the fat form of Baggy Trimble. Flinging aside their machines, they made a furious rush at him. Like a pack of ravenous wolves they leaped upon the amazed fat youth, and he went to earth with a bump and a fearful yell. Tom Merry & Co. stared at the scene, too startled and astonished to move. (See page 14.)

CHAPTER 6.

Knox Gets His Money Back!

BAI Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The shining ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was astonished.

Arthur Augustus had been strolling sedately along the Shell passage when, without other warning than a mournful howl, a huge, doubled up object, looking like a great football, had shot out into the passage scarcely a foot in front of him.

It crashed into the passage wall, and, unrolling as it rebounded, resolved itself into a human form.

"Bai Jove!" repeated the Swell of the Fourth. "Is—is that weally you, Twimble?"

"Yow! Ow! Oh crumbs! Grooogh!"

That reply, though not very intelligible, was undoubtedly in Trimble's well-known mumble. It was, indeed, Trimble. And the study he had apparently been rejected from was Study No. 3 on the Shell passage.

Trimble had been very doubtful about tackling Grundy. He was certain that he had made a mistake now.

Baggy, in fact, had entered the study very cautiously; but he had emerged two seconds later very incautiously. Grundy had pitched him out neck and crop, without even troubling to ask him his business.

For some seconds, under the wondering monacle of D'Arcy, Baggy lay and gasped and groaned. Then he tottered painfully to his feet.

"Ow! Oh dear! I—I believe my back's broken. Ow!"

"But you are standing up, Twimble. How can you get back—"

"Then it must be my floating ribs. I feel a sort of sinking feeling there— Ow!" groaned Trimble. "I—I say, Gussy, you're up against bullying, aren't you?"

"Yaas; but weally, Twimble—"

"Then go in and knock the stuffin' out of that beast Grundy," said Trimble eagerly. "I'll hold your jacket, old fellow. A fine fighting chap like you—"

D'Arcy turned his monacle sternly upon Trimble.

"I shall do nothin' of the sort, Twimble," he said stiffly. "You are a wascal, Twimble, and I have no doubt that you have been waidin' his cupboard, or somethin' equally wotten."

And with that Arthur Augustus turned on his noble heel. Whether Trimble's back was broken, or his floating ribs shipwrecked, the noble Gussy had no sympathy for him.

"Beast!" mumbled Baggy. "I wonder now—"

Up to this Baggy had given Study No. 6 a wide berth—as he had done Study No. 10 in the Shell. Like Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co. had no sympathy with Baggy's various stunts. They had a very—to Baggy—unfortunate habit of asking awkward questions.

But dealing with Blake & Co., together, was altogether a different matter from dealing with the aristocratic Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—alone. In the cheery Trimble's opinion, Arthur Augustus was just a trifle "soft."

And now, here was a splendid chance to get him alone.

Trimble hurried breathlessly after the departing D'Arcy. He caught him up just outside the door of No. 6.

"I—I say, Gussy, old fellow—"

"Bai Jove! What is the mattah now, Twimble?"

"I—I—the fact is I'd like the benefit of your advice, old chap," said Trimble.

D'Arcy carefully adjusted his monacle, and fixed a rather keen look upon the fat face of Baggy Trimble. Even Arthur Augustus was occasionally a trifle suspicious of Trimble's blandishments. He was now.

"Are you attemptin' to pull my leg, Twimble? If so, I shall—"

"Nunno; not at all, Gussy," protested Baggy earnestly. "I've never been more serious, in fact!"

Arthur Augustus rather prided himself on his tact and judgment, on the value of his noble advice.

Here was someone asking for it!

"Weally, Twimble," he exclaimed quite genially. "If you are weally in need of good advice, I shall be most happy to vander my aid. Pway, twot into the studay, deah boy!"

And before Baggy could protest, Arthur Augustus had flung open the door of No. 6 and was standing politely on one side for him to enter.

Baggy could see Blake, Herries, and Digby in the offing, as it were, and he hesitated. This wasn't what he had expected.

"Twot in, deah boy!" invited D'Arcy. "Twot wight in!"

Trimble trotted right in—though with many misgivings.

"Hallo!" said Blake, staring. "What does that fat merchant want? Turn him out, Gussy, you ass!"

"It's quite all wight, Blake," explained D'Arcy. "Twimble is here under my invitation, deah boys; he has come to me for advice—"

"For advice—" echoed Blake.

"Yaas. You—"

"Then he can depend upon it being anything but right," sniffed Blake. "The fat fraud has some little game on—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Nobody but a chap completely out of his senses would ever be ass enough to ask Gussy for advice," said Blake, shaking his head. "What's your little game, Baggy?"

"Bai Jove, Blake, you wottah—"

"I—I sus-say, D'Arcy," stammered Trimble hastily. "It's all right—I'll trot in again; no hurry at all!"

"No, you jolly well won't," snapped Blake grimly. "We want to know what the game is, Baggybus. Out with it!"

Seeing there was no escape, Baggy took the plunge.

"It—it's only this," he mumbled, taking a brooch from his pocket. "I—I found this in—in Rylcombe Lane this afternoon. Knowing old Gussy's a bit of a dab with jewellery, I—I thought I'd ask him if—it was worth much. That's all."

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, taking the trinket from Baggy's fat fist. "If that is all you wish to know I can vewy soon velieve your mind. You wequiah my fwank opinion—"

"Certainly," gasped Baggy.

"Then you shall have it, Twimble," smiled Arthur Augustus. "It is wubbish—uttah wubbish! I am sowwy, Twimble, but this bwooch is pwactically worthless, deah—"

Arthur Augustus was interrupted by the entrance just at that moment of Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners of the Shelf.

"Hallo—what's on here—tryin' Baggy for his life?" asked Tom, grinning. "If it is— What the thump's that thing, Gussy?"

Tom Merry's eyes had caught the glitter of the brooch lying on the open palm of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He recognised it at once—or imagined he did.

"It's a brooch—a very valuable brooch worth about ninepence," grinned Blake. "Dear old Baggy has brought it for Gussy to value. He says he found it in Rylcombe Lane."

"Oh, does he?" said Tom Merry grimly. "That's funny for he told us this afternoon he got the dashed thing from home—"

"From Trimble Towers," grinned Lowther.

"I sus-say, you fellows—" Trimble was beginning, when he paused, and an extraordinary expression came over his face.

Quite suddenly the door had opened once again. And this time the interrupter was Gerald Knox of the Sixth.

He stood framed in the doorway, his eyes fixed upon Baggy Trimble. His cap was in his hand, and the bottoms of his trousers were fastened with trouser clips. Evidently, Knox had just returned from a cycle ride.

But Baggy Trimble scarcely noticed these things. He was staring transfixed at the expression on Knox's face. It was an expression that could only be described as ferocious. It sent cold shivers up and down the well-padded spine of Baggy Trimble.

"Oh! Oh dear!" groaned Baggy.

He guessed in a flash what had happened. Evidently Knox had been over with the brooch to Rylcombe Manor to collect the fifty pound reward.

And now he had come to claim a reckoning from Trimble. Even then, the luckless Baggy found time to wonder why he had not anticipated this.

"So I've found you at last, Trimble," said Knox, his voice fairly trembling with long-suppressed rage.

He entered the study and closed the door carefully behind

him. Baggy backed to the far confines of the room, his flabby features twitching with fear. Knox followed him grimly.

"Trimble," he muttered, his eyes glittering, "you owe me one pound! Hand it over, please?"

"Oh, sus-sus-certainly," gasped Baggy.

Not for all the gold in the United States of America would Baggy Trimble have refused to obey. Though it hurt him badly to part with a pound of his ill-gotten gains, Baggy hastily produced a pound note and handed it over.

Knox took the note and stuffed it into his pocket. Then, with a swift movement, he snatched a cricket stump from the corner. Next he grabbed the hapless Baggy by his coat collar and fairly slung him across the table.

"Now, you fat swindler," hissed Knox. "I'll—I'll teach you better than to—to make a dashed, confounded fool of me. I'll—I'll—"

"I—I—sus-say—you fellows—"

Whack!

"Yarough!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

That first mighty whack was followed by a fearful yell from Baggy Trimble. But the whacks which followed wrung still more fearful yells from the luckless business genius of the Fourth.

"Yarough! Ow! Oh, help! Rescue, you fellows! Stoppit! Grocough! Yow-ow-ow! Murder!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Knox, the prefect, was fairly letting off steam. And, perhaps, under the circumstances, it was no wonder.

Knox had ridden over to Rylcombe Manor, feeling that the fifty pounds reward was already in his pocket. But once there, he had got a very rude awakening.

The poor old colonel was not yet recovered from the effects of his excitement and exertions that afternoon. And as might be expected, neither his temper, nor his gout, was improved by Knox's visit. To use a popular phrase, he fairly "went off at the deep end." And though he had not actually used physical violence as in Baggy's case, he had given the astonished senior a dressing down that Knox was not likely to forget.

Among several other things, he had told Knox of Baggy's visit that afternoon, and of what he had done to him. It was this that had humiliated Knox most of all—the thought that Trimble had knowingly let him in for it—that a fat fool like Trimble had dared to play such a trick on a Sixth-Former—a prefect.

It was no wonder Knox was letting off steam now.

He brought the cricket stump down as though he were beating a very dusty carpet. His eyes, glittering with fury, never once left Baggy's fat form. He seemed utterly oblivious of the presence of the other juniors in the study.

But he was soon made aware of their presence.

Blake & Co. and Tom Merry & Co. had looked on, too astonished to interfere before now. But as Baggy's howls began to change to gasping sobs, they acted. Jumping forward, Tom Merry grasped Knox's upstretched arm.

"That's enough, Knox!" he muttered. "Lend a hand, you chaps; he'll half kill Trimble!"

Blake and the others lent a hand quickly enough. In the grasp of seven pairs of hands, the enraged senior was dragged away from his unfortunate victim.

"That—that's enough, Knox!" snapped Tom Merry. "You've given him quite enough! Unless you want us to send for Mr. Railton, you'll stop this, and clear out!"

The threat brought the prefect to his senses at once. He ceased to struggle, and as the juniors released their grasp, he strode to the door and went out without a word.

"Well, my word!" breathed Tom Merry. "What on earth's the meaning of it? Trimble, you fat idiot, what game have you been playing with Knox?"

"Ow! Oh dear! Yow-ow-ow!" groaned Trimble, tottering to his feet shakily. "Has—has the awful beast gone? Ow!"

"Yes, he's gone!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Look here, Trimble! What's this mean? I suppose it's something to do with this brooch business?"

"Yow! Oh dear! Ow! My hat!" answered Trimble incoherently. "Mum-mum-mum! The—the brute's nearly killed me! Ow! Yow-ow!"

And, groaning and gasping painfully, the hapless Trimble tottered to the door and lurched out of the study. And none of the juniors had the heart to stop him.

"Well, this beats me!" said Jack Blake. "What d'you make of it, Tommy?"

"Hanged if I know!" muttered Tom Merry. "But it's something to do with these wretched brooches the fat idiot seems to be hawking round, I'm certain! Anyway, it's no good trying to get the truth from the fat rotter! Blow him! I expect he's got what he's asked for!"

And, though not a little puzzled, the juniors left it at that.

Baggy wasn't seen again that evening until bed-time. He



The little girl spotted Baggy Trimble, and tugging at her mother's dress, she pointed to the fat junior. "That's 'im, mammy!" she cried eagerly. "That's the fat boy I gave the brooch to!" (See page 27.)

certainly did no more visiting. And once in bed, Baggy was too busy wriggling and groaning after that terrific trouncing to sleep for a long time. He still had Cutts' thirty shillings and Racke's two pounds, but that gave him little comfort. It was dawning in upon his fat mind now that, like Knox, Cutts and Racke & Co. would demand a reckoning after they had been to claim the reward. And it was more than Baggy dare do, to own up and hand them their money back.

The future looked rather black for Baggy Trimble.

CHAPTER 7.

More Visitors for the Colonel!

"**H**ERE we are! Now for that fifty quid!"

And ending his muttered remarks with a soft chuckle, Gerald Cutts leaned his bicycle up against the gates of Rylcombe Manor and strode jauntily up the drive towards the house.

