

"THE CRIMSON CLAW!" A POWERFUL NEW MYSTERY STORY STARTS TO-DAY!

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D'ARCY DOES THE HUNDRED IN RECORD TIME!

(An exciting incident from the splendid long complete story of Tom Merry & Co., inside.)



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.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—Next week's Grand Bumper issue of the GEM will contain two extra-important features. One of these features is the special long story of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. Mr. Martin Clifford has a master stroke in his irresistible caravan series. It is the real, right stuff for the holidays, all fun and mystery, with heaps of surprising things happening all the time. And then for the other big draw for next Wednesday. It is a powerful instalment of our mystery serial. Order early, for everybody is running after the GEM!

"THE SHADOWED CARAVAN!"

By Martin Clifford.

Once you have devoured this yarn you will say that the famous author has never done better. The "doings" are tremendous. Coming caravans cast their shadows before—that is if the sun is acting correctly—but there was a very peculiar shadow in attendance on this occasion. The tale is 25,000 words long, and a perfect treat, whimsical, sparkling, bright, and fetching, so look out! The caravanners are up to their neck in extraordinary adventures of a most gripping sort.

"THE CRIMSON CLAW!"

By Lester Bidston.

Here the plot thickens, and in saying that concerning next week's instalment of Mr. Bidston's thriller, maybe I had better leave a good thing to speak for itself. It will! But there is this to it, namely, that here we have a Chinese

mystery yarn of an amazingly enthralling kind. There is something about the artifices of these arch Chinese plotters that gives you that odd squirmy sensation down the spine. The Chink, with his inscrutable expression and his purring ways, has a big pull. He gets you thinking hard. Don't miss the further enlightenment on his dark, vain tricks in next Wednesday's GEM!

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

You can make sure of a copy of the new volume by planking in your order now. It is safer. Be sure, and you won't be sorry. As to this new "H.A.," just one point. It is this: Whenever a book or a paper attains world-wide fame, there is one demand, to wit, for more. I am always being asked for a daily issue of the cheery old GEM, and some correspondents suggest that the "Holiday Annual" ought to come out several times per annum. How the "Annual" could manage that feat and remain an annual beats me!

THOSE "MAGNET" GIFTS.

All Gemites must make an extra-special point of getting this week's issue of our Companion Paper, the "Magnet," with the Four Magnificent Free Photos which are given away with the Bumper Number. These are Stand-Up Cut-Out Real Action Photographs of the quartet of famous cricketers, namely, Hobbs, Sutcliffe, Parkin, and Hendren. Every cricket enthusiast and everybody else ought to become the lucky owner of this jolly little set of portraits of the four cricks. The pictures are the best ever, being admirably executed, and showing the champions to the life. Get the "Magnet," and add to the pleasure of the week—and not merely one week, but a crowd of weeks to come. The group of popular exponents of the great summer game will show up jolly well on a fellow's mantelpiece or on his desk. There will be a boom run on this feature, so look lively and make sure of your "Magnet" this week!

Your Editor.

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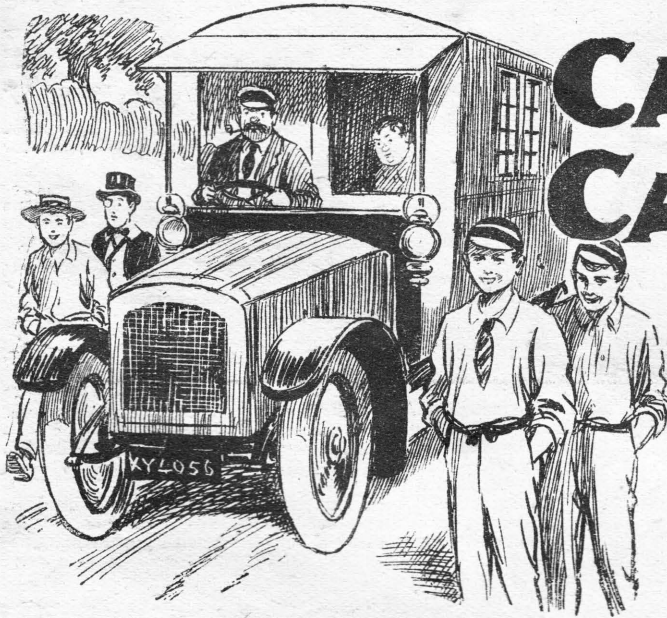
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ADVENTURE! The rolling countryside, a bright blue sky, a caravan load of light-hearted juniors, and, somewhere along the trail—adventure!



CAMP AND CARAVAN!

A Magnificent, Long Complete story dealing with the stirring holiday adventures of Tom Merry & Co., the chums of St. Jim's.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I.

Baggy Tries It On!

"TWO toppahs—"

"Eh?"

"Two should be enough, I wathah think. And one suit of evenin' clothes ought to be enough."

"But—"

"I had better take my second best plus-fourahs, too," added Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, rubbing his aristocratic nose thoughtfully with the end of a pencil. "One nevah knows when one may get the chance of a game of golf, bai Jove! And a tennis outfit, of course."

"What the thump—"

"A straw hat and a panama; a few neckties—I weally must select those at once—also one or two waistcoats; I must be careful about those. Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus murmured on, dotting the items down as he thought of them. "And silk shirts, and vests, and a weally good supply of socks."

"But look here, you ass!" roared Blake, getting a word in at last. "You don't mean to say—"

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, without looking up. "I weally must not forget anythin', bai Jove! Ah! Yes. Plenty of collahs, and a few changes of twousahs. Now how many pajahs of twousahs shall I require? What do you fellows think?"

Arthur Augustus looked up at last, and glanced inquiringly through his eyeglass at his chums.

Blake, Herries, and Digby stared at him; they stared blankly.

Blake spoke at last.

"How—how many pairs of trousers?" he stuttered. "Oh, you burbling dummy, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You blithering idiot!" gasped Blake. "You don't mean to say you're thinking of taking that little lot with you?"

"Natuwally!"

"On a caravan tour?"

"Yaas!"

"Well, my hat!"

That was all Blake could say at the moment.

"I am makin' the list out now, as I weally must not forget anythin', you know," went on D'Arcy, wrinkling his noble brows. "One is apt to miss important details in the wash of goin' off. On reflection, I fancy ten pajahs of twousahs will be enough." D'Arcy dotted them down. "And—yaas, three good pajahs of walkin' shoes; two swimmin' costumes; a change of cwicket flannels; and—bai Jove! I weally cannot think of anythin' else; I have already packed a supply of towels and othah necessawy articles. Perhaps you fellows can help me?"

And once again the Swell of the Fourth looked up inquiringly at his chums.

Jack Blake drew a deep breath.

"Help you!" he said, with grim sarcasm. "Yes, we can

help you, dear man, and save you a lot of trouble, too. Here goes!"

With that Blake snatched up the sheet of paper from before Arthur Augustus, and, tearing it up, flung the pieces into the empty study grate.

Arthur Augustus gave a yell, and jumped up.

"Blake, you uttah wuffian—"

"That's how we'll help you, you burbling ass!" snorted Blake. "Think we're going to be a blessed travelling outfitters?"

"You weckless wuffian—"

"We should want a furniture van to carry that little lot!" hooted Blake. "You've only arranged for a caravan, haven't you?"

"You know vevy well I have, Blake."

"Then how the thump are we to cart a lot of clobber about the country? Now, look here, Gussy, you born idiot. You're taking what we take—changes of underclothing and the clobber we stand up in—that's flat."

"Wubbish! I insist—"

"You can insist until you are black in the face!" snapped Blake. "There's going to be no rubbish—I mean, luggage—on this trip, old son. Got that?"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard, striving to overcome his indignant emotion. His eye fairly glowered through his monocle at his study leader.

"You—you uttah wottah, Blake!" he gasped. "I shall now be obliged to write out my list ovah again. It is wedic to suggest that I can manage without some decent clothes, bai Jove! Impossible! You wottahs may be satisfied to touch the woods as twamps, but I am not. It is necessary for one fellow, at least, to be well-dressed and respectable. Yaas, wathah!"

"But there isn't room, you dummy!" shrieked Blake. "With Merry, Lowther, and Manners, there'll be seven of us."

"Wubbish! There will be plenty of woom in the cawavan, Blake. We have decided to take two tents—a large one and a small one. Vevy well, I will have the cawavan for my own use, and you fellows can use the tents. I am takin' three cabin twunks, and these can go on the floor. My hat-boxes, suit-cases, and attache-cases can go in the bunks. I trust that awwangement," ended Arthur Augustus, eyeing his chums frigidly, "will satisfy you?"

If Arthur Augustus really trusted that, he was doomed to disappointment and disillusionment.

"You—you cheeky ass—"

"Weally, Dig—"

"You nervy bounder—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You—you burbling chump—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Of all the—the nerve!" stuttered Blake, glaring. "We can have the tents, can we? While he monopolises the thumping van, eh? The—the nerve! Here, bump the ass for his cheek!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Collar him!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Weally, you fellows— Yawooogh!"

Arthur Augustus broke off, and jumped back as his chums advanced upon him, but just at that moment the study door flew back, and Gussy gave a fearful yell as his backward jump cracked his head against the edge of the opened door.

"Sorry, Gussy!" said a well-known voice.

It was Tom Merry who spoke, and behind him in the passage were Lowther and Manners. All three grinned at sight of Arthur Augustus prancing about, and rubbing the back of his head frantically.

"Sorry, Gussy, old man," went on Tom Merry cheerfully, his tone belying his sorrow. "If you will walk backwards, though—"

"You—you clumsy wuffian—"

"Trouble in the family, I see," grinned Lowther. "What's Gussy been up to this time?"

"Must be trying to have a chap like Gussy always about," added Tom, shaking his head sympathetically. "Trouble about the vac tour, I suppose?"

"Yes, it is," snorted Blake. "The silly dummy wants to take a furniture van load of clobber. We're having none, though."

"Rather not," agreed Tom Merry, regarding Arthur Augustus severely. "This won't do, Gussy, old top. No luggage, my lad, that's understood. If we allow you to come with us you'll have to dispense with luggage, Gussy—just a suit-case is allowed, and that's all."

"That is, if we do allow you to come, of course," added Lowther seriously.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus glared at his chums, spluttering. As he himself had originally suggested the holiday tour, and as he had hired the van and made all arrangements, it was really too much to hear his chums talk like that.

But before he could express himself suitably, there came another interruption. This time it was the fat figure of Baggy Trimble who looked into the study.

"Here, kick that fat toad out someone," said Blake. "Now, Gussy, my lad, let's have this settled. If you think— Well, my hat!"

Blake stopped and stared. Without giving anyone the chance to kick him out, Baggy Trimble had coolly entered the study and closed the door.

"Making the final arrangements for your tour, chaps?" he said genially. "That's good. You haven't any too much time, you know. Break up to-morrow. I hear you've mapped out the route already?"

"Is there anything you don't hear, fatty?" inquired Lowther.

"If you haven't," said Trimble, choosing to ignore Lowther, "I've got a suggestion to make. You've heard, of course, of my pater's place in Sussex—Trimble Towers?"

"We've heard of it—yes," assented Lowther gravely. "It's a sort of castle in the air, ain't it—kind of mansion in the skies; you reach it by a flight of the imagination? Very much like Trimble Hall, only more so—what?"

"Don't rot, Lowther; this is a serious matter," said Trimble severely. "Now, you chaps, this is my suggestion. You're making first for Bournemouth, ain't you?"

"You seem to know a lot about it, Trimble?" sniffed Herries.

"Ahem! I—I just happened to overhear you fellows discussing the matter," explained Trimble airily. "The point is, however, that to get to Bournemouth, you'll be passing the gates of Trimble Hall."

"Thought you referred to Trimble Towers?"

"I meant Trimble Towers, of course. The pater has so many places, you know, that one forgets," explained Trimble calmly. "Well, here's the suggestion, you fellows. Why shouldn't we look in at the Hall—I mean, the Towers—for a week or so? The pater's arranging a cricket week, I believe, and, of course, there's the shooting, and fishing, and motoring, and all the rest of it. I'll see you fellows are done well."

"I quite believe you, Baggy—done out of every brass farthing—done brown, in fact."

"Do be serious, you chaps," urged Trimble, blinking round at the grinning faces. "I mean it. As a matter of fact, I was going to ask you fellows to Trimble Hall for the vac—only—"

"It's not built yet."

"Only Royalty are staying there just now—see?" said Trimble, ignoring Lowther again. "I couldn't very well take a rather mixed crowd like you chaps there, you know. You could scarcely expect that. The Duke and Duchess of Slocum—"

"The whatter?"

"The Duke and Duchess of Slocum are there now," said Trimble carelessly. "The duchess, you know, belongs to a branch of my family. I could scarcely take you chaps

along, could I, now? That's how the matter stands. The Towers isn't a bad show, though; you'll like it. Well, is it a go—just for a week or so?"

"Well, we might look in as we pass," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Does your pater sell oats as well as beer at the Trimble Arms, Baggy?"