Cutts rang quite a merry peal on the bell, and, in answer to his summons, a manservant opened the door. It was the butler this time.

"I wish to see Mrs. Blunt—or Colonel Blunt," said Cutts cheerily.

"Mrs. Blunt is away and the colonel is indisposed. He is seeing nobody to-day, sir," said the butler.

"I think he will see me when he knows my business!" smiled Cutts. "Tell him my name is Cutts—of St. Jim's—and that I have called about the reward offered for a lost brooch."

"Er—ahem!—very good, sir!" said the butler, rather doubtfully.

He crossed the hall to the door of the library, and passed inside. He had scarcely vanished into the room two seconds when from within came a sudden roar, followed by a deep voice:

"What! Another of 'em, begad! This—this is too much! Turn the rascal out! Set the dogs on the villain! Kick

him—stay, though! Begad! I'll see the rascal myself! Yow! I'll—I'll—"

There followed the crash of a falling chair. Cutts was rather startled. The ferocious note in the voice was enough to startle anyone. He was still more startled on seeing a purple visaged old gentleman with a bandaged foot stumping out of the library towards him.

Cutts knew the colonel well by sight; but he had never seen him look quite like this.

"So—so you have come to—to see me about the reward?" he stammered.

"Er—quite so, sir," stammered Cutts. "You—you'll be glad to hear I've been fortunate enough to find the brooch."

"You—you've fuf-found the brooch?"

"Ye-es, sir! I—I've got it here!"

"You scoundrel!"

Cutts gave a jump.

"Oh, I say, sir, I—I—"

"You—you villain! This—this is a dastardly conspiracy!"

"Con—conspiracy!" gasped Cutts.

"Yes, sir. I—I am amazed—astounded that a great hulking youth like you can—can dare to play such tricks—can descend to such childish games! I—I can only conclude that this is a—a rag, as you call it. Begad! Big as you are, I've a good mind, sir, to treat you as I treated your rascally schoolfellow!"

"Mum—my schoolfellow?"

"Yes, sir! The fat young villain who attempted to—to foist a wretched—wretched—wretched—"

The irate colonel paused. At that moment there were footsteps on the gravel, and three juniors came along the drive. They were Racke, Crooke, and Scrope.

The colonel's fierce eyes almost started from his head. Racke & Co. seemed rather startled at sight of Cutts. Cutts seemed rather surprised at sight of Racke & Co.

"Then the colonel exploded.

"What! More of 'em?" he thundered. "Begad! This—this is more than— Yow! Wow!"

He broke off and clutched at his bandaged foot. After hopping about for a moment, hugging it, he stopped and glowered at the astonished Racke & Co.

"Well," he panted, in a dangerous voice, "out with it! What's your business?"

Racke hesitated, and glanced at Cutts wonderingly. "We—we've called about the—the reward, sir," he stammered.

"Oh, you have, have you? You—you've called about the—the confounded reward—eh?" choked Colonel Blunt. "You—you've found the dashed brooch—what? Begad! I—I—"

What happened next none of the St. Jim's reward hunters ever clearly remembered. But evidently the gallant colonel had reached his limit.

Headless of his gouty leg, and gasping out incoherent remarks, he began to make things "hum."

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Oh crumbs!"

"Look out!"

"Yaroooogh!"

"Yoocoup!"

With howls of astonishment and anguish, the reward hunters scattered, and fled headlong down the steps. And after them went the colonel, hitting out right and left with his stick.

"Reward—hey?" he roared. "I'll give you reward, begad! Rascals, scoundrels, villains, insolent pups! I'll teach you! Take that, and that!"

Whack, whack, whack!

For a dozen yards along the drive the angry old gentleman chased them, and then, with a final terrific swipe that almost floored the amazed and horrified Cutts, he collapsed on the gravel, hugging his foot and roaring.

But the hapless reward hunters ran frantically on until they stopped at last at the gates. Then the afternoon air resounded with groans and gasps and lamentations.

Only Cutts of the Fifth was silent. He was inwardly raging with fury and humiliation and bitter disappointment. He was just about to snatch up his bike, however, when a thought seemed to strike him, and he came over to the almost weeping Racke, Crooke, and Scrope.

"Look here, Racke!" he hissed. "Not a word about—about this at St. Jim's, remember! We—we'll be the laughing stock of the school if this gets out! You hear?"

Racke, who was hugging a bruised head, nodded dimly.

"I—I know, Cutts," he mumbled. "But—but what does it all dashed well mean? I—I don't—"

"Can't you see?" snarled Cutts savagely. "It—it's all that little fat sweep Trimble's doing, you fool! Oh, I—I'll flay the fat toad alive for this! He's sold us a pup! He came here yesterday himself with a rubbishy brooch, trying to get the fifty quid with it. The colonel must have spotted it, and gone for him like he did us. Now, can you see?"

"Mum—my hat!"

"I suppose he's sold you chaps a brooch like he sold me one. They're duds—dashed duds! It's just a confounded scheme of the little rotter's for raising money!"

"The fat, beastly, greasy swindler!" hissed Racke, his eyes gleaming with rage. "Oh, just wait until I get hold of him!"

But Cutts did not wait. He sprang on his machine, his face dark with rage. And next second Racke & Co were riding after him. They rode hard, but not because they wanted their dinner. They rode hard because they were anxious to get into touch with Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 8.

Luck for Baggy!

"B Al Jove!"

"M-my hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were astonished.

They were standing chatting together in the quad, when they witnessed a rather surprising incident.

The chums happened to be discussing the recent curious conduct of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

They were deep in their discussion, when the object of it emerged from the School House doorway, and rolled hastily across the quad in the direction of the tuckshop.

At the same time four cyclists came through the gates, wheeling their bikes. The first was Gerald Cutts of the Fifth, and the other three were Racke, Crooke, and Scrope.

What followed rather took the watchers' breath away.

The four cyclists seemed to catch sight of Baggy Trimble at the same moment, and, with common accord, they flung aside their machines, and made a furious rush at him.

Like a pack of ravenous wolves they leaped upon the amazed fat youth, and he went to earth with a bump and a fearful yell.

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But they didn't stop at that.

While the hapless fat youth lay there roaring, they yanked him up, and then they sat him down again on the hard quad with a terrific concussion. Again and again they bumped him, at the same time subjecting his fat form to a continuous punching and pummeling, as if they took it to be a particularly tough punchball. And Baggy accompanied these remarkable proceedings with a series of heartrending shrieks and yells for help.

For some moments the juniors stared at the scene, too startled and astonished to move. Then Tom Merry gave a gasp.

"It's that fat ass in trouble again!" he exclaimed, in alarm. "Quick, you chaps, or those idiots will damage the fat fool!"

And, realising that, unless they were quick, the unfortunate Trimble stood in danger of becoming a subject for a hospital ward, the juniors raced to the rescue.

They arrived on the scene of the disturbance with a rush, and while Tom Merry, Blake, and Herries collared Cutts, the others grabbed Racke, Crooke, and Scrope. Together they dragged them off their yelling victim.

"Let go!" hissed Cutts, struggling furiously. "Let me get at the fat rotter! I'll—I'll teach him to fool me! I'll—"

"No, you won't!" snapped Tom Merry. "Stop it! You're—"

"You cads, let me go!" gasped Racke, his eyes glittering with fury. "That fat beast's swindled us! He's—"

"He's had quite enough, whatever he's done!" retorted Blake grimly. "You're not touching him! You must be potty, going for him like that, you brutes! Clear out, or we'll set about you!"

Racke, Crooke, and Scrope ceased to struggle, and as the juniors released them, they strode savagely towards their bikes.

"All right, it can wait!" muttered Cutts fiercely. "But—but I'll settle with that fat toad again. I'll—I'll—"

He wrenched himself free from the juniors' grasp, and strode away. He had gone some dozen yards, when he plunged his hand into his pocket, and wheeled suddenly. He sent a glittering object whizzing through the air.

It struck the wailing Baggy Trimble full on the chin, and he gave a sudden yelp.

Tom Merry stooped and picked the object up. It was a brooch.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he breathed. "It's another of those rotten brooches. Baggy, you fat fool, what's the meaning of it?"

"I think that's plain enough," grunted Blake. "He's been selling cheap, trashy brooches for real ones; though why these chaps allowed themselves to be taken in beats—"

Blake was interrupted by a deep chuckle from Cardew, who had joined the group.

"Dear old Baggy!" he murmured blandly. "Always trying new stunts for raising cash, and always getting it in the neck. Why don't you tell 'em everything, Baggy? They'd be no end amused—just as I am!"

"I—I say, you know—"

"What d'you mean, Cardew?" demanded Tom Merry. "What do you know?"

"Everythin', old top; not that I'm braggin' about it, mind you," smiled Cardew gently. "It was luck, really—pure chance. I just happened to spot the notice in the 'Wayland Observer,' y'know."

"The—the notice?"

"Exactly; the notice shoved in by Mrs. Blunt, of Rylcombe Manor, offering fifty quid reward for the recovery of a valuable brooch she'd lost in Rylcombe Lane. Catch on?" asked Cardew, yawning.

It took the juniors some moments to "catch on," but when they did they gasped. Baggy blinked at them in alarm.

"Well, the fat rotter!" grunted Herries. "So—so that explains everything. The fat swindler must have known about the reward, and he's been hawking cheap brooches round guessing the chaps would take 'em for the lost one. What a swindle!"

"No wonder dear old Knox was savage—Cutts and Racke, too!" chuckled Lowther. "Can't you see 'em rushing off to the manor after the fifty quid? What a sell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Most of the fellows laughed; but Tom Merry eyed the quaking Baggy grimly.

"You—you fat spoofer!" he breathed. "You'll end in quod yet, Trimble! I suppose you've been telling them what you told Gussy—that you'd found it in Rylcombe Lane?"

"I—I say, y'know," gasped Baggy. "It—it's true, y'know; I did find one in Rylcombe Lane—Merry knows I did. He saw me get it back from that cad Lacy. But—but you chaps are mistaken. I haven't sold any others—in fact, I don't

(Continued on page 26.)



A Thrilling Story of the Adventurous
Wild West, featuring that Plucky
Forest Ranger, Dave Elton.

CHAPTER 1.

A Triangular Problem!

RANGER DAVE ELTON rode out of the timber belt and drew rein, halting for a moment. Then, as he looked along the side of the valley an angry exclamation broke from his lips.

To the right, about half a mile away, there was rising steadily into the still, hot air a column of smoke. It came from a hollow on the edge of the brushwood, and the thin feather made a grey streak against the dark background of green trees behind it.

"Some darned camper, I suppose!" the ranger told himself as he swung his horse round. "These city fools just make me tired."

It was the camping season, and all through the great belts of timber fresh-air seekers were camping, spending their holidays. But even the veriest tyro knew that the building of a fire amidst that tinder woodlike growth was against the rules and regulations that govern the great open spaces, for fire in the timberland is the great scourge, and the one thing to be feared.

Setting spur to his mount, the ranger galloped off along the valley, riding straight for the smoke pillar.

He dipped into a slight hollow, and sent his mount for the opposite slope. He was half-way up the rise when he heard the sharp crack of a rifle, and his Stetson was flicked from his head.

With a quick pull of his wrist the ranger brought his mount to a halt, and leaped from the saddle, whipping round to glance up towards the trees. The shot had come from that direction, but he could see no sign of tell-tale smoke.

Crossing to where his hat lay, the ranger picked it up. The bullet had cut a jagged hole through the wide brim, and the narrowness of his escape made the ranger's hard chin tighten.

A moment later he was back to his horse, and, slipping into the saddle again, he sent the animal up the slope towards the trees.

Ranger Dave's hand was on the butt of his revolver as he urged his mount forward, and his keen eye was watching for the first sign of his attacker.

Reaching the trees he dismounted again, and began a hurried search. There was no sign of the individual who had shot at him, and, giving up the hunt at last, the ranger retraced his steps, presently finding himself near to where the small fire was lighted.

He sauntered up to the heap and

began to scatter it, kicking the pile of embers aside with his heavy boot. In a few moments the fire was extinguished. Then he made a quick examination of the spot.

There were several rather interesting facts concerning that fire. In the first place, it had been built in the form of a tight, compact pyramid, and again the ranger discovered that the pieces of fueling which had been used were damp, soured with water, while a heap of green leaves had been placed over the top of the pile.

"You were either a darned fool or you didn't want much blaze!" the ranger decided.

An ordinary camper when he lights a fire does so mainly in his desire to cook something, but that pile of half-sodden green leaves would merely have smouldered away in smoke. Then, again, although he searched the little hollow, he could find no trace or indication of a pack of any sort. There was neither pack nor cooking utensils, nor even the usual grub-sack that the tramping camper carries.

One final point was made by the observant ranger. There was any amount of tinder-like brushwood under the trees only a short distance away from the fire, yet he could see no traces of footprints, and it was obvious that whoever had built the fire had not even troubled to collect the dried wood.

One or two clumps of evergreens had a few broken branches, indicating that they had been torn off to form a covering to the fire, but the half-charred fragments of wet wood must have been carried there, for there was no water within two miles of the trees.

With the Stetson on the back of his crop of curls, the ranger studied the quiet, little problem that had been set him.

The fact that he had been fired at was in itself significant. Someone had tried to overawe him, to prevent him getting at the fire. But Ranger Dave's dash for the trees had speedily proved to the rascal that he was not to be frightened that way.

The very fact that he had been shot at was in itself a grim proof that the man responsible was one of the lawless type that haunt the lonely hills.

"Don't suppose you meant to kill," Ranger Dave decided, "for I guess you could just have easily put that bullet through my head as through my hat; but I don't like your style of warnin', not a little bit!"

He paced back to where the fire had

been burning, and, standing on the short grass, he looked across the valley. If, as he suspected, this fire had been a smoke signal, it was obvious that it had been lighted on that spot so that it might be seen by those who were waiting for the sign.

All around behind the ranger the belt of trees arose in unbroken ranks. It was only in front of him that the ground fell clear. He saw the long stretches of valley lying fold upon fold in front of him, and far to the right he caught the shimmer of the sun on some bright object.

Drawing his glasses, the ranger levelled them in the direction of the beam. He picked out the galvanised roof of a long shed, and below it was the upraised arm of a derrick.

"That must be the Red Falls Saw-Mills," the ranger told himself.

The lumber town was a good five miles away, completely hidden behind the long, rolling folds of the valley on the right. The road to it ran along beside the river, and Ranger Dave had not been in the town for some four or five months.

His job at that time of the year was riding the timber-belts as a guard against the ever-present danger fire, spontaneous and otherwise.

After another steady look in the direction of the sawmills, the ranger lowered his glasses.

There was a section of rising ground immediately ahead, and the observer noticed that the spot he was standing on was the only part of the timber that could be seen from the sawmills far below, the rising ground between them screened the view otherwise.

"I guess you were signalling down to the lumber camp all right," the ranger decided. "And you picked your site mighty well. Now, I wonder why you went to all that trouble?"

Again the keen eyes roved over the valley below. Save for huge clumps of undergrowth here and there, there was no break or gap in the sweeping expanse.

Presently the ranger's eyes caught sight of a number of small dots moving along the crest of a rise far to the left. His glasses revealed them to be cattle—cattle grazing on the slopes above the river.

A quick glint came into Ranger Dave's eyes, and he turned, walking quietly back to his horse.

Two days before the ranger had dropped in at the small ranch belonging to Jeff Wayburn below Wildcat Valley. Jeff

had a cattleman's licence to run so many heads on the ranges, and during his conversation with the ranger the old fellow had waxed wrathful over his affairs.

He had been losing stock. His last count had revealed the fact that twenty or thirty of his young steers had vanished.

Old Wayburn had hinted darkly that it was another grazer—Jim Fardell—who leased the valley below, who was responsible for the rustling, and he based his argument on his knowledge of beasts.

"There ain't any other way to go but up-river, ranger!" he declared. "Cattle don't ever take to timber while there's feed. They just wander along them ranges until they get into that skunk's line, and he lays for 'em."

They had been seated at the door of the ranch when old Jeff Wayburn poured out his explanation, and he pointed to the left with one horny hand.

The timber-belt ran down along the edge of his grazing-ground, to end in a clear bluff that looked out over the river. "That's my ring-fence," Wayburn said. "There's a good mile of thick timber up there, and no cattle ever took to trees. There ain't anything for 'em to feed on up along there, and they just hate them thorn bushes."

He had broken out into another violent tirade against his neighbour and enemy, waving a wrinkled fist in the air. "But I can't get him, ranger. I've been out night after night, and so's my son, watchin'. We ain't seen a single hide move down his way, and yet just three weeks ago we lost five, all of 'em young beasts that would have fetched a fair price at the fall."

The loss of cattle is a universal complaint among those hardy ranchers who range the hills. Jeff Wayburn's herd, when Ranger Dave had seen them, struck him as being peculiarly sleek and in good condition, as well as very numerous.

The law of the forest-lands permits only of certain head of cattle to graze on each section, but it is the common object of the cattleman to evade that law as much as possible, and so when the ranger had begun to question Jeff concerning the number of heads of cattle in his herd, the old fellow became silent.

"Why not ride down to Barnes Creek and have a chat with Sheriff Taylor?" Dave had suggested at last.

"No," the old cattleman had returned. "I don't ask no representative of the law to come nosin' round my stock. I jest told you all this to kind o' show you that raisin' cattle ain't all profit. Them beasts of mine jest vanish into thin air, and don't even leave their hides behind them, 'cos I guess I could recognise the old 'crazy z' mark on 'em quick enough."

The old fellow leaned forward and put his hand on Ranger Dave's sleeve.

"Mebbe I have got a head or two more than I should have in my herd," he admitted. "But it don't allow that skunk Jim Fardell to go cuttin' out my beef, and if you can help me to lay it up agin him, ranger, I guess you'll find me mighty grateful."

This conversation had slipped entirely out of Dave's mind; but now, as he sighted that tiny herd of cattle far below, it came back to him again. The black dots were spread about on slopes immediately below the belt of timber that ran down to the edge of the river. They were grazing steadily, and the ranger watched them for the best part of half an hour.

Cattle seldom graze in the hot hours of the day unless they are hungry, and

the keen-witted ranger suddenly discovered the solution of the problem which had baffled him.

A quiet laugh broke from his lips as he climbed into the saddle. "I've got the scheme, son," he said to the horse; "but now, I guess, I've got to find the schemer!"

He gathered up the reins, and a few moments later his rangy mount was cantering down the slope, heading in the direction of the distant lumber-camp—the camp which was no longer in sight now, thanks to the undulating ground ahead.

"It's a sort of triangular problem," the ranger told himself, "and I've got the three points all right; but mebbe I'll find it harder to locate the fellow who set it!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Treacherous Trio!

AS Ranger Dave rode into the lumber-camp, the high-pitched shriek of the syren-whistle sounded and the long, wailing notes of the circular saws came to an end.

To the left, where the axemen were at work, the shorn-off trunks and prostrate forest giants lay across the clearing. A huge steamer-trailer, with its timber-tugs, came lumbering along the muddy road, and the ranger turned his horse aside to allow the great, clattering vehicle to pass.

The man in charge of the trailer, a broad-shouldered, red-haired individual, waved his hand to the ranger.

"You're quite a stranger, Mister Ranger!" he called. "I'll be along at the mess in half an hour—with an appetite! Come and sup with me!"

Spike Murphy, the driver, was an acquaintance of Ranger Dave's, and the uniformed figure nodded.

"Right you are, Spike! I'll be there!" he called.

He rode on through the straggling shacks, and finally halted outside the little store. The storekeeper came out to greet the forest-ranger, and Ranger Dave arranged to have his mount stabled behind the building.

"I can give you a shake-down for to-night, ranger, if you want it," Storekeeper O'Donald remarked. "You can have some grub with me, too; but I suppose you'd rather sit out along with the boys?"

"I'm going to join Spike," the ranger said. "He's booked me for supper already."

Half an hour later, therefore, the ranger entered the long shed in which the unmarried workers of the big company dined, and presently the red-headed Spike Murphy came in and hailed his friend.

"What's kept you all this while, Dave?" he said. "Why don't you drop in now and again to give us the time of day?"

"Too busy, Spike," the ranger returned. "This is our worked season, you know. Got to be on the move, or some of you fellows wouldn't have your jobs for long."

Spike nodded his head.

He had been at one or two forest fires, and knew just what the ranger was hinting at.

The mess-shed began to fill with brawny, work-hardened diners, and the ranger studied them quietly. There were

all sorts and conditions of men; but, on the whole, they seemed decent, hard-working men, who earned good money and spent it royally.

The room was almost filled when three newcomers arrived, and Spike nudged the ranger on the arm.

"I don't think that bunch was here when you dropped in before, ranger," he said. "Have a squint at 'em. They're the rough stuff all right."

The three men were walking down between the lines of tables in single file, and Dave eyed them quietly.

The first man was a tall, sallow-complexioned individual dressed in store clothes; he boasted of a soft collar and tie, and there was something natty about his appearance. Behind him came a thick-set, broad-shouldered man in the ordinary lumberman's attire, and the third was obviously a half-caste.

He was wiry, black-haired, treading with that curious, flat-footed gait. He was wearing a suit of shabby blue overalls, and although the other two men looked at the ranger as they passed, the half-caste never turned his face. Yet Dave was conscious of the fact that the man had picked out his uniform as soon as he had entered the shed.

"Who are they, Spike?" the ranger asked.

"That's more than we can tell you," the red-headed driver returned. "The big fellow's called 'Long' Farrer—an' don't play cards with him! The other man's got a job with the company. His name's Pete Ricker, and I don't think he cuts much ice with the bunch."

"And the third man?" Dan asked.

"He's a betwixt-and-between skunk," Spike returned. "He goes by the name of Joe Chilkito."

Spike lifted a generous spoonful of stew into his mouth and munched for a moment, then went on:

"They've got a shack beside the river, and they do a bit o' tradin' with the boys. They came here in a big, flat-bottomed canoe. Most of their cargo was hoosh!"

The red-headed man laughed. Then: "But Boss Mallis is hot on prohibition and made 'em quit that stuff, so they jest trade in anythin' now, and you can always get a game of cards if you want to down along at their shack."

The three men had seated themselves at a table in the corner of the room, and the ranger could see the taller man and the half-caste from where he sat.

"What beats us is where they get their dollars from," Spike went on. "They don't do much tradin' here, and yet Farrer can splash rolls of greenbacks as big as your fist when he's working the gamin'-table."

The meal went on for a few moments, then the ranger questioned Spike again. "Where do they get their supplies from?"

"They bring them up by the flat-bottomed boat from Harleytown, down the river," the driver returned. "Joe Chilkito usually runs the cargo; goes down light and comes back loaded. He's a queer fish, though, son, for we never know when he's goin' off. He jest slips away, and next thing we hear he's back again with the goods."

"How far is it to Harleytown?"

"Twelve miles, or thereabouts," Spike returned. "But I shouldn't go there if I were you, ranger. It's the most darned dead-and-alive town you ever struck. It's set down in among them granite hills. I was there for three weeks a year ago, and darn me if they didn't feed me on tinned meat jest all the time! There ain't grazin' for a rabbit down in them parts, you know!"

A curious smile crossed the ranger's face for a moment.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:



With a powerful lift and a swing, Ranger Dave raised his opponent off his feet, and shot him clean over his shoulder, to lie sprawling across the green-baize table.

"I haven't had a gamble for a long time, Spike," he said presently. "I wouldn't mind havin' a little flutter to-night. D'you think that Long Farrer will be runnin' a game?"

"Bet your life he will, ranger!" said Spike. "I'll take you along there presently, if you like."

About eight o'clock Spike and the ranger made their way down to the lonely shack on the river-bank. It was a rambling structure, with two or three rooms, and a main centre saloon.

The saloon was well lighted by five or six oil-lamps, and when they entered there was already a fair crowd of lumbermen gathered round the principal table.

Roulette was the game being played that night, and the tall, sallow-faced man was in charge of the wheel. The ranger saw that there was a small bar to the left of the saloon, over which the stocky, thickset Pete Ricker presided.

Joe, the half-caste, with a greasy apron tied in front of him, was acting as waiter, gliding to and fro among the groups. While the ranger and Spike were watching the game the half-caste sidled up to Dave and touched him on the arm.