"Trimble Towers, you ass! It's a country house; a magnificent place."

"Oh, I thought it was a pub," said Lowther innocently. "I thought a call might be useful, if we wanted oats for our gee-gee!"

"Bai Jove, Lowthah—"

"Now, don't object, Gussy," said Lowther seriously. "This is the chance of a lifetime. I've often thought I'd like to see Trimble Hall—I mean Towers. Yes, it's a go, Baggy."

Baggy Trimble blinked rather suspiciously at Lowther. He had never hoped to "plant" himself on Tom Merry & Co. for the vacation quite so easily as this.

"You—you mean that, Lowther?" he gasped.

"Of course. You're coming with us, aren't you?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, of course!" gasped Baggy eagerly.

"That—that's ripping, you chaps."

"That's right," said Lowther cordially. "Then, as you're coming with us, Baggy, I'm sure we sha'n't object to calling in at your magnificent place with you, old chap. That's settled, then. Don't forget your imagination, though, Baggy."

"My—my whatter?"

"Imagination," said Lowther blandly. "You'll need it, you know. So shall we need ours. You'll be coming with us in imagination, and we'll be coming with you in imagination—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but—"

"Think it out outside, Baggy," advised Lowther, taking the rather bewildered Baggy by the ear and leading him to the door. "Good-bye!"

With that the humorous Lowther opened the door and led Baggy through it. Then Lowther planted a hefty boot behind Baggy, and Baggy sprawled forward on hands and knees in the passage, and lay there roaring with amazed wrath and pain.

It began to dawn upon the hapless fat youth then that it was not a "go," after all, and that it was not so easy to plant himself on Tom Merry & Co. for the vacation as he had supposed a moment ago.

CHAPTER 2. Off at Last!

"G USSY, old fellow—"

"Wun away, Twimble, deah boy. I am vewy busy. Twot!"

And Arthur Augustus went on with his packing.

Undoubtedly the Swell of the Fourth was busy—very busy. He was alone in Study No. 6. On the table, and on chairs and bookcase top, and even the floor, were small mountains of Gussy's "clobber"—silken hose and silken vests and shirts, and fancy waistcoats, and flannels and pairs of trousers, and gorgeous neckties, and other articles of attire too numerous to mention. On the carpet also stood a large trunk—a very large trunk; indeed, there was scarcely room for anything else save Gussy, his trunk, and his clobber in the study.

Since the matter of luggage was first mooted the previous evening there had been constant and wordy warfare in Study No. 6 regarding that question. Arthur Augustus had insisted that it was vitally necessary for a fellow to be well and suitably dressed, even on a caravan tour, and his chums had insisted that it was not.

In the end, Arthur Augustus and his chums had compromised. Arthur Augustus had finally agreed to take only one trunk, and his chums had agreed to allow him to take only one trunk.

But—though Arthur Augustus did not know it—his chums had privately made another agreement, and that was to get rid of that one trunk at the very earliest opportunity that presented itself.

So now, here Gussy was, on breaking-up morning, busily engaged in packing the trunk. He had already spent a couple of hours or more on the task, and he was now reduced to a state of flustered desperation when Baggy Trimble looked in.

But, apparently, Baggy Trimble failed to notice the important fact that Arthur Augustus was busy. Instead of obeying Gussy's injunction to "wun away," he rolled into the study.

There was a dismal, hopeless expression on Trimble's fat face—an expression that ought to have melted a heart of stone.

"Look here, Gussy, old fellow," he said pathetically, "I think you fellows are treating a chap jolly badly—inhumanly, in fact."



When Baggy Trimble came into the study he found Arthur Augustus standing before a great pile of clothing. Gussy turned a perspiring face to Baggy. "I say, it wasn't my fault that the arrangements for taking you fellows to Trimble Towers had to be dropped," said Baggy Trimble dolefully. "In my eagerness to give you fellows a good time this vac I've put myself in the cart!" (See this page.)

Arthur Augustus turned a crimson, perspiring face to Trimble at that.

"Bai Jove, Twimble!" he exclaimed. "Pway what are you jabbewin' about?"

"It's jolly ungrateful, to say the least of it," said Trimble, with no little bitterness in his tone. "After my asking you chaps to Trimble Hall for the vac, too."

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Black ingratitude, I call it," said Trimble, blinking sorrowfully at the astonished Arthur Augustus. "It wasn't my fault that the arrangements for taking you chaps to Trimble Towers had to be dropped, was it? You can't blame me for that."

"Wubbish!" said D'Arcy. "I do not believe that there is such a place as Twimble Hall in existence, Twimble, or Twimble Towers. You are a wretched young fibbah, Twimble."

"Oh, really, Gussy, old chap," groaned Trimble, "you can't deny you've let me down, you know. In my eagerness to give you fellows a jolly good time this vac I've put myself in the cart. I declined an invite to a trip to Scotland with Kerr, and another from Figgins."

"Wot!"

"Then there was that chap Lord Mauleverer from Greyfriars. He wrote begging me to spend the vac with him. But I had to decline, of course, having asked you chaps to spend the vac with me. And now—"

Baggy paused with another hollow groan. Arthur Augustus ceased his packing, and turned his eyeglass upon Baggy.

"Wubbish, Twimble—uttah wubbish!" he remarked tartly. "Do wun away! I decline to hear any more of your wotten fibs. It is useless twyin' to plant yourself on us for this cawavannin' twip."

"That's a rotten way to put it, D'Arcy," protested Trimble indignantly. "After all I've done for you, too! I must say I never thought of it, you, Gussy. The least you could do, after letting me down like this—"

"Wubbish! If you do not wun away I shall be obliged to kick you, you fat wottah! I am far too busy—"

"Don't be a mean beast, Gussy," pleaded Trimble, blinking pathetically at Arthur Augustus' heated features. "I'm

in an awful hole, you know—frightful! The pater and mater are going away, and I've got to stay for the whole vac at my Aunt Amelia's."

"Weally, Twimble—"

"It's awful," went on Baggy, with deadly earnestness, coming down to facts at last. "You're no idea what the old girl's like, Gussy—awful, you know. Lives on nuts and tabloid foods, and makes everybody else in the rotten show do the same. Fancy me living on nuts and tabloid rations! G-r-groooh!"

And Baggy Trimble gave a hollow groan of anguish at the thought.

"She can't stand a noise, either," he went on dismally. "And she locks every bit of her rotten grub up, too. Fancy that! I say Gussy, old fellow," he went on, in a heart-rending voice, "for goodness' sake, let a chap come with you! I'll cook and wash up, and prove no end useful. I'd rather die than go to my blessed Aunt Amelia's!"

As a rule, it took very little to "touch" the tender heart of Arthur Augustus; but for once Arthur Augustus refused to allow his heart to be touched. He was hot, and he was flustered, and he was exasperated, and the tragic predicament of Baggy Trimble failed to move him.

"Then you had bettah die, Twimble," he retorted heartlessly. "Weally, you know it would be a blessin' if you would. You are wathah a nuisance, Twimble. It is your own fault, howevah. If you weren't such a gweedy, unpleasant, and untwuthful young wascal, I would agree to take you. As it is it is uttably impos. Now do twot away, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus turned to his packing again. As he did so the ancient form of Taggles, the school porter, loomed in the doorway.

"Which I'll take that trunk now, if it's ready, Master D'Arcy," he said, mopping a perspiring brow with a red handkerchief. "Cripps as jest come with 'is cart—"

"Oh, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, looking up suddenly. "Weally, Taggy, I am not quite weady yet; would you mind waitin' one moment—"

"There ain't no 'urry, Master D'Arcy," said Taggles. "I'll

be gettin' some of the other young gents' luggage down. I'll come for that trunk arterwards."

"Bai Jove! Thank you vewy much, Taggy. I have almost finished now, however."

Working frantically now, Arthur Augustus finished his packing at last, satisfied. Then he pulled down the lid of the huge trunk and looked about for his keys. He looked around the littered carpet, and then he hurriedly went through his pockets.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed in annoyance. "My keys—can you see my keys, anywhere, Twimble?"

Trimble, who still lingered hopefully, grinned and shook his head.

"How annoyin', bai Jove! I must have left them in the dorm. Oh deah! We shall miss the Abbotsford twain at this wate!"

And, jumping up, Arthur Augustus rushed from the room to get his keys from the dorm. As he went, Baggy Trimble chuckled and removed his foot which had been standing on the keys.

"He, he, he!" grinned Baggy. "I was just waiting for him to ask for 'em. Serve Gussy right, the mean beast. I hope he misses his blessed train."

With which kindly thought Baggy picked up the keys and shoved them in his trousers pocket. He was about to stroll from the study when he paused abruptly.

His object in keeping the keys was merely to "spite" Arthur Augustus. But now a sudden, astounding idea took possession of the fat junior.

Baggy had stated that he would rather die than spend the vacation with his Aunt Amelia, and Baggy almost meant it. The thought filled him with hopeless despair. He was certainly ready to take any risk, almost, to escape such a fate—even to the extent of working during the vac! And now he saw his chance—or imagined he did.

"Mum-my hat!" he breathed. "Blessed if I don't do it! I shall get a bit knocked about in there, but it's worth it. Once I'm on the road with them they won't have the heart to kick me out. They're soft—silly asses! And when I've shown 'em how I can cook, perhaps they won't want to get rid of me. Here goes, anyway!"

With that Baggy set to work at frantic speed. He opened cupboard doors and drawers and boxes at great speed, and began to shove armfuls of clothes from the trunk into them. He worked away, heedless of rumpling Gussy's precious "clobber"—heedless of all save to get the job done before Gussy returned.

"There!" he panted at last. "That'll do, I think. Better leave some of the things in—make it a bit softer and more comfy for me."

And, after seeing that drawers and cupboard doors were closed again, Baggy made a sort of nest of D'Arcy's silken shirts and vests that remained at the bottom of the trunk, and then he hopped inside and pulled the lid down over his head.

He was only just in time, for the next moment footsteps and cheery voices sounded from the passage, and six juniors entered the study. They were the Terrible Three, and Blake, and Herries and Digby.

"Hallo!" grinned Blake, as they entered. "Here's Gussy's dashed trunk. Oh, good! Now's our chance while the ass is out. Got that label, Lowther?"

"What-ho!" chuckled Monty Lowther, producing a label from his pocket and licking it swiftly. "Here goes! We'll see if the ass will fill the blessed van with his rubbish or not. We promised he could pack a trunk, but we didn't promise we could take it with us."

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

Lowther pasted the label he held over the label that was already on the trunk. This was addressed to Abbotsford, and was the label Arthur Augustus had pasted on. The label Lowther pasted on, however, was addressed to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at Eastwood House, which was Gussy's ancestral home.

"That's good enough!" grinned Tom Merry. "Better get out now and leave the rest to old Taggles. We'll wait for Gussy at the gates."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughing juniors filed out of the study and tramped

away downstairs. As their footsteps died away the lid of the trunk lifted, and Baggy Trimble's head popped up.

"M-my hat!" gasped Baggy, in astonishment. "What's their giddy game, I wonder? I—I think I'll have a squint at that label."

And Baggy hopped out of the trunk, and had a "squint" at the label. As he read the inscription on it he understood, and grinned.

"Phew!" he breathed. "I see the game, of course. The asses were rowing with old Gussy about his luggage yesterday. He, he, he! I'll show 'em!"

With that, Baggy tore off Lowther's label, leaving the original one on. As Lowther's label had only just been stuck on, it came off easily enough, and Baggy crammed the label in his pocket, and climbed into the trunk again, pulling the lid down.

For some minutes he crouched there listening to the hurrying feet outside, and then Arthur Augustus came rushing into the study.

"Bai Jove!" he heard the flustered swell of the Fourth murmur. "It is weally extwaordinawy where those keys have got to. Howevah, as I shall be accompanyin' the twunk, it is scarcely necessary to lock it, atfah all. Yaas, it scarcely mattahs if I stwap it. I think— Ah! Heah is old Taggy!"

Old Taggles lumbered into the study, panting and breathing heavily, and inside the great trunk Baggy Trimble quaked, realising the critical moment of his risky plan had arrived.

But D'Arcy, in the rush of the moment, forbore to take a last fond look at his elegant and precious belongings. He grabbed the straps, and began to secure them up.

It was done at last, and Arthur Augustus, panting with his strenuous exertions, handed the porter half-a-crown.

"Pway do be careful not to shake or bump it, Taggy, deah boy," said Gussy anxiously. "I do not want my clobber to be wuffed or wumped, you know."

"Wery good, Master D'Arcy," said Taggy, eyeing the trunk a trifle doubtfully. "It looks hawful 'cavy, Master D'Arcy; but I reckon I can manage it."

It was heavy; there was no doubt about that. But amid much panting and gasping, and with the noble aid of the obliging Arthur Augustus, the porter got it on his back at last, and started from the study, D'Arcy bringing up the rear with an attache-case and suitcase. In the hall, Cripps, the carter, was waiting, and he helped the panting Taggles to place the huge trunk in the cart.