"You want drink?" he asked.

His voice was sullen, and the expression in the cold eyes was antagonistical. The ranger ordered a couple of soft drinks, and when they were brought to him, he handed the half-caste a ten-dollar note. He walked back to the bar, then

presently he and the stocky man came back to the ranger.

"Say, ranger, what's the idea?" Ricker said, in a gruff voice. "Tryin' to work some tough stuff on us—eh, are you?"

The group around the table turned, and every head was craned towards the speaker.

"What's the trouble?" drawled Farrer at the head of the table.

The thickset man held out a crumpled note.

"This ranger's tryin' to flash a dud on us, Farrer!" he said. "Mebbe he thinks that because he's wearin' a uniform he can carry it off!"

He reached out and slapped the note down on the table in front of Dave.

"We don't like them sort of things tried on us, ranger," he went on.

For a moment the ranger's face flushed, then he leaned forward and picked up the note. It was obvious that it was a counterfeit, and a very poor one at that.

By this time the tall proprietor of the gambling-den had elbowed his way into the mob, and the ranger turned towards him.

"This isn't the note that I gave to your man," he said. "I never set eyes on it before."

"What's that you say?"

Joe reached out, and grabbed Dave by the arm, and swung him round. His face was twisted into a snarl, and there was a sinister expression in the close-set eyes.

"I say you're tryin' to work a bluff on

me!" the ranger returned grimly. "The note I gave you was a good one!"

Joe fell back a pace, and his wire body dropped into a half-crouch.

"You say I go cheat you! You call me tief—eh?"

"I call you a darned double-crosser!" the ranger broke out.

With a single movement of his arm, the Indian's hand stole under the loose fold of his apron, and, quick as a flash, he made his spring, the ugly hunting-knife glinting between his lean fingers.

Any ordinary man would have been caught by that unexpected attack, but Ranger Dave was ready for him. He had realised that it was a plant directed against him, and, even as the lithe-body leaped, the ranger made a swift counter-move.

A sidelong dive saw him evade that murderous thrust, and next moment he had gripped at the Indian's wrist, and he closed with his man.

His shoulder thudded against Joe's thin chest; then, with a powerful lift and a swing, the ranger raised his opponent clean off his feet. The half-caste yelled as the powerful leverage on his outstretched arm took effect. Next moment he had been shot clean over the ranger's shoulder, and lay sprawling across the green-baize table, while the knife clattered harmlessly to the floor.

"Darn you!"

Ricker flung his thickset body forward, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 798.

aiming a vicious swing at the ranger's head; but Spike Murphy suddenly thrust out a broad boot, and kicked the rascals feet away from him, so that he lumbered against the table with an angry oath.

Next moment the tall, sallow-faced proprietor closed with the ranger, and, locked in each other's arms, they swayed across the lighted room, the startled groups scattering to right and left.

Spike Murphy lifted the knife just as the thickest man recovered his balance again.

"Steady on there, young fellah-melad!" the driver barked out angrily. "One at a time is good fightin'! Keep back!"

The point of the knife was pressed against the lumberman's chest, bringing him to a halt, and in the cleared space beyond the table the ranger and Long Farrer fought their battle out.

It came to an end when Ranger Dave twisted himself round, cross-buttocking his tall opponent, and Long Farrer went crashing to the floor, his head striking heavily against the side of the small bar.

Dave leaped back, and as the half-dazed ruffian on the floor slipped his hand into his pocket, the ranger drew his own revolver and covered him.

"Put your hands up!"

Farrer's hands came level with his shoulders, and Dave, backing into the door, looked across at Spike.

"Collect my ten-dollar note, Spike," he said. "Not the one on the table, the other one."

Spike was still standing with the knife-point against the heaving chest of his furious prisoner. Thrusting out his left hand, Spike made a rapid search, and found a folded note tucked away in the thickest man's waistcoat.

"Ten dollars!" said Spike, folding the note. "All right, ranger. This will do for you, I guess!"

He backed to the door, where the ranger stood on guard.

By this time Long Farrer had scrambled to his feet and was leaning against the bar, and Dave saw the lithe, wiry figure of Joe emerge from behind a group on the other side of the table.

Dave's eyes were fixed on the sallow face for a moment, then he nodded toward the Indian.

"You wasn't jest quick enough, Joe," the ranger said, in a quiet, drawing tone. "Better stick to building smoke-signals. You're an expert at that!"

He reached for the door, and opened it. Spike joined him, a grin on his healthy, tanned face.

"It don't do to start rough-housing with a ranger, Farrer," the driver remarked. "They're quick — darned quick!"

Next moment the door closed behind them, and, arm-in-arm, Ranger Dave and Spike Murphy went off quietly through the darkness, the big, red-haired man chuckling joyously to himself.

"You're the first man that's ever got the better of Long Farrer, ranger," he said. "He's been kind o' cock-o'-the-walk in this part ever since he came here. I guess he'll have a grouch against you. I'm warnin' you. If you'll take my advice you'll watch. He's a killer, if he gets the chance!"

They were pacing along the river-bank, and presently the ranger halted.

There was a faint moon, and below them, drawn up on the muddy bank, was the outline of a huge boat, a flat-bottomed, blunt-bowed craft.

"Is that the canoe that Joe brings the supplies up in?" the ranger asked. Spike nodded.

"Yes, that's it."

Dave left his companion's side, and, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 798.

dropping down the slight slope, stepped into the drawn-up canoe. Spike, waiting in the darkness, saw the uniformed figure making a very careful search.

Once Dave knelt and seemed to be examining the bottom of the craft; then he stepped ashore again, joining his companion. There was a handful of sawdust in his hand.

"Have you any idea why Joe should go to the trouble of covering the whole of his boat with a couple of inches of this stuff?" the ranger asked, as he held the dried fragments out.

Spike shook his head.

"Ain't got a notion," he returned.

"I've never seen it there. Although, comin' to think of it, he's been gettin' some bags of sawdust down from the mill now and again. I saw him cartin' away a load three or four weeks ago."

"Was that jest before he went down to Harleystown for some supplies?"

Spike stared at the speaker for a moment, then nodded.

"Quite right, ranger," he said.

"Comin' to think of it, Joe got that sawdust jest before he went down-stream for new stores, and he was along at the mills to-day for another lot. But what in tarnation does he want to litter up his boat for with that stuff?"

Ranger Dave slipped his hand under his companion's arm, and, as they paced along the river together, he spoke quietly to Spike for a long five minutes. At the end of which the driver drew a deep breath.

"Say, that's a darned good notion, and I'm on! You can bank on me!" the big fellow muttered.

Half an hour later a mounted man rode away from the stores, taking the road that ran along the river. As he cleared the mills he urged his horse into a gallop, and went on at a headlong run down the dim valley, heading for a distant timber belt that marked the end of the range.

CHAPTER 3.

Foiled at Last!

THE quiet dip and rustle of the paddle blades came to the ears of the ranger standing under the low bank of the river, and, peering to the right, Ranger Dave saw the flat-bottomed boat come sagging up the shallows, and picked out the figures of the inmates, two amidships, and one at the bows.

They were moving swiftly, keeping close to the bank and the ranger, snaking up over the edge of the slope, worked his way into a clump of willows, to lie there, waiting.

The flat-bottomed craft stole past and went on upstream, the ranger rising to his feet to follow it.

Where the bank shelved, forming a small bay, the flat-bottomed boat was swung shorewards, and he watched the man on board clamber ashore and draw the stern round, wedging it into the deep mud.

SAY!

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"DON DARREL ON THE TURF"?

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NOW ON SALE.

The murmur of voices came to his ears, then the tall figure of Long Farrer, followed by the thickest shape of Ricker, came up the bank.

In front of them loomed the tall trees of the timber belt, and on the grassy slopes between them and the trees lay the little bunch of steers.

It was a bustling scene that took place then. One by one the sleek animals were roped and dragged down the slope, to be thrust on board the broad craft, where they were thrown and tied.

The best part of an hour passed before the last of the bunch was stowed into its place on the sawdust-covered floor of the unwieldy canoe.

The ranger saw the three figures appear again on the top of the bank, and they commenced to walk towards his hiding-place. He heard the hoarse murmur of Long Farrer's voice, and lay flat behind the bush, listening intently.

They came past him, heading on towards the roadway, and the slow, broken accents of Joe sounded.

"I no go alone again," he said surlily. "It big job for one man, bigger than you tink."

"Aw, shut your grouse!" Ricker returned. "We got to be on hand tomorrow mornin', or else these darned fools will smell a rat. They don't miss you, but they'd miss the boss and me. You can watch out for the signal, and once you get past you ain't got any further trouble, that I can see."

The murmur of voices died away, and the ranger arose to his feet. He knew what was going to happen now. Presently the half-caste, Joe, would return and take charge of the flat-bottomed craft to steer it on its way down river.

Farrer and his companion were hurrying back to the lumber-camp, where they would reveal some sort of signal by which Indian Joe would know that it was safe for him to pass by.

They had been carrying out this cunning scheme of theirs for some time now, and the sheer audacity of it made the ranger smile grimly to himself. Old Wayburn, the cattleman, would hardly dream of going down to distant Harleystown to look for his strayed beef. There was no road through those great rocky ravines, and fresh beef fetched high prices at the lonely mining town in those granite hills.

Under the pretence of running a store and a gambling den, Farrer had made the lumber-camp a half-way house, and every trip made by that flat-bottomed boat explained the prosperity of the rascally trio.

Moving swiftly, the ranger slid along the bank and descended into the little shallow place where the laden canoe had been halted. Dropping over the side, Dave made his way quietly through the prone, heavy-breathing steers, and, gaining the broad-nosed bow, seated himself there.

There was a heap of blankets and a few packs in the bow, and he drew a strip of canvas over him as he settled into place.

There was a faint moon glimmering over the river, but it was only just sufficient to lighten the gloom, and, lying quietly there, Ranger Dave waited until he heard the soft, flapping footfalls of the half-caste as the man came down the wet bank.

Presently the canoe stirred, and he heard the grate of the mud, then a moment later it floated off into the stream.

Ranger Dave peered over the canvas, and saw the sinewy figure of Joe standing upright in the stern, wielding a long pole, as he drove the canoe out from the shallows into the slow-moving channel.



As Spike landed on the side of the canoe, the heavy laden craft tilted. Next moment, the ranger and the half-caste, thrown off their feet, went headlong into the stream, while Spike sprawled forward on to his face across the warm back of one of the trussed up steers.

The river wound to and fro in its tortuous course across the valley, and the slow, steady glide made the journey a long one. They sagged on, now running to the left bank under arching willows, then keeping to the centre of the river again as the current shifted.

Indian Joe was standing in the stern wielding a long-bladed paddle, steering the heavy-laden craft, and Ranger Dave, resting quietly in the bow, watched the lean, wiry shape.

Finally the canoe emerged from the high banked channel, and ahead to the right, lay the lumber-camp.

Here the river broadened, and Joe set to work again, steering his unwieldy charge to the left, and at last brought it to a halt under an overhanging tree.

He was waiting for a signal, and a long ten minutes passed before the ranger saw two lights appear on the muddy bank opposite. They waned and fro for a moment, then vanished, and the ranger heard the pole creak as Joe lifted it again to urge the canoe forward.

They sagged out, heading for mid-stream, and began to glide past the lumber-camp. Just below the camp a long boom ran out into the water, behind which the huge logs from higher up the river were stored.

They formed a solid platform, and the canoe, drifting into the current again, began to sag towards the great boom. They were about fifty yards away from it

when a clear call sounded, the high-pitched shriek of a night-owl.

Joe turned his head for a moment to look in the direction of the sound, and as he did so the ranger, casting aside the strip of sacking, arose to his feet.

He was half-way down the canoe before Joe caught sight of him, and with a quick effort the Indian swung his paddle aloft, aiming a vicious swing at the ranger's head. Dave ducked the flashing blade, then next moment he had closed with the lithe, sinewy half-caste, and a grim struggle began.

The canoe sagged on, with the two locked shapes swaying together in the broad stern. Nearer and nearer to the great jamb of logs it drew, and at last a loud voice barked out something, and several figures came leaping and scrambling over the floating logs.