Seven juniors watched the operation rather anxiously—Arthur Augustus in fear of his trunk getting shaken, and his six chums in fear of Arthur Augustus spotting the label—the unauthorised label that wasn't there.

But the trunk was safely in the cart at last—in the cart literally and figuratively speaking, as Lowther expressed it, and Arthur Augustus little dreamed of what had happened to his label.

"Theah!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "That's done at last! I am vewy sowwy to have kept you fellows waitin' all this time."

"Not at all!" said Blake, quite cordially. "We're jolly glad to see your trunk fairly fixed up at last, Gussy—aren't we, you chaps?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, staring a trifle suspiciously. "Pway what are you fellows laughin' at? I weally twust you do not pwopose to play any twicks on my twunk latah on?"

But D'Arcy's chums did not answer that question—nor did they explain why they were laughing. They picked up their suitcases and started out for Rylcombe Station, and Gussy followed their example, wondering not a little why his chums broke out now and again into chuckles. But he got no further opportunity to demand an explanation. Rylcombe Lane was crowded with juniors and seniors all streaming stationwards, and Gussy's chums were too busy exchanging farewell greetings—both polite and impolite—with other juniors to answer his questions. But Gussy's disloyal chums were fated not to have the last laugh after all, in regard to the much-discussed trunk.

CHAPTER 3. Driver Wanted!

"ABBOTSFORD!"
"Here we are at last!"
"Good egg!"
"Hip, pip! Cheers!"

And Tom Merry & Co. gave three cheers with a will, startling an old lady in the next carriage almost into a fit with their exuberance.

ANSWERS

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Tom Merry & Co. were in high spirits — very high spirits. It was a glorious sunny day—an ideal day for the start of the summer holidays, and ideal weather altogether for the kind of holiday they had planned—or, rather, Arthur Augustus had planned—motor-caravanning.

With such weather and such a joyful prospect before them, Tom Merry & Co. had good cause to be merry and bright that sunny summer's day. And they were.

They tumbled out on to the platform at Abbotsford in a joyful crowd, and started towards the station exit, or rather D'Arcy's chums did. But they stopped as Arthur Augustus called to them.

"One moment, deah boys!" he called after them. "I must see to my trunk, bai Jove! You are forgettin' my trunk!"

And Arthur Augustus looked along towards the guard's van, apparently on the look-out for his trunk.

The juniors halted, grinning all over their faces.

"My dear man," said Blake cheerfully, "don't waste your time. What's the good of looking for a trunk that isn't there, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Your trunk should be well on its way to Eastwood House by now," went on Blake, smiling at the astonished D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus raised his straw hat from his forehead. Then he slowly placed his eyeglass into position in his eye, and looked Blake over. It was a look that ought to have withered Blake, but didn't.

"Bai Jove!" articulated the swell of the Fourth, his voice trembling with horrified indignation. "Do—do you actually mean to tell me, Jack Blake, that you have been waseal enough to send my trunk astaway?"

Blake nodded, still cheerfully.

"I took the precaution of pasting another label on, Gussy," explained Monty Lowther. "I addressed it to Eastwood House, old top. Isn't that correct, old chap?"

"You see, Gussy," added Blake, "we only agreed to let you pack a trunk—not to bring one with you."

Arthur Augustus fairly gasped. His noble features went crimson with wrath, and his eye sparkled through his famous monocle at his chums. That look ought to have shrivelled them up.

"You—you feahful wottahs!" he almost shrieked at last. "You have placed me in a tewwible position by your weakness conduct. Gweat Scott! I have not a single article of undahclothin' to change into, bai Jove! Oh, you—you—"

Arthur Augustus spluttered incoherently for a moment, and then he turned back his cuffs, apparently about to exchange words for actions.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, backing away in pretended alarm. "Look out, you chaps! My hat! Gussy promised us a good time on the trip, but I didn't expect he'd start by giving us a fearful thrashing all round."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was the last straw for Arthur Augustus. He made a blind rush at the laughing juniors, who scattered like chaff before the wind.

But Arthur Augustus did not pursue them far. He suddenly stopped dead as his eyes fell upon a large trunk being tipped from the guard's van by an ancient porter.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He stared at the trunk, and then he stared at it again. But there was no doubt about it. The huge trunk had the initials A. A. D'A. upon it, and it was undoubtedly his own trunk, the trunk he had packed with such loving care that day.

Blake and the others had spotted the trunk now, and they almost fell down at sight of it.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake faintly. "It—it's it, you fellows. We've made a mistake or something. Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared transfixed at the trunk, the trunk they had fondly imagined was well on its way to Eastwood House, the ancestral home of the D'Arcys.

Arthur Augustus looked up from the trunk, and stared a trifle coldly at Blake.

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ful grin. "Anyway, come on. I'm rather anxious to see that caravan. As Gussy's arranged everything, you can bet there'll be a muck-up in the arrangements somewhere."

"No doubt about that."

The juniors strolled along after Gussy, still hopeful. Their hopes were doomed to disappointment, however. Arthur Augustus had no intention of letting the trunk out of his sight, nor did he. It was lifted on to a taxi, likewise the suitcases and handbags. And as there was no room for all in the taxi, Gussy's chums decided to walk.

They watched the taxi with Gussy and the luggage start out, and then they themselves started after it. Everything for the trip had been arranged—according to Arthur Augustus, who had visited Abbotsford only the day before—and the caravan was awaiting them at Cragg's, a local garage.

The garage was only five minutes' walk from the station, and Gussy's taxi was just leaving as they landed there.

"Here we are," grinned Lowther. "Now for the giddy caravan. I expect it will have no top to it, or the blessed gee-gee will— Oh, great Scott!"

Monty Lowther saw the caravan at that moment. It was the only caravan in the small garage yard, so that there could be no mistake about it. It almost filled the yard.

The juniors halted and stared at it.

It was a large caravan, a very large one. It had evidently been built to some special design, and it had obviously been built with more regard to comfort and space than appearance.

The juniors did not object to that, however. It looked a very nice, commodious caravan. What fairly took their combined breath away was the fact that it was not a horse caravan, but a motor-caravan.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

As the juniors stood blinking at the van an elegant form appeared in the doorway, and came down the steps to meet them. It was Arthur Augustus, and the swell of the Fourth was beaming.

"Well, deah boys," he exclaimed, waving a lofty hand towards the van. "What do you fellows think about it? Wathah a nobbay van, what?"

"Oh, you—you idiot!"

"Is that it?" almost howled Blake.

"Yaas, of course, deah boy! Why, do you not—"

"But—but it's a blessed motor-caravan, you ass!"

"Yaas, exactly!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "That is the little surprisew I told you to expect, deah boys. That is why I wesused you fellows permission to come and inspect it. I wanted it to be a surprisew, you know."

"Oh, you—you ass, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, fixing a rather astonished glance on that junior. "Pway what is the mattah with my cawavan? I am vewy disappointed that you do not appeah to like it. Just think

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of the savin' in work at havin' no horse to attend to. Then we can covah a gweath distance, and—"

"But—but what about a driver?" almost shrieked Blake.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

A look of blank dismay spread slowly over the noble features of Arthur Augustus. Apparently that junior had omitted to include a driver among his arrangements.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he exclaimed feebly. "Weally, you fellows, I nevah thought of that. How—how annoyin', you know!"

"Annoying!" hooted Blake. "You want annoying, you born idiot! I can't manage a thing like that without a driver. A horse we could look after ourselves. Oh, you—your idiot!"

"Bai Jove! We—we shall have to engage a dwivah, deah boys."

"But the cash, you ass! Even if we do manage to get a driver, it will cost quids and quids to keep him for weeks."

"We—we might get a cheap one, you know. I—I will ask the ownah, deah boys. Bai Jove! Perhaps I could dvice it myself?"

"Rot! Think we'd trust our giddy lives to you, Gussy? In any case, you've no dashed licence, you idiot, and you aren't old enough. You've paid your deposit on this dashed tub—"

"Bai Jove, Blake!" said Gussy indignantly. "I object strongly to you callin' it names. It's a vevy nice van."

"Looks like a blessed furniture van," grinned Lowther.

"Well, the van's all right," said Tom Merry. "In fact, it's a jolly good one—plenty of room, anyway. The blessed engine and chassis look as though they've seen their best days, though."

"Yes, rather!"

"Anyway," went on Tom, giving Gussy a withering look, "this is the giddy limit, Gussy! You say you've paid the deposit?"

"Oh, yaas! I have also paid Cwagg for four weeks' hire, deah boys. It nevah occurred to me about a dwivah, you know. It is most extwaordinawy."

"Not at all," said Lowther. "There's nothing extraordinary about it. You couldn't do anything else but make a muck of things, Gussy."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Stop wrangling, for goodness' sake!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Look here, you chaps, we'll have to do something. If Gussy's paid the deposit we can't back out, of course. We'll have to get a driver from somewhere."

"Nothing else for it," said Blake, nodding. "This comes of leaving the arrangements to that burbling chump—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I suppose you've forgotten the grub, too?"

"I have not forgotten the gwub, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I see no weason whatevah for this wumpus, you fellows! I have plenty of cash, and it should be a vevy easy mattah to engage a dwivah. A gweath deal

of the responsibility and work will then be taken off our shouldahs, and we can enjoy ourselves more."

"Well, that's true enough," said Tom Merry, grinning. "If Gussy has the cash to blue on a driver, then we won't grumble."

"Rather not."

"If we can get one," grunted Blake doubtfully.

"Wubbish! You fellows can leave that to me," said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, heah is Cwagg now!"

At that moment the garage proprietor came bustling up, carrying tins of petrol, which he placed under the seat at the front of the chassis.

"Here's the juice, sir," he announced, looking respectfully at the other juniors. "I see your driver hasn't turned up yet, Master D'Arcy?"

CHAPTER 4.

Filling the Vacancy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS went a rich pink. "Ahem! Nunno! You—you see, Cwagg, we haven't engaged a dwivah."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Cragg, frowning. "You should have explained that, Master D'Arcy. I took it for granted that you had a responsible driver coming with you. I'm afraid I couldn't let you young gents—"

"That is quite all wight, Cwagg," said Arthur Augustus. "It was meahly a case of havin' ovahlooked the mattah of a dwivah. I pwesume it will be a vevy easy mattah to engage one?"

Mr. Cragg shook his head emphatically.

"It won't be no easy job, sir," he said. "I can't spare none of my men, and, in any case, I don't suppose as they'd like the job—bein' away from home weeks, like. In fact, I know you won't get one in Abbotsford. This 'oliday weather we wants all the drivers we can get for charabanc outings and that."

"Oh, my hat!"

The juniors groaned in dismay.

"We're fairly stumped, then," said Tom Merry dismally. "Surely we can get a man from somewhere, Mr. Cragg?"

"I'll see what I can do, sir," said Mr. Cragg, though he was obviously not too hopeful. "I'll ring up the other two garages here, and those at Wayland."

Shaking his head and looking not a little concerned, the garage proprietor hurried away towards his telephone. While he was away Tom Merry & Co. inspected the caravan with growing approval. And it was undoubtedly a very useful caravan—if it was not gracefully built—and everything in it was in perfect order. There were four roomy bunks, and everything else was bright and clean and very conveniently arranged. Arthur Augustus had already had his trunk placed inside, and even with that in it there seemed to be heaps of room.

But the juniors eyed the rest of the vehicle very doubtfully indeed. The engine was certainly old, and the rest of the chassis equally old and dilapidated.

"Well, the van itself's O. K.," said Tom Merry at last.

"Jolly good!"

"But the engine—"

"The engine's an old crock!" grinned Lowther. "It'll drop to pieces before we get far."

"If we do get going at all," growled Blake. "It's beginnin' to look—Hallo, here's Cragg now!"

The garage proprietor came hurrying up again, shaking his head seriously.

"I'm afraid it's no good, young gents," he said. "There isn't a man to be got nowhere round these parts—not a man as will come on a tour like this. I don't just know what's to be done."

"Bai Jove! That's wathah awkward!" said Arthur Augustus, frowning thoughtfully. "I wandah if the patah would lend us Wobinson if I wired and asked him? Wobinson, you know, is the patah's personal dwivah, and the patah could easily walk, or take a taxi duwin' the next few weeks, couldn't he? What do you fellows think?"

"Just the very thing, Gussy!" said Lowther gravely. "Go on, old man—get on the phone and see what his lordship says. He will be no end delighted, I'm sure."

Arthur Augustus reflected a moment, and then he shook his noble head.

"On second thoughts, deah boys," he observed sapiently, "perhaps I'd bettah not. He might think it wathah cheeky, you know."

"He might," agreed Tom Merry, laughing. "No, that won't do, I'm afraid, Gussy, you ass! It's jolly awkward, though!"

"It is awkward," said Mr. Cragg slowly. "I hardly know—"

He paused suddenly, his eyes fixed upon the figure of a man who seemed to be engaged in holding up one of the gateposts of the yard gate. He was rather a seedy looking individual, wearing very oily and greasy clothes. He was unshaven, and had a remarkably red nose. But he was a

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very cheery-looking individual, for all that, and he was obviously a down-at-heel mechanic of some sort.