"All right, ranger! Hold him! Hold him!"

It was the joyous voice of Spike. And the burly driver, leaping on to the thick boom, ran along it, then as the canoe came within reach Spike made his spring.

He landed on the side of the canoe, and the heavy-laden craft tilted. Next moment the ranger and Joe, thrown off their feet, went headlong into the stream, while Spike sprawled forward on to his face across the warm back of one of the trussed up steers.

"Quick, boys! Quick!" the driver called as he stumbled to his feet. "Give me a rope or something quick!"

Another of the men cast a length of rope out, and Spike grabbed it; then a few moments later the flat-bottomed canoe was drawn in against the wedged platform of logs and made fast.

"Where is he?" one man asked.

"Where's the ranger?"

Someone lighted a lantern, and Spike took it, scrambling across to the stern. He held the lamp upwards so that the yellow beams fell on the river. Five or six yards away was a circle of bubbles, and as he watched it Spike saw the surface break and a wet, sleek head appear, followed by another.

Ranger Dave's hand was gripping Joe's lean throat, and a whoop of joy came from Spike's lips.

"Here, hold this!"

He thrust the lantern into another man's hand, then, with a lurch of his body, the huge fellow went overboard to the aid of his friend. Joe was fighting fiercely, desperately, to free himself from that grim grip; but Spike, swimming like an otter, came up to the struggling shapes, and grabbed at the Indian's head, giving it a sharp backward jerk.

"Quit it, you skunk," Spike spluttered, "or we'll drown you! Do you hear? We'll drown you!"

He suited the action to the word, for his heavy hand thrust the lithe swimmer under the surface and held him there for a long, grim moment. Then Joe

struggled up again, all the fight had gone from his evil heart.

"I—I quit—I quit!" he gasped. They swam back to the log jamb, where willing hands drew them ashore.

A great flare was lighted on the bank, and aided by its beams, the tied-up cattle were released and led shoreward, their wide eyes shining in the dusk.

Boss Mallis, head of the lumber-camp, was waiting for the ranger when the wet, tired man came ashore. The manager held out his hand.

"A very pretty trap, ranger," he said. "I think we carried out your suggestions all right, didn't we?"

"You got the other two, then?" Ranger Dave asked.

"They're in gaol now," the manager reported. "I've telephoned to Barnes Creek for Sheriff Taylor, and he'll fetch along old Jeff Wayburn to identify his bunch of beef to-morrow mornin'."

The manager laughed grimly, rubbing his hands.

"I've been tryin' to find out a way of gettin' rid of these crooks for this last few months," he said; "but I reckon you've found it now, and you can take it from me, we're well rid of 'em."

He put his hand under the wet sleeve. "And now you'd better come along. We'll give you a real camp supper, ranger," he said, "for I guess you've earned it!"

THE END.

Next week's Grand Complete Adventure Story is entitled **'DO-NOTHING-RIGHT CHUMLEY!'** A Thrilling Tale of Ranch Life. By **GORDON WALLACE.**

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

A Splendid Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck is awarded to the sender of what the Editor considers the most interesting paragraph. Half-a-crown is awarded for each other contribution accepted.

(If your name is not here this week it may be next.)

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.

MERELY HUNGRY!

"Could you spare me a crust of bread, mum?" asked a tramp, knocking at the door of an old lady. "I 'aven't 'ad a bite inside my mouth for two days, and I am awful 'ungry!" "But, my dear man," replied the old lady, "you cannot expect me to give you food in these hard times! You can earn a good dinner, though, by trimming up the hedge and tidying up the front garden in general." At that the tramp's face fell, and he turned away, muttering: "I said I was just hungry, mum, not despr'it!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to E. Cullen, 51, Beaumont Road, Plaistow, E. 13.

Set and Sweet! The railway manager of a recently-constructed electric railway complained

to one of his subordinates, Finnegin by name, that his reports of trouble on the line were too long—too wordy. "Cut 'em short!" said the busy manager. The subordinate's next report of a train off the line satisfied all hands. It was: "Offagin! Onagin! Awayagin! Finnegin!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to James Johnston, 133, Comelypark Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow.

Easily Explained!

Two small boys were throwing stones at each other in the street, when one of them had the misfortune to break a shop window. The culprit immediately ran away, but was pursued, and eventually overtaken by the irate proprietor. "So you know you have broken my window?" demanded the shopkeeper. "Yes," replied the boy, "and I'm running home to get the money to pay for it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. V. Wright, 30, Aberdour Street, Alexandra Park, Glasgow.

Kangaroo-ing

An old lady at the Zoo, seeing a kangaroo, considered it to be a very strange animal. Not knowing the name of it, she inquired of the attendant: "What have we here, pray?" she remarked. "Here," answered the attendant, "is a native of Australia." "Good gracious!" replied the old lady faintly. "To think my sister married one o' them, too!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Bentley, 16, Fern Grove, Northumberland, Hull.

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What You Have to Do!

Here is a splendid cricket competition which I am sure will interest you. On this page you will find an easy picture-puzzle. What you are invited to do is to solve this picture, and when you have done so, write your solution on a sheet of paper. Then sign the coupon which appears below, pin it to your solution, and post it to "Kent Cricket Club" Competition, GEM Office, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C.4, so as to reach this address not later than THURSDAY, May, 31st, 1923.

The FIRST PRIZE of £5 will be awarded to the reader who submits a solution which is exactly the same as, or nearest to, the solution now in the possession of the Editor. In the event of ties the prize will be divided. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit. The Editor reserves the right to add together and divide the value of all, or any, of the prizes, but the full amount will be awarded. It is a distinct condition of entry that the decision of the Editor must be accepted as final. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

This competition is run in conjunction with "Boys' Friend," "Magnet," and "Popular," and readers of those journals are invited to compete.

I enter "KENT CRICKET CLUB" COMPETITION and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

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START READING THIS THRILLING AND DRAMATIC SERIAL NOW!



A plucky Lancashire boy sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire. This is famous David Goodwin's most powerful story.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

TOM COMPTON, a young piecer, formerly of Barton's Mills, sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire.

Mill after mill had suffered at the hands of this treacherous foe. At last Tom, by chance, actually catches the Spider in Barton's Mill. He gives chase, but the Spider, a sinister figure in blue goggles, makes good his escape. He drops a pocket-book, however, from which Tom Compton obtains valuable information.

Tom is unable to save Barton's Mill, which is blown up, the owner being killed. From that time it becomes Tom's only ambition to crush the Spider.

With only a few shillings in his pocket, he decides that work must be found before he can chance striking a blow at this hidden power. Answering an advertisement for a left-handed piecer, he unsuspectingly falls into the hands of his enemy. He escapes, however, by taking refuge in the house of a friend, Dick Stearns, who is employed on the "Clarion," the offices of which are next to those of the Spider's. Stearns introduces Tom to Morton Kane, the wealthy proprietor, who offers him a post on the great newspaper. Tom then meets Dennis Gale, another victim of the Spider's handiwork, who promises to assist him in his great fight. Later Tom gains access to the Spider's office, where he overhears a plot for the capture of himself and Dick Stearns. He hurries off and warns Stearns.

"We'll be ready for him, then!" said Stearns. "And Heaven help the losers!"
(Now read on.)

Over the 'Phone!

CCAREFULLY and quietly Stearns let Tom out by way of the roof, and he gained the road by an empty house some doors farther down. Once in the street, he took great pains to discover if he was being shadowed, and breathed freely when he found no signs of it.

"They think they've nothing to get from me," he said to himself. "They're waiting for the evening, to settle the affair once for all. Ah, Mr. Spider! We shall see!"

He smiled grimly to himself as he made his way back to Hargreave Buildings and entered Morton Kane's half of them. The usual brisk air of work and bustle was in the place, unlike the sinister silence of the Spider's offices in the same block, from which he had escaped but five hours since. He went up to Dick Stearns' room, locked the door, and went to the bookshelf for the copy of the cipher notes he had put there.

It was gone!

Tom stood for a moment stupefied. Then, unlocking the door, he went quietly downstairs to the room where he had hidden the second copy. The place was empty, and, shutting the door, Tom lifted up the carpet. He could scarcely suppress a cry of joy when he saw the extra copy lying there still. Thanking his stars he had had the foresight to make it, he stowed it in his pocket and returned to Dick's empty room.

"One gone and one left," he said to himself. "Morton Kane's office—right in the enemy's camp! By some means he saw me hide the one in the bookshelf, but not the one downstairs. Thank goodness! I'll soon find out who!"

A knock at the door interrupted him, and he opened it. One of the staff—a green-eyed, sandy-haired man named Reynolds—was there.

"Mr. Compton," said Reynolds in a domineering voice, "Mr. Kane wishes you to apply yourself to the writing of the article of which he spoke to you, and to finish it to-night."

"Is Mr. Kane in?"

"No," replied Reynolds, and went out.

"I'll keep my eye on you, Mr. Tow-Head," murmured Tom to himself. "Through whom, I wonder, did the Spider get the news I was to be kept here late to-night, before I knew it myself? Anyway, I'm suffering to tackle that article. Here goes!"

Tom settled down to work. His idea of a strong newspaper article had nothing old-fashioned about it. He pasted a copy of the cipher notes on a sheet of paper. Then he worked them out with a key.

"Heavens and earth!" he said. "These are enough to set all England humming!"

The notes were cool and business-like proposals for the wrecking, ruining, or blowing up of ten of the biggest mills in Dunchester, just as the Spider had jotted them down in his notebook.

Without turning a hair, Tom went through them carefully, pasted a copy of the key to the cipher over the notes, and by the side of the notes themselves an exact translation of them into ordinary English, and very startling it looked. When it was done he headed it: "The Story of the Spider," and took it in to Mr. Henry Legard, the night editor of the "Clarion."

That gentleman, a keen, grey-whiskered man, who looked sharply at Tom, glanced at it. Then he started and read it through carefully, and again after that. "Great heavens!" he said, turning to

Tom, his hand on the manuscript. "Is this true?"

"Every word of it, sir," said Tom.

"Come, boy, you never wrote this! It is the work of a practised journalist, and a smarter one than I have on the whole staff!"

"I wrote it during the last two hours, sir, and the materials have taken me two days to get." It was written by Mr. Kane's orders.

"Great Scott! It is true, then! And he told you to write it? That's enough. It shall go to the printers at once. By Jove, what a thing! It will startle all England in the morning!"

"I think it will, sir," said Tom. "Good-night!"

"Good-night! Mind you come back, youngster! We can't afford to lose you!"

"If that hasn't spoked the Spider's wheel," said Tom, as he went back to Dick's room, "I'm a Dutchman!"

He looked at his watch.

"Eleven o'clock! That telephone call has never come. They must have smelt a rat after all, and given it up."

In spite of himself, he could not help feeling a sense of relief. It was a grim undertaking he had pledged himself to with Dick.

"I begin to think I was a fool," thought Tom. "I'm no coward, but the plan was weak. It was a false move, and I'm glad it hasn't come off, for I should have had to go on with it. I'm well out of it."

He started, and tightened his lips as a sharp sound interrupted him, close to his ear.

Ting-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

It was the telephone-bell.

The shrill whir of the bell roused Tom from his pensive mood like a call to battle. He stepped across rapidly, and put the receiver to his ear.

"Who are you?" he said sharply.

The voice came muffled and strange in reply.

"Dick Stearns!" it said. "Come to my house as quick as you can. I've got some news that'll startle you!"

Tom listened sharply. He caught the words clearly enough.

"Louder!" he said. "Can't hear!"

The words were repeated.

"Speak up, Dick!" replied Tom again.

"What do you say?"

"Come over to Number 27, and hurry up!" was the reply shouted on the wires.

"Are you deaf?"

"Not Dick's voice," thought Tom.

"It was a bit like him when it was lower." He called clearly the signal they had arranged.

"Half-time!"

"Come on!" said the voice in reply. "You're wasting your time!"

Tom's eyes gleamed. There was no doubt about it now. Dick, of course, would have replied "Piece-up!" to Tom's signal. The enemy had laid their trap, after all! Once more the voice spoke, urging Tom to hurry himself.

"What's it all about?" said Tom, winking to himself. "Can't you tell me over the wire?"