"There's him there," said Mr. Cragg, pointing at the cheery-looking individual and speaking rather doubtfully. "He might take on the job, now—cheap, too. He's an out-of-work driver—been a bus-driver—and he's been to me several times asking for work. I was thinkin' of givin' him an odd job now and again, as I'm so busy. But—but—"

He paused again doubtfully. Evidently Mr. Cragg was just a trifle doubtful concerning the cheery-looking individual.

"Bai Jove! He's wathah seedy!" remarked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass on the gentleman in question. "But he's bwight and cheerful-looking, I must say."

"He might suit you gents very well," said Mr. Cragg, seeming to make up his mind. "He can drive, I know, and his licence and references seem all right. Perhaps you young gentlemen would like to speak to him."

The juniors did like. It seemed the only possible chance in view, and the idea of abandoning the tour—if that were possible now—was not to be thought of. The very sight of the caravan had made them long to be on the road. They were not in the mood to be very particular about such little things like seedy clothes, an unshaven face, and a red nose. After all, as Arthur Augustus murmured hopefully to his chums, the red nose might merely be caused by acute indigestion. And a fellow who had—possibly—been tramping about in search of work could scarcely be expected to look spick and span.

So Tom Merry & Co. spoke to him. They found him as bright and cheerful an individual as his expression had led them to suppose him to be. His cheerfulness made quite an impression on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at all events. He fairly beamed with joyful relief when the seedy individual—whose name was Cobb—promptly announced his willingness to take on the job.

"I reckon a job like that'll suit me down to the ground, young gents," he said, smiling genially round at the juniors. "In fact, it's just the job I'm lookin' for. I've done a bit of caravanning afore this. And I reckon you gents an' me won't quarrel about the screw neither."

"What wages would you require then?" asked Tom Merry, eyeing Mr. Cobb a trifle doubtfully.

"What about a quid a week and my keep?" suggested Mr. Cobb cheerfully. "I reckon that's reasonable enough, young gents."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "That is certainly most reasonable, Cobb. Don't you fellows think so?"

The juniors did think so. And it certainly was most reasonable—too reasonable, in fact, for Mr. Cragg, who eyed the down-at-heels gentleman still more doubtfully.

But Arthur Augustus had made up his mind to engage Mr. Cobb on the spot, and he did so, and his chums made no demur. As Blake said, beggars could not be choosers.

So after a little more discussion the matter was fixed up, and, with some of D'Arcy's cash in his pocket, Mr. Cobb rolled cheerfully away for a shave and a clean up—as he was most careful to explain—while Blake and Herries went out to hire a small patrol tent for the personal use of Mr. Cobb. The juniors knew that Arthur Augustus had not omitted to hire a large bell-tent, but they felt that another tent for Mr. Cobb's sole use would be the most satisfactory course. And when an hour later Noah's Ark—as Lowther had dubbed the van—rolled and rumbled away through the streets of Abbotsford, en route for the open road, Mr. Cobb, looking clean now and exceedingly cheerful, was in the driving seat. The last difficulty had been overcome, and Tom Merry & Co. had started their caravan holiday without a cloud visible on the horizon.

But Mr. Cragg, who watched it go from the front of his establishment, shook his head still more doubtfully. He seemed very uneasy in regard to Mr. Cobb, the driver. Perhaps it was Mr. Cobb's nose that worried him!

CHAPTER 5.

The Vanished Grub!

"HALLO! Another stop!"
"Another one? Well, my hat!"
"That chap's the limit!"
Thus Tom Merry & Co.

Many miles had slid by under the wheels of the big caravan since Tom Merry & Co. had left Abbotsford behind them. Not that Noah's Ark had been travelling at a high speed—far from it; racing about the countryside at top speed was not Tom Merry & Co.'s idea of a caravan holiday. Moreover, according to Mr. Cobb, who was most voluble on the subject, it was impossible to get any sort of speed out of the antiquated engine.

But Sunny Jim—otherwise Mr. Cobb—had been given strict orders not to attempt to get speed out of the engine. Tom Merry & Co. were out to take things easy—they had plenty of time before them. And at almost a walking pace the caravan had rumbled along, seeking the lanes and byways, and avoiding the highways as much as possible.

In the glorious summer sunshine, the Sussex countryside was looking at its best.

The juniors had had rather a late lunch before starting, and though it was late afternoon now, they had not halted for tea yet. But they had halted several times, for all that. And it was not the juniors who wanted to halt, but Sunny Jim, the driver.

Curiously enough, it had been outside an inn that Sunny Jim had called a halt on each occasion, either to see a relative whom he claimed lived at the inn, or to borrow a spanner—a special kind of spanner—with which to carry out a slight repair to the engine.

It really was very curious that a breakdown should occur outside an inn on each occasion, and that Sunny Jim should own so many relatives who lived at inns. It was most remarkable. And it was little wonder that, just when the juniors were thinking of calling a halt for tea, they should be surprised when the caravan once again rumbled to a halt.

"Wonder which it is this time?" grinned Monty Lowther. "A dashed breakdown or a relative?"

"It's getting rather thick!" remarked Tom Merry grimly. "That chap will be getting squiffy if he goes on at this rate. Hallo, here's Gussy! What's wrong now, Gussy?"

"Another breakdown?"
"Or a relative?" queried Lowther.

Arthur Augustus, who had been seated with Sunny Jim on the driving seat, came round to the juniors. "It is quite all right, deah boys," he remarked. "Cobb wishes to see the pwoprietah of this place—a man who was in Fwance with him duwin' the War, you know. He says he has often longed to talk ovah old times."

"So that's the yarn?" sniffed Blake.
"Something fresh, anyway," grinned Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah," protested Arthur Augustus mildly. "You suahly do not question Cobb's word? He is weally quite a decent fellow, you know—though his bweach is wathah unplesant at close quartahs. He has been tellin' me some of his expwienches in the War. He won the D.S.O. and the D.C.M., you know, though it is wathah stwange that he should get a D.S.O. as a motah-dwivah, isn't it?"

"Very!" grinned Lowthah. "Sure he didn't get the V.C. and the O.B.E., too?"

"Weally—"
"He's been pulling your leg, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, you can tell him that if he isn't back in two minutes we're going on without him—if I have to drive the giddy old bus myself. We don't want the spoofing rotter squiffy, and smashing us up."

"Bai Jove! Do you fellows think—"
"Yes. It's a pity you don't do a bit of thinking occasionally, too, Gussy. Go on, tell him!"

"Bai Jove!"

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"THE CRIMSON CLAW!"
On Page 22.

Arthur Augustus ambled back looking rather thoughtful. He spoke to Mr. Cobb, and that gentleman nodded, and hurried across the road to the country inn, and vanished inside. He was back again well under the two minutes. Apparently Mr. Cobb did not wish to be left behind.

He was wiping his mouth rather hurriedly as he emerged, and Arthur Augustus eyed him very thoughtfully indeed as he noted that significant action.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" he murmured, shaking his head seriously. "I am vewy much surprised at Cobb, you know. I am afraid that he has been wathah spoofin' us in wegard to his weasons for stoppin' at these places, you know."

"Go hon!"

"Yaas! It is wathah disturbin', you— Well, Cobb?"

Arthur Augustus broke off to address Sunny Jim, who came up respectfully to the juniors.

"Excuse me, young gents," he remarked cheerfully. "But might I suggest as this is a good place to stop for tea? Nice and shady under them trees there. I could 'ave my tea with my old Army friend inside—beggin' your pardon, like."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; carry on, Cobb!" he said curtly. "We're not stopping here, and I don't think we'll stop at any more pubs, either. We'll have tea a bit later. Just take it easy, and we'll walk as before."

"Very good, sir."

If Mr. Cobb was disappointed, he did not show it. He grinned, and took his place in the driving seat. Arthur Augustus did not rejoin him to hear more of his Army experiences. Arthur Augustus was beginning to get rather dubious regarding Mr. Cobb.

At a snail's pace the caravan rolled on along the dusty, sunny lane, the St. Jim's juniors walking leisurely alongside, chatting cheerily. Inside the caravan it was broiling hot and stuffy, and the juniors preferred the open air and the exercise of walking.

They kept their eyes open for a suitable place to rest, and after another mile had been covered Tom Merry saw one, and gave the word to halt.

It was a cosy little stretch of greensward, at the edge of a thick wood, just off the lane, and easy of access. Sunny Jim steered the lumbering caravan on to the grass, and shut off his engine.

"Just the very place for tea, you chaps," said Tom Merry.

"By jingo, I'm hungry!"

"Same here!"

"Yaas, wathah! Thank goodness we have plenty of gwub, deah boys, and sha'n't have need to go fowagin', you know. There's plenty of lemonade in the van, too, so we need not bothah about makin' tea, unless anyone wants it."

Nobody wanted tea; even Mr. Cobb did not want it, having been made a present of a bottle of lemonade from his friend of the inn. It was in a large, quart bottle, and it looked to the juniors rather queerly-coloured lemonade.

They passed no remarks, however, in regard to that. But Tom Merry, at all events, was beginning to be very uneasy in regard to the cheery Mr. Cobb. Moreover, they were hungry and eager for tea.

With Blake, Lowther, and Manners behind him, Tom boarded the caravan. As he did so, he stopped short on the

threshold with a slight start.

"What's the matter, Tommy?" demanded Lowther.

"You nearly busted my boko, you ass!"

"My hat!" said Tom, glancing curiously round the van. "There surely can't be rats in this show—"

"What rot! Why, you—"

"Only I fancied I heard a slight noise—a scuffle—just as I jumped up the steps," said Tom, grinning feebly. "Must be hearing things; I'll be seeing 'em next."

Tom's words proved prophetic. He reached the larder next moment, and as he looked inside he almost yelled.

"Great Scott!"

"What's biting you now?"

"Look!" gasped Tom Merry, staring into the larder. "Who on earth's been at our dashed grub? Well, if that don't beat cock-fighting!"

Tom's chums looked over his shoulder, and they almost fell down at sight of the larder. When they had inspected it before the start, that larder had been well stocked—very well stocked. Arthur Augustus had not blundered in regard to the food arrangements, at all events. There had been a good supply of bread, of butter, of tinned fruit, of potted meats, of jam, of sardines, and several paper bags full of tarts and cakes, in addition to tea, cocoa, coffee, and sugar, etc.

But it was not a well-stocked larder now, not in regard to toothsome articles of diet, at all events. Someone—or something—had created havoc among those. The bags of tarts and cakes had gone—vanished, likewise the contents of several sardine-tins and potted-meat jars. The bread, certainly, had not been touched, but scarcely a single other article was as it had been packed on the shelves.

And on the hitherto neat and tidy shelves were now empty tins, jars, crumbs, empty bags, and smears of jam.

The juniors blinked into the larder as if they could scarcely believe their eyes.

"Well—well, what a giddy mystery!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "How—why—when could this have happened, you chaps?"

But Tom's chums could not answer that. They were staggered, as he was. It was certainly a mystery. It was only an hour at most since they had left the van to have a turn at walking, and nobody could possibly have entered the van without their seeing them.

Yet someone—or something—had been there. There could be no possible doubt about that.

"Crumbs and stuff on the floor, too!" exclaimed Blake, pointing down and looking amazed. "Well, my only best topper! This—this beats me. If we were at St. Jim's, now—"

"We'd think that fat burglar Baggy Trimble had been on the job," ended Tom Merry, half-grinning. "But that's impossible, of course. I'm blessed if I can see how any tramp could have—"

He broke off abruptly to pick up something from the floor. It was a pocket-knife, with the blade open, which had jammy crumbs adhering to it. Tom Merry's eyes caught sight of a name scratched on the haft, and he jumped.

The name on the haft was the name of Baggy Trimble!

"G-good gracious!" stammered Tom.

A sudden, astounding suspicion entered Tom's mind, and he looked quickly about him, searching the four bunks and every possible hiding-place in the van. Then his eyes caught sight of D'Arcy's trunk at the far end.

At once Tom noticed that there was something queer about that trunk. It was rather an old-fashioned trunk, made of basket-work, lined on the outside with stout American cloth. Tom knew that it had been in good order, however, when it had left St. Jim's.

Yet now several holes showed on the shiny black surface, and one big hole, large enough for a hand to pass through, showed near the lock of the trunk.

"Mum-my hat!" breathed Tom Merry.

Ignoring his chums' stares, Tom stepped across to the trunk, and as he did so he caught a glimpse of something moving behind the jagged hole, whilst his ears caught the sound of heavy breathing from within the trunk.

That was enough for Tom Merry. The depleted larder, the mess of crumbs, the pocket-knife, and the undoubted fact that someone was hidden in Gussy's trunk told him all he needed to be told. He knew Baggy Trimble of old.

He stooped suddenly, and, with finger on lips to enjoin silence, he beckoned to his chums to follow him out of the van. In utter bewilderment, Blake, Manners, and Lowther followed.

"What the thump—!" began Blake.