"I've got a clue that'll help us to bowl the Spider out, middle stump, and break up his gang," said the voice. "We can't trust the wires. Someone might be listening at the exchange. I'll tell you when you come."

The voice broke off, and Tom thought he heard the sound of a dry cough, smothered in a handkerchief.

"By George," thought Tom, "it's the Spider himself or I'm a Dutchman! I wonder they haven't thought the game too risky. I wish I could get something out of him!"

"Tom," said the voice again, in its lower key, "have you tackled the gang since I've been away? What happened?"

"He's trying it on me now," thought Tom, with a grin.

"Rather!" he said, with relish. "They caught me, but they couldn't hold me, and I've been in the Spider's offices all on my own. I tell you, Dick, he's as big a bungler as any of his men, and the ugliest-looking sweep of the whole crowd into the bargain!"

Again the smothered cough.

"Is he?" said the voice. "I heard he was rather good-looking. A fine figure of a man, they say."

"He's the living image of the chimpanzee in Sanger's Circus, and I shouldn't like the chimpanzee to hear me say so, either!"

"H'm!" said the voice. "I didn't know that. You got away from him, then?"

"You bet! He locked me in his safe; didn't know I was there. In the morning when he opened it I hauled him inside and locked him in, while I hooked it."

"In the safe—eh?" said the voice. "You got hold of his secret papers, then? Bring 'em over with you, Tom?"

"What!" said Tom, suppressing a wild desire to laugh. "What secret papers? Were there any there?"

"Of course, you see! All his ciphers and documents must be there. And you didn't get them?"

"No," said Tom. "Confound it! How stupid of me! But he'd have missed them, anyway."

"Well, you ought to have taken copies of them. Didn't you?"

"Oh, lord!" exclaimed Tom. "Of course I ought! What a fool I am!"

"You seem to have made a fine mess of it!" growled the voice, but with a noticeable tone of relief. "Anyway, hurry round here as quick as you can, and I'll tell you what I've discovered. It knocks your job into a cocked hat. Start right away now!"

"I'll be with you in half an hour," said Tom, and hung up the receiver.

He stood silent for a few moments, thinking. Then he took his hat, felt the chambers of the revolver in his pocket, and went downstairs into the street.

"We're in for it," he said to himself, striding out in the direction of Dick Stearns' house. "Whatever happens

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we've got to see it through. Heaven help us if we fail!"

He had hardly gone a couple of hundred yards when he found he was being watched. His shadows hung back a long way in the rear, but Tom, already used to this sort of thing, recognised the trick in a moment.

"They won't pitch into me," he thought. "They're only making sure I'm going to Dick's. I wonder how many the Spider will set on us when we're in the house together, and how they'll set about it? I'd like to have seen the Spider's face when I was telling him about his beauty over the telephone. I can score up one over that. He's set his mind at rest about the secret papers and the cipher, anyway, and that was a bit of luck, too. I didn't have to lie to him about it, either. I bet he'd squirm if he knew I'd got all those copies nicely made out."

He walked on boldly till he came to Dick's house. The long street was deserted, and the house itself looked dark and forbidding, save for a dim light that showed through the blind of Dick's parlour window on the first floor. Tom glanced round quickly, went to the door, and rang the bell. No one came. He turned the knob and the door opened. It was unlatched.

"That's queer," thought Tom. "He said he'd come down and let me in."

He stepped into the hall, shut the door behind him softly, and stood listening. The house seemed dark and silent as the grave, save for a dim light from the street lamp outside that shone through the glass over the door, and made it just possible to see the staircase.

"Can they have tackled Dick already?" thought Tom.

He gripped the revolver in his jacket-pocket without drawing it, and, with every nerve on the alert, moved to the staircase and walked quietly up. One of the stairs, about the middle, creaked loudly. Tom made a mental note of that. Any enemy coming up would advertise his arrival as soon as he stepped on it. Tom gained the landing and went to Dick's study door. There was dead silence within. He tapped lightly.

"Piece-up!" said Dick's voice within, sharp and commanding.

"Half-time!" answered Tom, and turned the handle. The moment he entered a revolver stared him in the face, and he saw Dick sitting on a stool close against the wall.

"It's you, theft," said Dick, lowering his revolver. "Don't walk across the room, but come round by the wall. The shutters are closed outside, but they only reach half-way up, and you never know when a bullet's coming through. It's an old dodge of the Spider's."

"All serene!" said Tom, bringing another stool and joining him where he sat. "You seem pretty handy with that old iron of yours."

"I can handle a pistol," replied Dick, "and I had it ready, in spite of the signal, for I've known the Spider to get hold of private passwords before now. I guess I got the drop on you, as they say in the States."

"Don't build on that," said Tom. "I had you covered, too, through my jacket-pocket. And, talking of passwords, the Spider hasn't got hold of ours. He called me up over the telephone, and didn't use it when I tried him."

He told Dick of the conversation he had had over the wires.

"Good for you!" said Dick, chuckling. "If ever he gets hold of you he'll take it out of you for that more than anything you've done to queer his gang."

Well, he's called the game, anyway, and I've been thinking we may have let ourselves in for more than we're likely to come out of alive."

"I was thinking the same thing just before the bell rang," replied Tom. "But we've got to go through with it now. I reckon it's time to make ready and wait for the final row. Is it possible for anyone to see us over the shutters?"

"Not where we sit," said Dick, "though there's a house a couple of hundred yards away from which they could send a bullet in, and a lighted window makes a good mark."

They waited, straining their ears for every sound, and the silence of death fell on the house. For over an hour they sat motionless. At first the strain kept them very much on the alert, but presently a heavy sense of drowsiness oppressed the watchers, and they found it hard to keep awake.

"Dick," whispered Tom at last, "we're counting on their attacking us in force. It's the likeliest dodge, but suppose they try dynamite on the floor below?"

"They never try the same thing twice on one place," replied Dick. "I found a bomb of theirs in my cupboard below once."

"Or fire?" said Tom.

"Useless," returned Dick. "If they set the place alight we could get along the roofs easy enough. Those dodges are apt to miss. They'll try force this time. I know 'em."

Tom said no more. They waited half an hour more, and their drowsiness increased. Tom had to pinch himself to keep awake, and a dull, heavy feeling seemed to paralyse his brain. Dick seemed to be dropping off altogether, and Tom had to shake him twice to rouse him.

"This won't do!" muttered Tom. "I wonder what's making us so deadly sleepy?"

The opposite wall seemed like a haze before his eyes, and his lungs breathed as if weighted with lead. He felt his senses gradually leaving him, and with a strong effort, urged by a feeling of hidden danger, he rose from his seat. The deadly sense of helplessness seemed lighter as he stood up.

"There's something wrong!" he thought. "By George, can it be—"

An idea occurred to him. A small paraffin-lamp and a single candle stood on the table close by, and both were burning dimly with a faint blue flame. Tom took the candle and placed it on the floor. It went out as if it had been plunged into water.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom. "Choke-damp! The room's filling with it!"

Even as he spoke, Dick Stearns slipped heavily from his stool and collapsed on the floor unconscious.

Covered!

THE Spider had laid his trap well. It was the low burning of the lamps that warned Tom, and in another moment he would have lost consciousness had he not risen.

The flicker of the candle told its tale. The room was gradually filling with carbonic-acid gas—the choke-damp of the miner—that deadly, invisible poison which, being heavier than air, sinks to the floor of a room as though it were water poured into a cistern, and rises gradually as more and more enters.

How it was making its way into the

room, Tom did not stop to think. It was all he could do, fighting with all his might against the deadly drowsiness that was overpowering him, to stagger to the window, and try to force it open and let in the fresh air—the only thing that could save them.

The window refused to budge. Tom put his waning strength into the effort to move it. He passed his hand rapidly over the sashes, and found they had been securely screwed down. Feeling himself sinking, he smashed one of the panes with his elbow, and, gasping, put his face to the broken space.

The cool air from without played upon his brow, and he felt his pulse beat quicker. The outside shutters were closed, but they stood a foot away from the window, and Tom drank in the life-giving air in great gulps. Then, as soon as he could move, he darted back across the room, holding his breath, and dragged Dick's inert body to the window. He smashed a second pane, broke off the jagged edges, and Dick, who was, luckily, not yet wholly under the influence of the deadly gas, began to revive.

The lamp on the table went out altogether. Tom filled his lungs with fresh air, and, binding his handkerchief across his face, left his chum at the window and felt rapidly round the walls till he reached the gas-jet, which, his instinct told him, was the cause of the trouble. He found the tap and bail were missing altogether, and a plainly felt, invisible current played on his head from the tube. He stuffed his handkerchief into it tightly, checking the flow of gas, and then went back to Dick, who was just recovering his senses in the cool night air.

"What is it?" he gasped. "What's wrong?"

"Choke-damp!" said Tom abruptly. "We must open the shutters! It doesn't matter now—the light's out! It was pouring in through the gas-jet, but I've stopped it!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dick. "And we were sitting like fools, with a loaded revolver apiece, and going to our deaths! I'm better now, Tom! We must get rid of the stuff! Open the door wide and swing it to and fro, while I stir up the beastly atmosphere!"

They worked hard for some minutes, swinging the door and whirling a tablecloth round and round the room. With another pane broken and the shutters wide open, this gradually got rid of the gas, and the air was breathable once more. The boys gave a great sigh of relief.

"They nearly got us that time!" said Dick. "I see how it was. The gas hasn't been used since the mains were blown up. There's none in the pipes, and someone took that tap out while I was away. They've attached a cylinder of carbonic-acid gas at the branch some where outside, and forced it into the room—an easy dodge, as things stand. Ordinary gas wouldn't do; one would smell it. But this awful stuff—"

"It's all out now," said Tom. "We must close the shutters again. It won't do to strike a light. Shut the door, and I'll plug up that jet more securely."

Dick hunted out some cobbler's wax, which he used for his fishing-rods, from a cupboard, and the jet was securely plugged. The danger from the Spider's strange weapon was at an end.

"Hark!" whispered Tom suddenly. "What's that?"

They both stood motionless, listening with all their ears.

Dead silence greeted them, but Tom was certain he had heard a faint noise in the hall. There was a few moments'



"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom Compton, as the candle he had lowered to the floor went out. "Choke-damp! The room's filling with it!" Even as he spoke, Dick Stearns slipped heavily from his stool and collapsed on the floor unconscious.

pause, and then the loose stair half-way up gave a loud creak.

"They're coming up to make sure of us," whispered Dick, "and maybe to search us! They think the gas has done for us!"

Tom caught his chum's arm.

"Now's our time!" he whispered eagerly. "Shall we play dead, and nab them? Are you game?"

"Right you are!" replied Dick, under his breath.

And, without another word, he lay quietly down on the floor and rested here in a huddled heap, his revolver hidden beneath him. Tom did the same.

It was a daring move, but they had the certainty of taking the enemy off their guard; and Tom, ever thirsting to pick up any knowledge that might help him, thought he might hear something useful before the time came to strike. His chief reason, however, was a keen hope that the Spider himself might come and give himself into the boys' hands at last. Tom clutched his revolver, and waited with a beating heart.

The door opened slowly, and two men, bearing a lantern, came into the room with cautious steps. Tom, watching from the corner of one half-closed eye, saw that his best hopes were not realised. The Spider was not one of them.

The first man was a tall, tawny-haired foreigner, and the other a thick-set Dunchester man. Both wore cloths tied over their mouths and nostrils, and the tall man carried a lantern.

"It's finished 'em, right enow!" said the Dunchester man, speaking in muffled tones through the cloth over his mouth. "Hold that light as high up as you can, Bernstein, so's to keep it out of the gas."

"You are right, Slane," replied the

other gutturally. "Dey are done for at last. Der boss will be pleased."

He held the lantern near the ceiling, and stood above the prostrate forms of the boys, gloating over them evilly, while his companion walked quickly across to the window and produced a screwdriver, with which he set the sash free. Dick, who could see him from where he lay, feared lest the man should notice the broken-out panes. But the light was bad, and the visitor noticed nothing wrong. He opened the window and threw back the shutters. The two men then did exactly as the boys had done, and Tom quivered with suppressed laughter to see them swinging the door and whirling the tablecloth vigorously to drive out the choke-damp which was not there. Then the German, Bernstein, cautiously took off his face-muffer.