"Shush!" breathed Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming with mischief. "Can't you chaps guess?"

"Guess what, you ass?"

"That Baggy Trimble's hidden in Gussy's trunk!"

"What!"

It was a yell—a yell that almost made Mr. Cobb leap several feet into the air.

CHAPTER 6. Baggy Makes Terms!

"TRIMBLE!"

Jack Blake muttered the name and gazed at Tom Merry blankly. Herries and Digby hurried to the spot wonderingly.

"Trimble!" repeated Blake. "Are you potty, Merry?"

"It's the sun," explained Lowther, tapping his own fore-

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As the trunk landed on the island a terrific shriek pierced the air, and the lid flew up, revealing the fat features of Baggy Trimble. "Oh—oh crumbs!" he gasped. "I—I say, you fellows, rescue me!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "Bai Jove!" stuttered Arthur Augustus. "How came that fat wottah in my twunk?" (See page 12.)

head significantly. "Just lie down on the grass a bit, Tommy, old man—under the trees here."

Tom Merry grinned.

"You ass, Lowther!" he said excitedly. "That fat fraud Baggy Trimble is hidden in that trunk, I tell you! The grub going like that, and the sight of the crumbs and mess he'd left, reminded me of Trimble. Then I picked up this knife—it's Baggy's, you see. Then I spotted something moving through that hole in the trunk, and heard the fat rotter breathing. It must be Trimble!"

"Phew!"

"But—but it's impossible!" breathed Blake, aghast.

"It's a fact, anyway, I'm certain," said Tom Merry.

"How he managed to get in the blessed thing beats me! But he's there, and he's been out pinching our grub, of course."

"But—but the trunk was strapped up, you ass!"

"Didn't Gussy unstrap it just before we started?" said Tom. "He wanted to unpack the dashed thing, you remember, and shove his giddy clobber in the bunks. We caught him just in time and stopped him. The ass must have strapped it up again."

"But the lock—"

"It wasn't locked—only the catch slipped," said Tom. "I heard Gussy say it wasn't locked. That fat ass must have cut through the basketwork with his knife, and got his blessed hand through to slip the catch. Isn't he the giddy outside edge?"

"Great pip!"

Blake, Manners, and Lowther gasped aloud, as did Herries and Digby, when they grasped the position—or the position Tom Merry suspected.

"The—The daring, cheeky fat toad!" breathed Blake. "Shoved himself on us after all!"

"And raided our tea!" snorted Herries excitedly. "My hat! Why are we standing here? Let's go and smash the fat rotter! We'll give him—"

Herries was about to rush up the steps of the van, but Tom Merry yanked him back.

"We'll deal with the fat fraud all right, Herries," he said, with a grim chuckle. "Where's Gussy?"

"Gone to the farm yonder for some eggs," said Herries.

"Good!" grinned Tom Merry. "Then we'll get rid of Gussy's blessed trunk at last, and give Baggy the fright of his life at the same time."

"I see," said Blake. "You mean to send the fat cad back in the trunk, Tommy?"

"Nunno!" grinned Tom. "We could scarcely do that; and we can't abandon even that fat rotter in a lonely place like this. We'll give him the fright of his life, and then we'll get rid of him at the first station we come to."

"But—"

"I thought I heard something when I entered the van," grinned Tom. "The fat burglar must have just jumped back into the giddy trunk. Anyway, back me up. We'll pretend we're going to pitch Gussy's trunk into the duckpond over in the field there. He'll think we mean it—he must have heard us squabbling with Gussy about it."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Come on, then—before old Gussy turns up."

And, snatching up a coil of rope slung on the hook on the van, Tom ran up the van steps, followed by his grinning chums.

"Here we are, chaps!" he cried. "Gussy's gone to the farm for eggs, and now's our chance to get rid of his giddy trunk! We'll pitch it into the duckpond, and let it sink—eh?"

"Just the very thing!" chuckled Blake.

"Hear, hear! Out with it, chaps!"

There was a sudden, startled gasp from the trunk at the shadowy end of the van. A fat hand came suddenly into view through the hole in the trunk and groped blindly for the clasp of the lock.

Just in time Tom Merry sprang forward and sat himself down on the top of the trunk.

"Now, you chaps," said Tom. "We'll tie this rope to the handles, and sling the whole lot into the duckpond. It'll soon sink, I expect, and that will be the last of Gussy's trunk!"

"Good egg!" said Blake cheerfully. "It'll be simply ripping to get rid of the trunk—and more ripping still to get rid of what's inside it!"

"Yes, rather!"

Once again there sounded a startled gasp from the trunk—a loud, terrified gasp this time. But the juniors pretended not to hear it, and, cutting the rope into two pieces, Tom tied one piece to one handle and Blake tied the other to the other handle.

Then they lifted the trunk up in the air, and as they did so a terrified howl came from inside—an earsplitting howl in the well-known tones of Baggy Trimble of St. Jim's.

"Ow! Help! Lemme out! Ow-wow! I say, you fellows, I'm in here! Ow! Yaroooh! Oh crumbs! Help! Police! Murder!"

But Tom Merry & Co. were, apparently, deaf. They carried the heavy trunk out into the open air and down the steps, cheerfully ignoring the earsplitting shrieks of Baggy Trimble inside.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry loudly. "Yonder's the duckpond!"

"Yaroooh! Oh crumbs! Help! Murder! Ow! Lemme out—for goodness' sake, you fellows, lemme out!"

Shriek! Shriek! Shriek!

Mr. Cobb, who was reclining at ease on the grassy bank, jumped up and stared transfixed at the procession that wended its way towards the duckpond just visible through the low hedge.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "What—what—"

But Tom Merry & Co. did not stop to explain matters. They tramped across the grass with the heavy trunk, Monty Lowther busily engaged rapping at a fat hand that kept frantically reaching through the hole in the side and groping for the catch.

The juniors crushed through the low hedge with their noisy burden, and as they did so an elegant form hove in sight in the field beyond. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he was carrying a paper bag full of eggs.

But he dropped the eggs and stared aghast at the sight of his chums carrying his precious trunk towards the duckpond.

"Why—what— Oh, bai Jove! You—you fwightful wuffians!" he shrieked. "You feahful Huns! You are about to destwoy my twunk! Oh, bai Jove!"

With his shrieks of alarm almost outdoing the more muffled shrieks of Baggy Trimble, Arthur Augustus rushed madly to the rescue of his precious property, his eyeglass streaming behind him at the end of its silken cord.

"See to old Gussy, some of you," grinned Tom Merry.

"What-ho!"

Herries and Manners met the charging, yelling Arthur Augustus, and collared him low.

Crash!

"Yaroooh! Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus crashed down, and Herries and Manners fell upon him, and pinned him down.

"Hold him there!" ordered Tom Merry cheerily. "Now for tipping the rubbish in, chaps! Up she goes!"

Tom Merry pointed to a little island that rose in the centre of the duck-pond, and his chuckling chums grasped his idea. With Blake and Digby at the extreme end of one length of rope, and with Tom Merry and Lowther at the extreme end of the other, the trunk was slowly swung out over the slime-covered duck-pond.

"You—you wuffians!" shrieked Arthur Augustus madly. "Oh, bai Jove! My twunk and my clobber will be uttably destwoyed. Help! Cobb, my man—help!"

But Mr. Cobb was too astonished and bewildered to help had he felt disposed.

Shriek, shriek, shriek! came from the swaying trunk.

It touched the island at last, and then the terrified Baggy managed to find the catch with his fingers, and he slipped it madly. The next moment the lid flew up, and Baggy's tousled head and fat face, white as chalk save where it was streaked with jam, and streaming with perspiration, popped into view.

"My heye!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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The juniors shrieked now—shrieked with laughter as they noted the expression on Baggy's fat features as he found himself marooned on the tiny island of mud with slimy water all round him.

"Oh—oh crumbs!" he gasped. "I—I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Almost helpless with laughter, Herries and Manners had allowed Arthur Augustus to get up—which he did, almost collapsing at the shock of finding Baggy Trimble in his trunk.

In great agitation he fumbled for his eyeglass and jammed it into his eye.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he ejaculated feebly. "Twimble! It is actually that fat wottah Twimble in my twunk! Oh, bai Jove! Blake, Mewwy—you feahful wottahs! How came that fat wottah in my twunk? And my clobber—what has happened to my clobber?" ended Gussy, in a wail of dismay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should think you could guess that, Gussy!" laughed Tom Merry. "He must have slipped in after you'd packed it at St. Jim's. The fat fraud must have pitched your clobber out. And—my hat!—it must have been he who changed the labels again."

"That's it! Oh, the nerry bounder!"

Baggy Trimble gave a yelp of dismay and blinked across at the juniors who still held the ends of the rope at either side of the shallow pond.

"I—I say, you chaps!" he howled dismally. "Lemme come ashore, will you? Oh dear! I've had an awful time! All my bones are broken, and I've nearly been shaken inside out! Lemme come ashore, will you?"

"Not much, old tulip!" called Tom Merry grimly. "If you'd left our grub alone, Baggy, we might have been lenient with you, and just packed you off home again. As it is, we're going to teach you a lasting lesson before we kick you off. What shall we do with the fat ass, you chaps?"

"Drag him and the trunk through the pond," suggested Lowther. "If he does happen to get drowned, it will be a jolly good thing. Think what it will mean to return to St. Jim's after the vac, knowing that fat grub-raider isn't there!"

"Oh dear! I say, you chaps, be decent, you know!" wailed Baggy almost tearfully. "I say, Gussy, old fellow, don't let 'em do it—make 'em lift me back again. They—they'll only ruin your trunk and clobber, you know."

Arthur Augustus pricked up his ears at that.

"Bai Jove, Twimble!" he ejaculated. "Is there some of my clobber in the twunk, then, you fat wascal?"

For answer Baggy Trimble stooped down into the big trunk, and reappeared bearing aloft an armful of silken vests and shirts and fancy neckties.

At sight of them Arthur Augustus gave a shriek.

"Oh, bai Jove! Do not drop them in, Twimble!" he shrieked, dancing about the bank in alarm. "Pway put them back, you wascal!"

A sudden gleam came into Baggy Trimble's rather crafty eyes at that.

His fat face broke into a grin.

"Look here, Gussy!" he called. "You're the boss on this trip, aren't you?"

"Yaas, I suppose so!" called back Gussy, in an agony of fear for his garments. "Bai Jove! Put those things down, you fat wascal! Oh, yaas! I am responsible for this twip, but you—"

"Then look here, Gussy old chap," called Trimble, blinking seriously across at Gussy. "Make those rotters lift me ashore—"

"You—you—"

"If you don't," warned Trimble, holding the pile of under-clothing over the green-covered water, "I shall drop the lot in. There's heaps more at the bottom of the trunk, too—waistcoats and collars and ties and things."

"Twimble, you fat wottah—"

"Be quick!" called Trimble, grinning now at the horrified expression on Gussy's face. "I think the water's coming through the bottom of the trunk—the blessed trunk's sinking, anyway."

"Oh, bai Jove! Blake, Mewwy—pway lift that twunk ashore at once!" shrieked D'Arcy frantically. "Do you not realise that I have not a single change of clothin', you awful wottahs? If that undahclothin' of mine is wuined, I shall immediately return home and leave you wottahs! I pwomise you that I shall keep my word, bai Jove!"

"Oh crumbs!"

It was the turn of Blake, Merry, and the others to look alarmed. As Arthur Augustus was the chancellor of the exchequer—the founder of the feast, so to speak—they could not possibly carry on with the caravan trip without him and his well-lined pocket wallet. And they knew that the Honourable Arthur Augustus always kept his word.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Better land the fat ass!" he chuckled. "We can't afford to lose Gussy, you know."

"My hat! Rather not!"
 "Haul ashore, then, chaps!"
 "Half a minute!" bellowed Baggy Trimble.

He groped in the bottom of the trunk, even as the ropes tightened, and reappeared bearing a huge armful of clothing. The fat junior's little eyes were glinting.

"Half a moment, you chaps!" he called. "I want to settle a small point with old Gussy first. Now, Gussy, old chap," he went on cheerfully, holding the clothes over the water, "I want your word to include me in the caravan party for the rest of the tour, or in goes your blessed clobber."

"Well, my hat!"

The other juniors stared at Baggy. Evidently that junior felt himself master of the situation. But Gussy gave a yell.

"Don't dwoop them, Twimble. Oh, yaas, yaas! But don't dwoop them!"

"You promise, old fellow?"

"Yaas! I'll pwomise anything, only don't dwoop them!"

"You won't wallop me for this, either, Gussy?"

"No!" yelled Gussy, in an agony of fear. "Oh, bai Jove! Do be careful, Twimble, you fat wottah!"

"That's good enough!" said Trimble. He dropped the clothes back into the trunk. "Haul away, you fellows! Remember what Gussy said, mind!"

Amidst much chuckling, the trunk with its burden was swung back on to the grassy bank. Gussy's clothes were very expensive clothes, and the juniors had no desire to damage his property. It was safe at last, and as Baggy climbed out gasping his relief, Arthur Augustus rushed to claim it.

"Now for that fat ass!" breathed Herries. "Collar him, you chaps. If Gussy gave his word not to wallop him, we didn't!"

"Oh dear!"

Baggy blinked apprehensively at Tom Merry & Co.

"I—I say, you chaps!" he mumbled pathetically. "You might lemme be now. I've had an awful time—really I have. I've been bumped and banged about in that trunk until I was nearly sick, and I've been famished—fainting for something to eat."

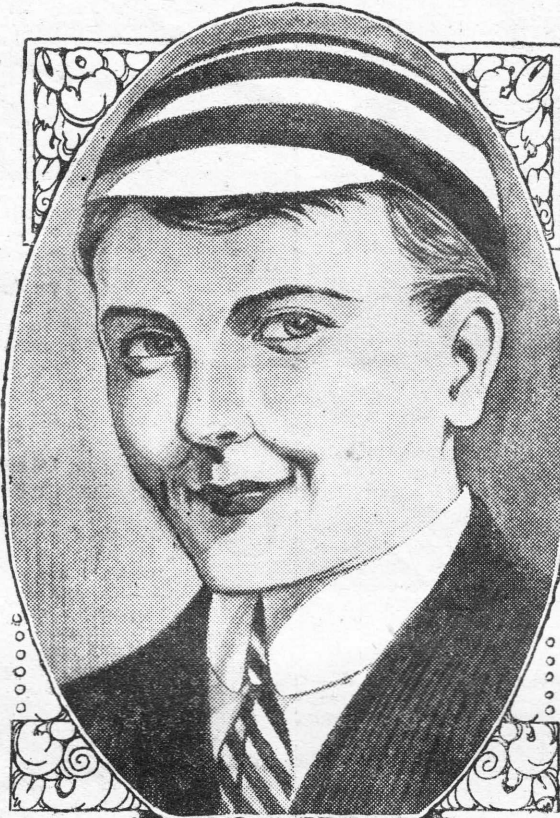
"Why, you fat poacher!" howled Blake. "You've scoffed our grub—enough for a dozen chaps."

"I had to do—I was starving!" groaned Baggy. "I knew Gussy had taken the straps off, and I cut holes in the trunk with my knife. Then I got my hand through and slipped the catch. I say, you chaps, don't be hard on a fellow."

Tom Merry laughed. Angry as he was with the fat junior, he could not help seeing the funny side to Baggy's daring escapade.

"Oh, let the fat ass alone—for the present, anyway," he grinned. "He's had a fright and a stiff lesson, at all events. Now what about tea? Gussy's busted those eggs, I suppose, and someone will have to run to the farm for more."

The eggs were certainly "busted," and Herries hurried away to the farm for more, while the rest of the juniors began to get tea ready, with the comestibles Trimble had left them. Most of the juniors were thirsting for Baggy's gore, but they could not help seeing that the fat junior was really in an exhausted and battered state, and that he had had enough for the present. But the looks that were cast at the fat junior during tea, especially from Arthur Augustus, were not at all friendly looks. Arthur Augustus had promised not to wallop the fat junior, and he kept his word to the letter. But he moaned, and would not be comforted, for the clobber he had so carefully chosen and packed at St. Jim's, and which Baggy Trimble had left at St. Jim's, and the few things Baggy had brought



ARTHUR WELLS.

A member of the Sixth Form in the New House. A jovial and happy-go-lucky fellow. Fond of all kinds of sports and a very good swimmer. A helpful sort to the younger members of the school, to whom he is always willing to give advice. Very chummy with Kill-dare, the head prefect and school captain. When you see Arthur Wells without a smile you can reckon there is something seriously wrong somewhere.

were in such a trampled and rumbled state that their possession brought him little comfort.

But he kept his word, and left Baggy severely alone. And the rest of the juniors soon discovered that he was also determined to keep his word in regard to his inclusion in the caravan party for the rest of the tour. When tea was over, and the juniors were reclining on the grassy bank, Tom Merry spoke of kicking Baggy out at Laneham, the next village they would pass through. Arthur Augustus would not hear of it, and a very heated argument resulted.

Arthur Augustus was adamant, however. He had given his word, and his word was his bond. In the end, the juniors gave in reluctantly. They did not want trouble with Arthur Augustus; and when they heard of the hapless Baggy's Aunt Amelia they could not help feeling sorry for the fat junior. So they agreed at last, on condition that he would work his passage, and that he would be booted out if he misbehaved himself. And when the St. Jim's caravan rumbled on its way again on that sultry summer's evening there was still another addition to the party—Baggy Trimble of the Fourth at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.
 Speeding Up!

"Gussy, you ass—"
 "Where is it, you idiot?"
 "Where's that delightfully peaceful glade—"
 "Beside the rippling brook—"
 "At the edge of the brown woods—"

"Near a farm where we can get fresh eggs and butter?"
 "Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded his chums through it rather anxiously and just a bit flustered. Being bombarded with questions always did fluster Arthur Augustus, especially when they were questions he could not answer.

The long summer evening was drawing in, and the golden red sunset was deepening in the west, and the St. Jim's caravanners were still on the road. But they were seeking a resting-place now for the night.

Long ago Tom Merry had mentioned the necessity of looking out for a suitable camping-place, and Arthur Augustus had mentioned that he knew of one, a trifle farther along the Sussex lane they were rumbling along.

But they had not come to it yet, though they had covered several miles since Arthur Augustus had mentioned its existence, without finding it. Mr. Cobb had suggested several likely places, but as those likely places were situated close to country inns, the juniors had politely resisted the suggestions. But now they were beginning to wonder if the delightfully peaceful glade Gussy had mentioned really existed at all.

So they surrounded the swell of the Fourth, and bombarded him with those rather wrathful questions.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not know how much farthah it is. I remember it distinctly, howevah. I was motahin' with my bwothah Conway, you know, and we stopped for a picnic there. We should have weached the spot long ago, bai Jove!"

"Well, we haven't," grunted Blake. "And it looks as far off as ever, you fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"No signs of anywhere fit to camp," grunted Herries, glancing round the bare fields surrounding them. "What about boarding the old bus, and telling Sunny Jim to get a move on her?"

"That's the wheeze," said Lowther. "We're bound to strike a decent place if we get a move on."

Tom Merry frowned. He was thinking of Sunny Jim, the driver; in fact, Tom had been thinking about Sunny Jim, the driver, for the last hour. Despite the fact that the juniors had plainly showed their disapproval of his fondness for calling upon relatives and friends, and for his remarkable knack of finding breakdowns when close to inns, Sunny Jim had insisted and persisted in calling at inns. Indeed, there had, since tea, been several rather heated altercations on the subject between the driver and the juniors. Undoubtedly Sunny Jim was a cheery fellow, but the juniors were beginning to discover that he could be otherwise than cheery.

In point of fact, the more inns Sunny Jim called at the less sunny he became, and the more erratic his steering became also.

Tom Merry was getting quite worried about Sunny Jim. He knew that, for the present, unless they wished to abandon the tour, they could scarcely do without him, and he knew that Sunny Jim knew it also. At the moment Sunny Jim was indispensable to the St. Jim's caravanners.

Yet Tom knew that if he remained in the driving-seat much longer he would manage to get the lumbering vehicle into the nearest ditch—or into something worse.

For that reason alone it was necessary to find a camping-place soon.

"We ought to have halted at Laneham," said Tom, frowning again. "Anyway, we've got to find a suitable place soon, you chaps. That chap Cobb's nearly squiffy now, and the sooner he's away from the dashed wheel the better. We'll risk speeding up, if you like, though."

"No traffic about," grunted Herries.

"That's so," said Tom. "And perhaps the rotter will find it easier to drive straight going faster than at a crawl like this. Yes, all aboard, chaps, and I'll give him the word."

All the juniors were feeling a bit tired and dusty, and they swarmed aboard Noah's Ark, while Tom went ahead to talk to Sunny Jim. Baggy Trimble was already in the van, reclining at ease in one of the bunks. Baggy did not like walking any more than he liked work, which was not at all. There was plenty of room in the van—more room now since Gussy's precious trunk had gone. For even Gussy had realised that in its present damaged state the trunk was of little use, and he had not objected when his chums had dropped it in the duckpond and left it there—after Gussy had taken his "clobber" out, of course.

It was a great relief to get rid of the cumbersome trunk; but, as Lowther pointed out, there was little comfort in that, since they only exchanged it for a bigger nuisance—referring, of course, to Baggy Trimble.

However, Baggy was now a member of the caravan-party, and the juniors were grimly determined to make the best of a bad job, and to put up with him as long as they could.

"Look here, you fellows," snorted Baggy, as the juniors tramped in, "when are we going to camp? I want my thumping supper, you know. Blessed if I'd have agreed to come with you if I'd known a fellow would have to wait like this for his meals!"

"You fat rotter—"

"What about a little snack now?" suggested Baggy, blinking towards the larder. "Just a little—"

"Oh, dry up, you fat rotter!" said Blake crossly. "A fat lot of grub you've left us for supper, haven't you? You scoffed enough for a dozen at tea, too; and you'd have scoffed the blessed eggs we were leaving for supper if we'd have let you!"

"The—the eggs?"

"Yes," snapped Blake, "the eggs—" He broke off with a sudden suspicion, and glanced quickly into the larder. "Why, you fat thief," he roared furiously, "you've dashed well scoffed those now! Well, you—you—"

"I say, you chaps," said Trimble, eyeing the juniors a trifle nervously, "it—it's all right. I had to have them, you know. They were rotten raw; but a fellow must live, and I couldn't wait till supper. I'll tell you what— Here, keep off, you— Yaroooh! Oh crumbs!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

Without waiting for Baggy to tell them "what," the incensed juniors grasped him and bumped him again and again. The fat junior had had time to get over his exhaustion now, and the juniors felt it a good opportunity to get a bit of their own back.

And they did. They bumped and bumped the fat youth on the shaking floor of the caravan until Baggy's howls and yells raised the echoes. Baggy shrieked for D'Arcy to aid him, but Arthur Augustus was deaf. He had promised to leave Baggy alone, but he had not promised to save him from the vengeance of the remainder of the party.

They were still bumping the fat junior when the van gave a sudden lurch, and began to rumble ahead at a good speed. And the next moment Tom Merry swung himself aboard and entered the van.

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"Hallo!" grinned Tom Merry. "That's right! Give the fat rotter an extra bump for me! What's he been up to now?"

"Pinched the last of the dashed eggs!" snapped Blake.

"Up with him!"

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

Having given Baggy the extra one for Tom Merry, the irate juniors released him, and left him gasping and roaring breathlessly on the floor of the rocking van—and it was rocking now with a vengeance.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry, looking alarmed. "I told the dashed idiot to speed up, but I didn't expect him to put it on like this. He'll have us—"

Without finishing, Tom ran to the front of the van and leaned over the low door to speak a warning to Sunny Jim, who had obviously taken his orders a trifle too literally. And as he did so it happened—suddenly.

Tom had a brief glimpse of something looming in the lane ahead, a great, monstrous vehicle resembling a gaudily-painted furniture-van, and then, even as he yelled out, the caravan went into it with a sickening crash.

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy "Up the Pole!"

CRASH, crash!

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The sudden lurch and shock of the collision—for it was obviously that—sent all the juniors sprawling over the floor of the van amid a chorus of yells, and from somewhere came the smash and crash of breaking crockery.

Arthur Augustus stumbled backwards and sat down forcibly, full on Baggy Trimble, who was still on the floor, and Baggy yelled fiendishly.

"Yaroooh!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, scrambling up in great alarm. "What has happened, deah boys?"

But the juniors did not stop to answer. They also scrambled up, and rushed down the van steps, anxious to know what was amiss.

They very soon did know.

Tom Merry was the first out, and once in the open he saw what he had failed to glimpse before—a long line of gaudily-painted vans stretching away round a bend in the narrow lane just ahead.

It was plainly a travelling circus or menagerie into which they had crashed, or, rather, the rear van of the yellow and gilded vehicles.

But Tom did not have the time to get more than a glimpse of the rest of the vans. All his attention for one thrilling moment was given to the rear van into which they had crashed.

His first glimpse showed him that the yellow pantech-nicon-like affair had iron bars to it, and his second glimpse showed him that the bars were broken and twisted—the rear and side completely shattered.

Then he saw something else—something huge, ungainly, and grotesque—that ambled through the wreckage on to the lane, emitting blood-curdling grunts and snarls as it did so.

"Mum—my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, almost petrified for the moment with alarm. "It—it's a bear!"

It was a bear, right enough, an enormous brown and shaggy creature, with open, slaving jaws and wickedly-glinting eyes, grunting and growling in rage.

It sighted Tom Merry standing there with his startled chums behind him, and with a terrifying growl it raised itself on hind legs and lumbered forward in a blind charge.

At the same moment the road seemed to be filled with yelling men, obviously showmen, who gesticulated and yelled.

"Run for it, you young fools!"

"E's mad! Run for it!"