"It vos all right," he said, sniffing at the air. "Der gas is gone. I tell you, Jock, it vos an easier death dan der boss would have wished dem to die, duse cubs."

"They'd got to be made sure of," said the other. "If this job hadn't worked, he'd a better scheme, an' one that would ha' taken 'em alive. But time was precious, an' he wouldn't let this chance go. Bring t' lantern here an' let's have a look at 'em."

"We must leave dem here, I suppose," said the German, as he bent over the boys, "after searching dem. But it will be better to put a liddle knife into dem first—eh, just to make sure?"

"Ay, we'll leave no doubt about it!" growled the other. "Let's go through their pockets, an' then finish them an' clear out. Not but what they're dead enough."

Then German's long, thin hand

suddenly reached out and placed itself over Tom's heart.

"Ach!" he exclaimed. "Dis von is alive! I feel his heart beat!"

"What!" ejaculated the other. "Lord, that's a bit o' luck! This one ain't, I don't think—"

He started back, gasping out a hoarse oath. The German's jaw dropped, and his face changed to a dusky ash tint.

"If you move," said Tom quietly, "you are a dead man!"

Neither of the ruffians stirred a finger. They stared, as if transfixed, into the barrels of two revolvers, which were pointing straight at their waist-coats. Dick and Tom, who had not moved except to produce the revolvers, then rose, keeping the men covered.

"Don't shoot," gasped the German—"don't shoot!"

"Shut up!" ordered Tom. "Now, Dick, have you got your man in hand? Take my revolver as well, and cover them both!"

"Good!" said Dick, taking his chum's revolver. "Now, then, where's that knife we've heard so much about?"

Tom passed behind the prisoners, ran his hands over the German, and took from his hip-pocket a long clasp-knife. The other man had a similar weapon. Tom went over them carefully, and found a life-preserver apiece, a bunch of skeleton-keys, and a latchkey, newly-made, which fitted Dick's front door.

"That's the lot," said Tom. "Now, what shall we do with these two gallows ornaments?"

"It's no use handing them to the police," said Dick.

"No," said Tom, with a dry laugh. "It's too hard to tell which are police and which are the Spider's men. That's no good. They might tell us a thing or two about the gang, though, if they liked. Suppose we try toasting their palms over a candle by way of persuasion?"

He winked at Dick. The two prisoners broke into a cold perspiration.

"H'm!" said Dick. "Hardly worth while, I think!" He winked back. "They're only undertrappers, and we know more than they do, as it is!"

"All right," said Tom. "Then, as they're no use, we'll just return them as damaged goods at the Spider's office. It'll cheer him up to see what a fizzle he's made of it. We'll deliver them in one package, to save postage. Hold those revolvers steady!"

Tom hunted out a length of box-ropo from Dick's cupboard, made the men stand side by side, bound the right leg of one to the left leg of the other, and tied the little finger of the German to that of the cotton-spinner.

"Did you ever hear of the three-legged race?" he said. "It's rather sport! Now, then, Dick, shepherd 'em downstairs, and let's be off to Hargreave Buildings."

Guffawing hugely, the boys drove the two frightened and crestfallen ruffians downstairs, stumbling and lurching, and out into the street. There Tom placed himself on one side of them, and Dick on the other.

"Now, my men," said Tom, "don't forget that there's a revolver on each side of you, even if you can't see them, and that if you raise the alarm, or if any of your pals try to make a rescue, you won't live to see the result! Step out, and mind you don't tumble down."

It was a strange journey through the deserted streets, and Tom and Dick laughed without stopping all the way to Hargreave Buildings. The two prisoners, perspiring and woebegone, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 798.

stumped along as best they could, sitting down heavily on the pavement more than once when they lost step.

At last they reached the main door of the Spider's office and rang the night-bell. The commissionaire opened the door, and Tom, giving the pair of rascals a vigorous push, sent them flying into his arms. The three fell in a heap on the passage, and the door swung to and shut in a chorus of oaths.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" said Dick. "Now let's go and turn in, old boy. They'll leave us alone to-night, I guess."

The two chums slept soundly that night, but they did not return to Dick's house. They took some trouble to ensure they were not being watched; but it was plain the Spider had had enough of them for that night, at any rate. They went to a small hotel, and put up there.

In the morning they both went together to Dick's house before starting for the office. Dick went on at once, but Tom stayed behind, shutting himself in a room where he was certain of not being overlooked, and went carefully through the notes and copies he had made while in the Spider's safe. It took him some hours to master them.

"There's material for several hard knocks here," he said at last, "but nothing that would actually catch the Spider out, and wreck him for good. I'll find that sooner or later. The question now is, what am I to do with these papers? They're enormously important, and I can't keep them about me always!"

A footstep on the stair caught his ear, and he thrust the papers out of sight, and put his hand in the pocket where his revolver lay. He heard the newcomer go into the study, and a moment later Dick's old charwoman—who came during the day—knocked at the door of Tom's room.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," she said wheezily. "I showed him into t' study."

"To see me!" thought Tom. "What's up now?"

He went into the room quietly, but on his guard. As soon as he saw his visitor, however, he knew he had nothing to fear: It was Mr. Peter Grant, a much-respected mill-owner of the original Dunchester firms, whom Tom knew well by sight.

"Good-morning!" he said, with some eagerness. "You are Tom Compton, I think?"

"The same," said Tom.

"I went to Mr. Kane's office, and Mr. Richard Stearns told me you were here. I have come to you because I'm in trouble, and I've heard of you lately as knowing more than most people about these disasters that are ruining Dunchester. One of my hands told me you were in Mr. Kane's service, and had made your mark already."

Tom waited for him to go on, wondering what was coming.

"It seems strange," said Mr. Grant, "for an old stager like myself, thirty years in the trade, to be coming to a young piecer for advice. At any other time I should think myself crazy. But I'm at my wits'-end. I don't know what it is, or who, that is at the bottom of all these horrors, but it seems you know more than I?"

"What can I do for you?" said Tom.

"Unless you can help me to-night will see me a ruined man, perhaps worse! I found this on my desk three days ago."

He handed Tom a note.

"You have till Saturday," it ran, "to sell up and clear out. Few are given such a chance. Take what you can, and start afresh elsewhere. If you stay in Dunchester Saturday night will see you without a mill or hands or money, perhaps without life. Think it over and act quickly!"

"At another time," said Peter Grant wearily, "I should have laughed at it. But mill after mill has gone, and I believe nothing will save mine. I have shown the police the note, but I have little hope from them. I am doomed like the rest."

"You are in grave danger," said Tom. "That is certain."

"I have come to you as a forlorn hope," said the visitor. "If you can save the mill I will give you five hundred pounds. I can well afford it if it saves me from ruin."

Tom thought swiftly. Morton Kane was away, or he would have consulted him. Grant at present was a wealthy man, and the money he offered would help to fight the Spider.

"I would do my best to save you in any case," he said, "and without a penny; but I'll take it if I can earn it. Wait here a moment."

Tom went back to his own room, and ran rapidly through the copy he had made of the cipher notes in the Spider's ledger. He soon found Grant's name, some notes about his mill, the date of that very Saturday, the words "bales, ground floor," and the significant letters "g. c."

"Gun-cotton!" said Tom to himself. He went back hurriedly to his visitor.

"Come!" he said. "Let us go to the mill. There is not a moment to lose. We may be too late. You should not have waited till the last moment. You must leave everything in my hands."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Grant anxiously. "Certainly!"

They hurried along the streets, Tom putting rapid questions to his companion, and thinking swiftly as he went. Suddenly a cheery whistle greeted him, and he saw his sharp ally, the little piecer, Dennis Gale, by his side.

"How goes it, Tom?" said the youngster.

"Dennis," he said, aside, "I'm going to Mr. Grant's. There's big trouble hatching there. I want you to go to Dick Stearns' house, and watch there till he comes back. Keep a sharp look-out for anything fishy."

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The little piecer nodded, and slipped away on his errand.

"Whom have you got at the mill?" asked Tom, as they hastened on.

"A lot of new hands," said Grant. "A queer crew. I don't care for them. They'll have stopped work by now, and the place will be shut up when we get there. But three good hands and my old overlooker will be there still. I told them to wait."

"Ah!" muttered Tom. "New hands—the Spider's, of course! Only three Dunchester men! The Spider wouldn't blow the place up during working hours, then; but it may happen at any moment now! By George—"

He stopped. Was it a trick to decoy him, then? Were they trying to work him into the plot, and end him in the wreck of the mill?

He turned and looked keenly at Peter Grant. Could this man, who had come to him in such a suspiciously plausible way, be one of the Spider's latest recruits? Tom had agreed to his proposal, and had walked out blindfolded to take the bait. He resolved to test the man. If he knew of the gun-cotton scheme, Grant would not enter the mill with his victim.

"Look here!" said Tom. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll sit and watch in the mill, you and I together, till night-fall."

"Yes," said Grant simply. "Anything you like. I'll stay by you if we can only stop the attempt. They'll try to set the place on fire, I believe."

Tom knew he was mistaken. Grant, at any rate, was innocent. The plot was more deeply laid than the boy had thought.

"I've promised him," he muttered, with a gulp—"given myself into the enemy's hands. I can't draw back now. And it's no use dragging Grant into the trap with me. If I go down, or up, I'll go alone!"

They reached the mill, entered the yard, and Grant rang the bell. The door was opened by the foreman, and with him there were three other men—mule-spinners. Tom glanced at them and turned to Grant.

"I've changed my mind," he said. "I would rather you kept away. If you will go home I will report to you at seven o'clock to-night—bar accidents. I'll tackle this job myself."

Grant turned away somewhat reluctantly, and Tom entered the mill with the four men.

The door shut behind him with an ominous slam.

As the outer door slammed behind him there was a pause, and Tom, standing in the large hall, looked sharply at his companions.

He felt reassured. The foreman—or, rather, overlooker—was a big, slow-looking man, Dunchester bred, with an honest, calflike face. His neat brown whiskers gave him an air of respectability, and he looked the old and trusted employee all over.

Plainly there was nothing to be feared from him. The other three were of the same stamp—younger than the overlooker, but with an old-fashioned air about them. Tom thought they would have looked more in place running an old water-power jenny than in an up-to-date mill, with 2,500 spindles apiece to look after.

"Now, lads," said Tom, "what's wrong with this mill? Do you know anything about it?"

The overlooker stared blankly and scratched his head.

"I dunno," he replied. "T' guv'nor thinks the mill won't last much longer.



The two ruffians dropped back, staring as if transfixed, into the barrels of the two revolvers which Dick and Tom were pointing straight at them. "Don't shoot!" gasped the frightened German. "Don't shoot!"

Happen it's nobbut a run o' bad luck; but some ugly things ha' been done here lately, to be sure!"

"Ay," said one of the other men, "but accidents will happen, measter."

"Ah think t' owd mill's bewitched," said a second, wagging his head wisely. "That's what Ah think."

"Decidedly, if there are any geniuses in Grant's mill, they've gone at one o'clock with the rest," thought Tom. "He's left a pretty lot of simpletons to look after the place. Of course, they're the only honest hands he's got now; the others will be the Spider's men."

He glanced at his watch. It was a little after four. His copy of the Spider's cipher notes had given the time for the catastrophe as four-thirty. Tom knew well that the arch-enemy was always punctual to the minute in his arrangements; and after a rapid glance round the ground-floor, which satisfied him that all had been done according to the Spider's notes, he made the men show him quickly over the building, to make sure that no second plot underlay the one he had discovered.

"The looms are cut here, I see," he said, his keen eye taking in all the details of the machinery as he entered the weaving-room. "When was that done?"

"Three days ago," said the overlooker. "There hasn't been no weavin' done since. If we could find out the rat as did it we'd stuff him into the fire-boxes in the power-room!"

"Ay," said the others, with a menacing growl, "we would that!"

Tom, without replying, led the way down to the ground-floor again.

"Now," he said, "if you don't know what's wrong with this mill, I'm going to show you. There's a tank in the corner there, I see. Turn the tap on and let it fill."

The overlooker went to the tank and turned on the tap, with a wondering face. Then he turned to Tom a little nervously.