The startled juniors ran for it quickly enough. Mr. Cobb also saw the danger, and with a yell he scrambled up from the driver's seat on to the roof of the caravan. It was clear Mr. Cobb was uninjured, at all events.

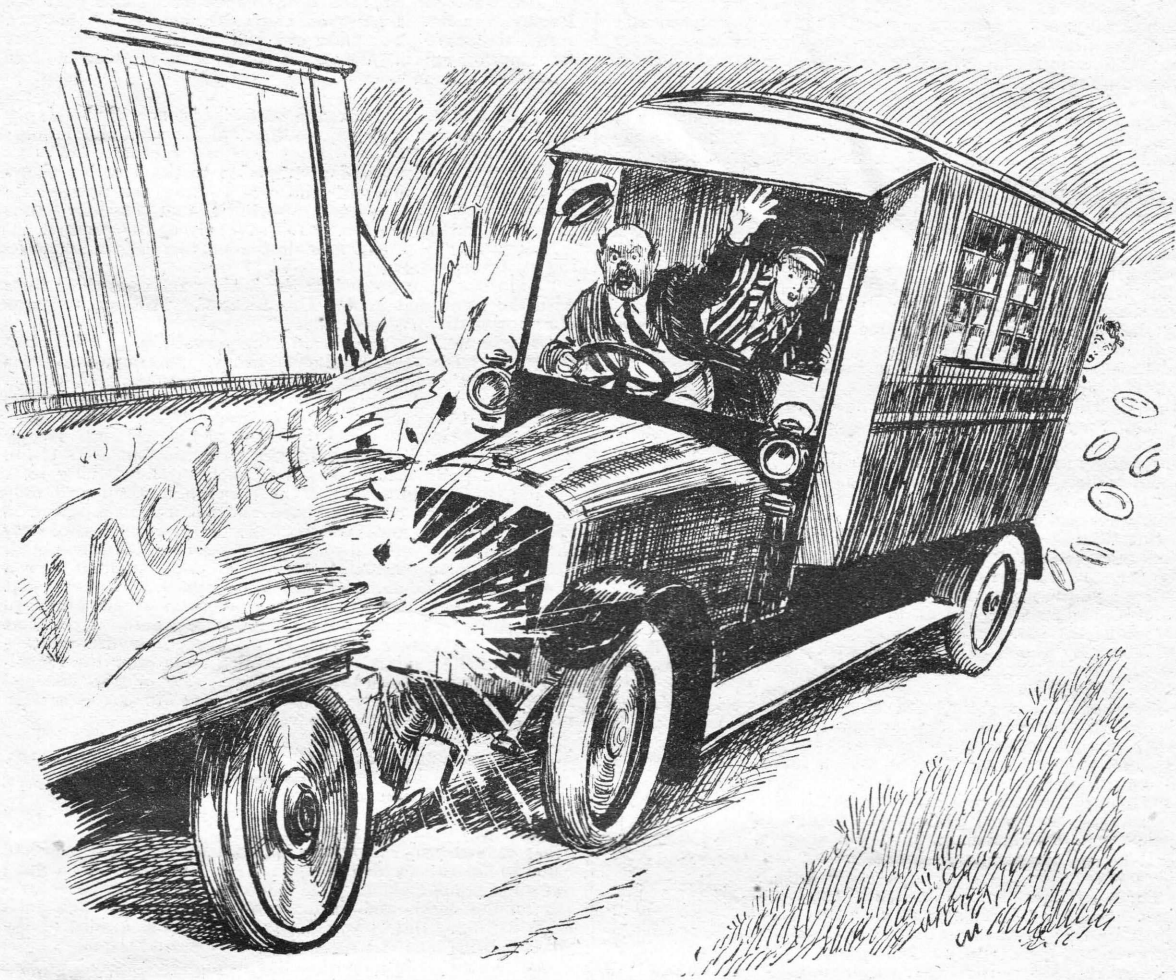
"Wun!" shrieked Arthur Augustus frantically. "Oh, bai Jove! Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

But the "deah boys" needed no telling to do that. They did not like the look of bruin at all. They turned and fled along the lane for dear life. Arthur Augustus started off, changed his mind suddenly, and ran up the steps of the caravan.

But the door was locked fast. Baggy Trimble had discovered what the rumpus was about, and had locked himself in, fore and aft, as it were. And Arthur Augustus leaped down the steps, and all but crashed into the ugly-looking bear.

"Yooop!" yelped Gussy in sheer horror. "Oh, bai Jove!"

The bear lunched up on its hind legs again, and made for



As Tom Merry leaned over the side of the van, he had a brief glimpse of something looming in the lane ahead—a great, monstrous vehicle, and then, even as he yelled out, the caravan crashed into it, with an appalling, rending sound. "Great Scott!" (See page 14.)

Arthur Augustus, grunting threateningly. Arthur Augustus yelled again, and bolted down the road after his chums, only just escaping a hefty sweep of the bear's paw.

Like a runner on the cinder-track went Arthur Augustus along the narrow lane, and after him went bruin, with rage in his redly-glinting little eyes.

On the side of the bear's cage were the printed words: "Bruno, the Famous Tame Grizzly!" But if this was the famous Bruno, there was little tameness about him now. Possibly that unexpected crash had damaged him a little, and had untamed him, so to speak, and put him in a very bad temper. At all events, he seemed to think Tom Merry & Co. were responsible, and he seemed to be bent upon venting his hasty temper upon them.

Down the road sprinted Arthur Augustus, and after him went Bruno, grunting and growling horribly, and after Bruno went several of the showmen, shouting raucously, and waving various implements. But it was a half-hearted chase on their part. Possibly, like the juniors, they did not like the look of the tame bear.

In any case, they could scarcely have overtaken Bruno had they tried. He lumbered on, covering the ground at an amazing speed, and very soon the unfortunate Gussy realised he could not hope to escape by running.

Gussy heard the grunts and growls and thud of padded feet drawing nearer and nearer. He ventured a swift look over his shoulder, and the sight of the bear within a few yards of him caused him to lose his head completely.

"Oh, bai Jove!" wailed Gussy.

The hedge on both sides was thick and very high. To hope to squeeze through before bruin was upon him was hopeless.

Then Arthur Augustus spotted the telegraph pole.

Had Gussy stopped to think it might have occurred to him as extremely unlikely that he would escape the bear any easier by climbing than running.

But there was no time to think, only time for action. And Arthur Augustus acted frantically.

He dashed at the telegraph pole and began to swarm up it, sheer terror and desperation lending him unusual strength and energy. But it was not a very thick post, and in a flash he had reached the foot-rests which started some seven feet from the ground.

The rest was easy to the active junior, and he went up those foot-rests like a sailor up the rigging of a ship; nor did he stop until he had reached the wires above his head. Then he stopped, and puffed and panted, and gasped with relief.

But it was a very short-lived relief. A sudden ferocious growl, and a sudden hefty shake of the telegraph pole made Gussy look quickly downwards, and as he did so he yelled in sheer horror.

The bear was coming after him, climbing the pole with slow and grotesque movements. The pole shook and shook, and Arthur Augustus clung on like grim death, and yelled and shrieked.

"Help! Oh, bai Jove! Help! Wescue! Wescue!"

But help was at hand for Arthur Augustus. Gussy's frantic shrieks had already acquainted his chums with his hapless plight, and at a word from Tom Merry the juniors came dashing back at top speed along the lane.

"Stones!" shouted Tom Merry desperately. "Pelt the thing with stones! Hold on, Gussy! Hold on!"

There were plenty of stones in the dusty lane, and in a flash Tom Merry & Co. were at work, pelting the animal madly. Large and small stones rattled about the head of the grizzly, and he stopped, and looked down in a curiously-puzzled manner.

"Go it!" panted Tom Merry. "Let the brute have it hot and strong, chaps!"

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

As fast as they could pick stones up the juniors flung them with deadly aim, scarcely one missing its objective. But after the first stare of surprise the ungainly animal merely hesitated a moment, growling and grunting, and then it went on again.

It was almost at the top now, and Arthur Augustus was clinging madly to the cross-trees, and Arthur Augustus was just thinking of making a desperate bid by taking to the slender, shaking wires, when a newcomer arrived on the scene.

He was a boy of about their own age, a sturdy, well-set-up youth, with sun-browned features, clear blue eyes, and tousled and uncovered hair. His clothes were dusty and travel-stained, and the juniors guessed in a flash that he belonged to the menagerie.

He stopped at the bottom of the pole, and his voice rang out sharp and commanding:

"Bruno, you old rascal! Come down at once! Do you hear me?"

The effect was startling and instantaneous.

The angry animal gave a curious grunt and looked downwards. Then he started to descend, awkwardly, but swiftly.

"Mum-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "I say—look out, chaps!"

Suddenly remembering their own danger, the juniors were about to bolt, when the stranger gave a laugh.

"It's all serene, you chaps!" he said coolly. "You needn't worry about old Bruno now."

But Tom Merry & Co. were not so certain about that, and they backed away, ready to bolt at the first sign of danger. The bear reached the ground, and as it did so the strange youth grasped a broken length of rope that hung from its collar, and gave bruin a light, playful cut with the switch he carried.

"You silly old rascal!" he grinned. "What d'you mean by it, eh? Here, I see what's the matter with you, old chap!"

He plucked at a splinter of wood that was sticking from the bear's shaggy hide, and after a sharp tug wrenched it out and pitched it away. The bear gave a curious grunt of satisfaction, and hung its head like a human being caught in a guilty act.

"He's the best-tempered chap going, in the ordinary way," grinned the stranger, patting the shaggy coat. "But that little smash-up must have hurt him above a bit. Anyway, he'll be all serene now. Hallo, here's old Patchy! Now for a row!"

Three of the menagerie hands came hurrying up just then, and Tom Merry saw at once that there were signs of trouble. One of them—a big, brutal-looking fellow with a heavy moustache, and a black patch over one eye—came up, cracking the whip he carried and scowling at the juniors.

"You young 'ounds!" he yelled. "What d'you mean by this, eh? You'll pay for this smash-up, my lads!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, eyeing him calmly. "It was as much your fault as ours. Your van was on the wrong side of the road, anyway. It's there now, and you can see that from here!"

"I wants none of your lip, youngster," said the burly bully furiously. "Wrong side, eh? Wrong side, be 'anged! I was drivin' that there van, and now I'll get it 'ot from the guv'nor for this, darn you! Your driver must 'ave bin drunk!"

Tom Merry frowned. He knew well enough that Sunny Jim was to blame chiefly. He had undoubtedly been driving the cumbersome vehicle recklessly, and Tom felt he could easily have avoided the accident had he been quite sober.

But Tom strongly objected to the bullying tone of the man with a patch, for all that.

"There's no need to talk like that, anyway!" snapped Tom. "We'll settle the matter with your boss, in any case."

"And blame it all on me, eh?" snarled Patch-eye. "The guv'nor's down on me enough as it is. An' I ain't standing no more cheek from you kids, neither. Any more, and I'll lay this whip about you!"

And the bully was just stepping forward threateningly when one of his companions gave a warning cry, as a fat, flashily dressed individual came bustling up, his red features more anxious than angry.

"Ere, none of that, Patchy!" he bawled. "None of your darned tricks! You leave them young gents alone. Anybody 'urt? No. That's good! Who fetched old Bruno down, eh?"

"Young Nippy did it," said one of the showmen. "E 'ad 'im down in no time, Mister Jackson."

"Good lad!" snapped Mr. Jackson, who was obviously the proprietor of the menagerie. "E's a good lad is Nippy. Well, I suppose these young gents was with that darned caravan, eh? 'Ow the deuce did it 'appen?"

"It weren't my fault, guv'nor," said Patchy, glowering at the juniors. "Their driver must 'ave bin drunk—"

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"Ho, was he?" ejaculated Mr. Jackson. "You shut up, Patchy, anyhow. I got eyes, and I can see you 'ad that van across the road. You clear out and see if you can get that van running again. We got to camp afore dark at Melton, remember. Jim!"

"Yessir!"

"Take old Bruno back and land 'im in one of the empty cages. Now, young gents, we'll go an' see what the damage is."

Time was evidently of great value to the hustling showman. The next moment Jim was leading the now docile Bruno back along the road, and the rest of the show hands followed, Patchy scowling back savagely at the juniors.

Arthur Augustus had now descended to the ground, looking still very shaky.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped as the juniors retraced their steps with the somewhat genial Mr. Jackson. "I thought I was done for that time, deah boys!"

"So did we!" grinned Tom Merry ruefully. "That chap Nippy saved your giddy bacon fairly. Anyway, this looks like being a thundering expensive holiday for you, Gussy. It was mainly our fault about the smash-up, and we'll have to pay up, I suppose."