"We'll be going, if you'll excuse us," he said. "T' measter said we needn't stop after four. We ha' bin here over two hours beyond time as it is."

"Don't go yet," said Tom. "You will be paid overtime, and Mr. Grant has put me in charge here. I must ask you to stop. Besides, you'll miss an interesting item if you go now. Hallo! Who are you?"

He turned to a newcomer, who had just silently joined the party—a darker and rather sharper-looking man than the others.

"That be Joe Gribble," said the overlooker. "He's one of us, an' he was the last to go out to lunch. We takes it in turns after hours."

But Tom, after another look at Joe Gribble, stepped across to the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. Then he walked quickly to the middle of the room, where a pile of bales and lumber were stacked together. The room was the right one, according to the cipher notes, and there was no mistaking the spot. It was an ideal one to hold the deadly machine Tom knew was there.

"Now," he said, pulling the bales apart, "I'll show you what's wrong."

He paused a moment and looked sharply at Joe Gribble. The man, with a face growing paler by degrees, was glancing anxiously at his watch, and then at the window.

"Seize that man!" said Tom, pointing to him.

(Another grand, long instalment packed with thrills next week, boys.)
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know anything about selling one to Knox for a quid. As if I would! And as for—

"You silly ass—"

"It's a fact!" groaned Baggy. "Besides, it's all rot to say I swindled 'em! Rot! 'Tain't my fault if they thought the blessed brooches were real ones. They shouldn't have jumped to conclusions, you know. I didn't tell 'em they were. It's their own look out. You can't deny that!"

The juniors did not attempt to deny that—they roared at Baggy's remarkable manner of denying the charge. Tom Merry, however, was looking very thoughtful.

"I don't quite catch on to this, you chaps!" he said grimly. "Why, if Baggy knew the brooches were frauds, did he kick up such a fuss and demand that one back from Lacy? Trimble, you fat rascal, what made you sell one to Lacy and Carker?"

"They made me!" mumbled Trimble. "They took it from me just after I'd found it, and practically forced me to sell it 'em for five bob. I didn't know about the reward then. I thought it was a dud."

"And when you heard about the lost one, you thought that must be it, and wanted it back—eh?"

"Yes," groaned Baggy. "But it wasn't."

"How do you know?"

"I took it to the manor to claim the reward," mumbled Baggy. "But somebody had already returned the real brooch some minutes before. That brute of a colonel chased me out with his stick—said I was trying to palm a cheap brooch on to him. As if I knew it was a cheap brooch, the beast!"

Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming now.

"There's something behind this, you fellows!" he muttered. "Look here, Baggy, did the colonel tell you who had returned the genuine brooch?"

"No. The beast—"

"It didn't happen to be Lacy, by any chance?"

"How—how could it be?"

"Easily enough," replied Tom quietly. "The brooch he tricked you into handing over may have been the real one, you know. And he may have spoofed you by handing back to you a dud. Just the sort of thing that cad would do, anyhow!"

"Bai Jove!"

Trimble's face was a study.

"Oh dear!" he groaned dismally. "I never thought of that! And—and I say, Merry—I remember now—I met Lacy and Carker when I was going to the manor. They—they must have been just coming away. Oh dear! The—the howling spoofers!"

"Serves you jolly well right, though!" grunted Blake.

"That's right enough!" said Tom Merry grimly. "But it's beastly tricky, all the same! Right's right, and if Baggy found the dashed brooch, he's entitled to the reward. We're not going to let cads like Lacy rob our chaps. It amounts to that—if it's true!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, nodding. "I quite agree with you, Tom Mewwy."

"I—I say," stammered Trimble, his voice trembling with sudden rage. "I—I'm not standing it! I'm not going to be robbed, you know! I'm going over to see those beasts now, Tom Merry!"

"Don't be an ass! You stay here!" snapped Tom. "They'll only deny it and flatten you. You can leave this to us, my pippin!"

"You—you'll—"

"I'm going to see the cads now!" announced Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "I may be wrong, but I think not. And the sooner it's put right the better. We're not letting Grammar School cads play tricks like that on our chaps—Trimble or anyone else. Who's coming with me?"

"I'll see the thing out, for one!" grunted Blake.

"And I'll come!" said Manners and Lowther together.

"Good! Four's quite enough, though. Out with your bikes, then. We haven't any too much time. Buck up!"

The four juniors hurried to the cycle-shed, and in a few seconds were racing at top speed for the Grammar School.

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Trimble and the others watched them go. The latter were keenly interested, now, and anxious to know the result. But Baggy Trimble was more than interested. He stood by the gates, fairly trembling, his fat features ablaze with excitement. He had forgotten his pains and troubles now. Once again his star of hope gleamed on the horizon, once again visions of wealth were taking shape before his eyes.

CHAPTER 9.

Alas, Poor Baggy!

TOM MERRY and his chums dismounted outside the Grammar School gates, breathless and panting.

There were several fellows lounging about there chatting, and among them were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, the Grammar School headmaster's son, and the two Wootton brothers.

They grinned a welcome as the St. Jim's chaps hurried up. "This a friendly visit—or otherwise?" asked Gordon Gay, pretending to turn back his cuffs. "Just say the word—"

"It's pax," grinned Tom Merry. "At least, it's a friendly visit to you chaps, but not to Lacy and Carker. I've run over to see them."

"There the bloated millionaires are, then—holding up the wall there," chuckled Gay. "I'm not so sure they'll talk to common chaps like you now, though."

"What do you mean—" the mystified Merry was beginning.

"They've just come into a fortune—or, rather, are coming into a fortune," grinned Gay—"a fortune of fifty quid! They've had the luck to find a blessed brooch or some—"

"That's just what we've come about!" said Tom grimly. "So I was right, then! Here goes!"

And as he spoke Tom Merry led the way towards Lacy and Carker, who were leaning negligently against the school wall. They eyed the juniors rather uneasily.

"I want a word with you, Lacy," began Tom. "I hear you've claimed the fifty pounds' reward offered by Mrs. Blunt. Is that true?"

"What if it is, hang you?"

"Have you got the cash yet?"

"No. The old lady's away, and the old chap won't fork out—says we've got to wait until she comes back. She's coming back to-night, though."

"That's rather a good thing—that you haven't got the cash," said Tom. "Because you aren't going to be allowed to get it!"

"Who—who'll stop us?" said Lacy hoarsely.

"I will. It's no good, Lacy, you cad! We know how you bamboozled Trimble into handing the brooch over."

"It—it's a lie!" panted Lacy. "You—you can't prove it!"

"We can if it's necessary!" snapped Tom Merry. "I myself saw you hand Trimble the imitation one. And we've only got to ask old Godfrey in the village if you bought a cheap brooch there yesterday afternoon. Are you going to own up?"

Lacy's face grew livid.

"I—I'm hanged if I will!" he hissed.

"Very well," said Tom grimly. "We'll see what Dr. Monk has to say. He'll soon get to the truth. And I fancy I can guess what he'll think of such mean trickery."

And Tom was turning away when Lacy suddenly gave a gasp. He also knew what the Grammar School Head would think of it. It would mean serious trouble, in addition to losing the reward. He knew that, and the thought made him shudder.

"It—it's all right, Merry!" he panted. "I—I own up. No need to—to tell the Head."

"Very well, then. You've got to write, or go to Mrs. Blunt to-night, and tell her so," said Tom quietly. "If you don't, you know what'll happen."

"You can leave that part of the business to me," interrupted Gordon Gay, grasping the situation now. "I'll see the cad does it, Tommy, old son. Leave this beauty to me!"

"Thanks, Gay!" said Merry. "So that's that! And now we'd better get back, you chaps. We'll have to move!"

And they did move. They whizzed back at top speed, feeling very satisfied. They had scarcely expected success so easily.

Most of the fellows had gone in to dinner when they jumped off at the gates, but D'Arcy, Cardew, and the rest were still there, waiting patiently. Trimble was also waiting, but anything but patiently.

"I—I say, you fellows," he gasped, breathless with eagerness. "Is—is it all right—have they owned up?"

"Yes, they have!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's all serene, Baggy. The fifty quid's as good as yours. You'd better trot over to the manor after tea."

"Oh, great jumping elephants!" chorled Baggy.

The fat junior fairly danced about with glee.

But his joy and triumph were short-lived—very short-lived. At that moment a rather shabbily-dressed woman and an equally shabbily-dressed little girl came up to the juniors. As Baggy's eyes fell on the girl, he stopped dancing suddenly and his jaw dropped.

The child spotted Baggy at the same moment, and, tugging her mother's dress, she pointed to the fat junior.

"That's 'im, mammy—that's the fat boy as I gave the brooch to!" she gasped eagerly.

Tom Merry and the others were thunderstruck.

"Oh, is it?" said the lady, glaring at the shaking fat junior. "Then—"

Tom Merry stepped forward, and raised his cap politely.

"What is the matter, madam?" he asked, in amazement.

"Is what your little girl says true? Did she give a brooch to this chap?"

"True enough!" said the lady indignantly. "It's a shame, I say. It was like this. My little girl picked up the brooch in the lane yesterday, and, seeing this fat young gent in front, she thought he must 'ave dropped it. So she runs after 'im and gives it 'im. But he didn't ought to 'ave took it. I—"

"I—I sus-say," gasped Baggy. "Don't you fellows—"

"You knowed it wasn't yours, and I knowed it, too, when I saw the notice this morning!" said the lady indignantly. "It was lost by Mrs. Blunt up at the manor, and she's offering a reward of fifty pounds for it. I think it's a shame, taking advantage of a child's honesty like that. A young gent like you ought ter know better, I say! And I don't see why—"

"I—I say, you fellows, don't you believe it!" gasped Trimble, in great alarm. "Why, I've never even seen the kid before. Never! Besides, she said herself it was mine—that I'd dropped it when she gave it me. Ask her. She can't deny it. I—I—"

"Shut up, you fat rotter!" cried Blake warmly. "So we really have got to the bottom of it this time!"

"Here, I say, you know!" panted Trimble, almost weeping with dismay. "You—you can't take that kid's word before mine—"

"We wouldn't take your word if it was made of gold, you fat villain!" snapped Tom scornfully. "You've as good as admitted it only a second ago, you idiot! Look here, madam, as it happens, we were just dealing with this matter. If you'll go to see Mrs. Blunt to-night, you'll find everything all right. I'll see Mrs. Blunt myself, and tell her your little girl found it. You can trust us to see she gets the reward all right."

Evidently the lady did trust them. Tom Merry's sincerity was obvious to her. With profuse thanks she departed with her girl, her face bright.

Tom Merry turned to Baggy Trimble.

"You—you fat rascal!" he breathed. "Taking advantage of a poor kiddie's honesty like that! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

"But—but look here!" wailed Trimble. "Does—does that mean I won't get the fifty quid? Why—"

"Of course it does!" snapped Tom Merry. "It belongs to that kiddie, and we're going to see she gets it. Clear out! If it wasn't that you've already been through the mill, I'd boot you across the quad, you fat worm!"

"But—oh dear!—but, I sus-say— Yarooough! Ow! Stop it!"

Blake and Herries introduced their boots into the discussion at this juncture. Unlike Tom Merry, they had no scruples. And Baggy departed, roaring.

He scudded away across the quad, and did not stop until he reached the bottom of the School House steps. Nor did he stop for long then. At that moment three juniors came down the steps. They were Racke, Crooke, and Scrope. They made a simultaneous rush at Trimble.

The next moment the hapless Baggy was streaking like greased lightning across the quad, with Racke & Co. in full cry after him. They vanished behind the chapel, and to the ears of the grinning juniors there came a faint:

"Yaroooough!"

Apparently Racke & Co. had not yet finished with Baggy Trimble.

Tom Merry kept his word to the letter. So also did Lacy of the Grammar School—he had no other course. And Tom found no difficulty in establishing the rightful claim of the village kiddie to the reward.

It was a satisfactory ending to the affair for Tom Merry and his chums of the Fourth and Shell, though probably anything but satisfactory to Baggy Trimble and the rest of the shady gang who had been in the running for the Fifty Pounds Reward!

THE END.

(Another grand, long story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "TRIMBLE'S AUCTION!" The most amusing story Martin Clifford has yet written. Order it early.)

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