The group soon reached the scene of the accident. Baggy Trimble was still locked in the caravan, but Mr. Cobb, looking a trifle scared still, was back in the driving seat. To the juniors' great relief the caravan had suffered only slight damage to one mudguard and a lamp, in addition to various scratches and loss of paint. Fortunately, also, only the bars of the cage and some of the woodwork was smashed, and after some discussion Arthur Augustus handed over a fiver to Mr. Jackson, who very kindly agreed to accept that sum in settlement. Possibly it was because the old cage was insured, and not because he was so kind-hearted, that Mr. Jackson agreed. But, at all events, he did agree—greatly to the juniors' relief. And a little later the travelling menagerie was on the move again. The juniors watched it go, little dreaming that they were to meet certain members of it again before very long.

"Well, thank goodness it was no worse!" grunted Tom Merry. "Anyway, this sort of thing can't go on, you chaps. We'll have to do something about that rotter Cobb. But let's get on. We can talk matters over when we've camped."

And Mr. Cobb—who had been eyeing the juniors very thoughtfully—started his wheezy old engine, and the St. Jim's caravanners moved on. From a kindly yokel who had come to see the accident they learned that there was a good camping ground about "alf a moile" down the next turning on the right, and the caravan moved slowly and took that turning. But it would have been much kinder of the yokel had he been a little more careful in his estimate of the distance, for it was only after rumbling down a rutty, narrow cart-track for some thirty minutes that they reached the place, and by that time dusk was deepening into darkness.

CHAPTER 9.

Sunny Jim Protests!

IT was quite a nice camping place. The long, rutty cart-track had brought them to a gate, and through the gate was a pleasant stretch of common, covered with trees and furze. At the edge of the common was a wood, and between these was a little tinkling stream of crystal water. In the distance, just visible through a dip in the common, was a church spire, telling the St. Jim's caravanners that a village was handy—a village where fresh supplies could be obtained.

The juniors, tired out and hungry, set to work in earnest, eager to get everything to rights before the sun sank over the Sussex common. Despite the fact that Baggy Trimble explained that he was tired, he was kicked into activity, and very soon a camp-fire was blazing and crackling cheerily against the dark background of the woods, and very soon a cloth was set on the grass, and the famished St. Jim's party were seated round it, devouring a meal of tinned beef and tongue, washed down with coffee, for with the setting of the sun the night air was just a trifle chilly after the heat of the day.

At a little distance away Mr. Cobb was seated, eating his supper alone, and drinking liquid refreshment out of a bottle—refreshment which the juniors had not provided. And as the juniors ate they glanced often at Mr. Cobb.

Save for a faint glimmer in the west the red sun had gone now. But the red firelight flickered over the camp, on the trees and murmuring stream, and, with the kettle steaming cheerily on the fire, the scene was a very pleasant one, and the juniors should have felt at peace with the world.

Yet they did not feel so; they did not feel at peace with Mr. Cobb. They were very worried indeed about Mr. Cobb, and it was Mr. Cobb they were discussing as they ate their supper in the flickering firelight.

What to do with that thirsty gentleman they hardly knew.

The tour could scarcely go on without him, and, at the same time, Mr. Cobb could not be allowed to carry on as he had been carrying on that day. They did not want another accident, nor did they want their driver to fall foul of the police.

But one thing they were resolved upon, and that was that unless Mr. Cobb changed his conduct they would have to part with him, come what might.

"The sooner we settle the matter once and for all the better," said Tom Merry at last. "We shall have to risk being stranded here for a bit. After all, it's a jolly nice spot for camping out, and there's Melton not far away. It's a goodish big place, and we ought to get a driver from there, surely."

"It's all that ass Gussy's fault!" grunted Blake.

"Bai Jove! Why is it my fault, Jack Blake?" inquired Arthur Augustus warmly.

"For ever hiring a motor-van at all!" snorted Blake. "I admit it's a jolly good van, and the idea would have been all right if you'd arranged for a decent driver, too. As it is, it looks as if we're going to be mucked up altogether."

"That's right!" agreed Lowther. "Gussy's mucked us up and ruined the whole tour, as usual. I vote we bump him here and now!"

"Bai Jove, Lowther, you wottah—"

"Peace, my children," said Tom Merry. "Don't squabble now, for goodness' sake! Look here! If you're game to risk us being stranded I'll tackle that rotter now. I'll tell him straight that unless he stops acting the goat he'll get the boot!"

"Go ahead!" grinned Blake, glancing over at the recumbent Sunny Jim. "Better go carefully, though. He looks none too sunny now, and he may kick up a dust."

"Let him!" snapped Tom. "Here goes, anyway."

And Tom Merry walked across to Mr. Cobb. At first glance Tom saw that the fellow knew they had been discussing him. He scowled up at Tom.

"Look here, Cobb," said Tom quietly. "It's about time we had an understanding. You realise, I suppose, that it was mainly your fault about that smash-up this evening?"

"Ho! Does I?"

"You should, if you don't!" said Tom curtly. "Well, we're not going to risk any more accidents of that kind, Cobb. You've got to stop calling at every dashed pub we come to!"

"Ho! 'Ave I?"

"Yes! Unless you promise to keep clear of such places while travelling with us here and now, we'll part company. You can clear out in the morning."

"Ho! Can I?"

"Yes. We're fed-up, Cobb!"

Mr. Cobb rose to his feet. He rose with difficulty, and stood swaying slightly. Tom noted that his eyes were glinting balefully, and he saw trouble ahead. Sunny Jim looked far from sunny now.

"You—you impertinent little brat!"

"Look here—" began Tom uneasily.

"So I got to keep clear of pubs, 'ave I?" demanded Mr. Cobb, in a loud, husky voice.

"I've said so."

"And you'll kick me out if I does—hey?"

"That's what I said."

"Arter bringin' me all this 'ere way," roared Mr. Cobb. "Arter bringin' me all these many miles, yer goin' to cast me off—hey? I'll see you don't—not for nothin', neither."

"Look here—"

"I arks you?" roared Mr. Cobb excitedly. "I arks you—'ave n't I done my dooty on this 'ere trip? And now you're goin' to turn me off—turn me off like an old shoe. Why, I'll knock your block off if you gives me any of your lip, young gent or no young gent!"

"Listen to me, Cobb—"

"I ain't listenin' to nobody," said Mr. Cobb, in a voice that could scarcely have failed to reach the distant village. "Think I wants your darn job—a quid a week, hey? Thinks you can treat a poor workin' bloke jest as you likes, hey?"

"Look here, don't make such a dashed row," said Tom, looking about uneasily. "You'll have—"

"Who's makin' a row?" roared Mr. Cobb. "I've stood more lip from you kids to-day as I've stood from any men. I ain't standin' no more, though. Drunk, am I? Want to get rid of me, hey? I'll show you! Why, I'll—I'll—"

Mr. Cobb dropped words for actions then. He lurched forward and made a blind swipe at Tom with his fist. But Tom was ready for trouble, and he dodged neatly and sprang back. Mr. Cobb sprawled forward and measured his length on the ground.

"Back up, you chaps!" called Tom Merry. "If the rotter wants trouble, he can have it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Cobb "had it" right enough. He staggered to his feet and went for Tom Merry with a roar of rage. Tom

side-stepped neatly, and tapped him just as neatly on the chin.

Mr. Cobb yelled, staggered, and all but fell again.

"You young 'ound!" he roared ferociously.

Undoubtedly Mr. Cobb was angry, but his anger availed him little against Tom Merry & Co. The juniors were fed-up with Mr. Cobb, and they were in no mood to stand any nonsense from him.

Before Mr. Cobb could even raise a fist again the juniors were upon him in a swarm, and he went crashing down.

"You little himps!" he howled, struggling furiously. "Why, I'll smash the lot of you! I'll— Yooop! Owl Gerroff a chap! Grooooh! Yarroooh!"

Mr. Cobb yelled fiendishly as Monty Lowther banged his head on the ground.

"Go on struggling!" remarked Lowther cheerfully. "And I'll go on making a hole with your napper, old top. Like that!"

"Yarooop!"

"And that!"

"Yarrough!"

Mr. Cobb ceased to struggle after that second bump. The ground was quite hard in parts, and Mr. Cobb's head happened to be resting on a hard part.

"Had enough?" asked Tom Merry grimly. "It's your own fault, you know. You asked for trouble, and you've got it. You'll get more if you ask for more. See?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am vewy surprised indeed at your conduct, Cobb," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I thought, at first, that you were quite a decent fellow, bai Jove!"

"Groooogh! Leggo, you gents! Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Cobb's voice sounded quite subdued.

"I say, you chaps," said Baggy Trimble, hurrying up now the danger in the scene was past. "Why not chuck the beast in the stream there?"

"Here!" roared Mr. Cobb. "Don't you dare— Lemme get up, young gents!" he ended appealingly. "I was only joking. I—I lost my temper like. I won't try no more rough work."

"You'd better not," snapped Tom, grinning at the sudden change in Sunny Jim's voice. "Let him get up, chaps. No, Baggy, we won't ruin the drinking water by chucking this beauty in."

"Be almost as bad as making you wash in it, Baggy," said Lowther.

"Beasts!"

Baggy retired from the limelight, and Mr. Cobb was allowed to stagger to his feet. And he kept his word and tried no more "rough work." He had evidently felt himself more than equal to eight juniors, and had now discovered his mistake.

"Look here, young gents," he mumbled humbly. "I hopes as you'll forgive a feller for losin' his head like. I reckon you was right about me calling at pubs—I owns up to that. And I hopes as you gents will forgive me and forget and give a chap another chance."

Tom Merry frowned and eyed his chums questioningly. Mr. Cobb had certainly "lost his head," and after all—

"Bai Jove! If Cobb is twuly wepentant," said Arthur Augustus gently, "then I am sure we can forgive him, deah boys. Shall we give him anothah chance?"

"We'll talk that over before morning," said Tom. "We're only asking Cobb to behave himself. If he will, I see no reason why he should go."

And the juniors did talk the question over, and in the end they agreed to give Mr. Cobb another chance. They realised that he had acted as he did when not quite himself, and they felt that if he could behave himself they could stand him—especially as they did not wish to be stranded. Afd Mr. Cobb was grateful, and thanked them humbly, and he even volunteered to help Baggy Trimble wash up—which offer Baggy gladly accepted. In fact, Mr. Cobb was quite subdued, and seemed to be ashamed and anxious to make amends. And when Mr. Cobb had crept into his little tent that night, and the juniors turned in, they went to sleep with the happy feeling that all was going to be merry and bright after all.

CHAPTER 10.

A Night Alarm!

"HELP!"

"What the—"

"Help, help! Burglars! Thieves! Police! Help!"

"What the giddy thump—"

Tom Merry, thoroughly awake now, flung off his blankets and rushed to the door of the tent. He pulled the flap back, and blinked out, rubbing his drowsy eyes as he did so. The next moment, likewise awakened by those piercing yells, Herries, Lowther, and Manners joined him at the door of the tent and blinked out.

The St. Jim's caravanners' encampment had been asleep for hours—or should have been asleep for hours—and Tom Merry knew it must be long after midnight. The moonlight glimmered on the stream that reflected the sky, and lit up wide stretches of the ghostly common beyond. But under the shadowy trees, where the caravan stood, it was deep darkness, and not a movement could be seen.

Yet there was plenty of sound, for it was from the direction of the caravan that the piercing yells proceeded. And even as Tom Merry tried to pierce the deep gloom under the trees, a light flashed and glimmered, showing up the cosy interior of the van through the open doorway.

"My hat! That was Trimble's fat voice," gasped Tom, in a breathless whisper. "Let's go and see what's wrong."

He started across the moonlit stretch of grass at a run, heedless of his bare feet. The yells had ceased now, and from the lighted van sounded questioning, angry voices.

With Lowther, Herries, and Manners at his heels, Tom plunged beneath the shadowy trees, and as he did so a pyjama-clad figure plunged down the caravan steps.

Neither the pyjama-clad one nor Tom Merry saw each other until it was too late, and the next moment they collided with terrific force.

The next moment Tom Merry found himself rolling over in fierce combat with the unknown—unknown, at least, until the next moment, when a well-known voice rang out in a gasping yell:

"Wescue! Wescue, deah boys! I've got the wascal! Take that, bai Jove!"

Punch!

"Yarcoooh!"

Tom Merry took it—full on the nose, and he yelped fiendishly.

"Stop it, Gussy, you silly ass!" he howled. "Can't you see it's me? Ow! Oh, great pip! You've busted my nose, you idiot!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The light from within the van flashed out on the scene as Blake and Digby appeared suddenly at the top of the van steps. Behind them showed the fat, white face of Baggy Trimble.

They blinked down at the two pyjama-clad forms on the grass blankly.

"Great pip! What's all this mean?" ejaculated Blake.

"Gussy, you ass—"

"Oh, bai Jove! I—I thought it was the twamp!" gasped Arthur Augustus, sitting upright and blinking at Tom Merry in astonishment. "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You—you silly owl!" howled Tom, sitting up and caressing a rapidly-swelling nose. "What the thump did you want to come barging out like that for? Oh, you—you—"

Words failed Tom, and he staggered to his feet, glowering at Arthur Augustus. That astonished junior also scrambled up, feeling himself all over tenderly.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Oh, bai Jove! Tom Mewwy, you weekless ass! It was your fault for wushin' about in the dark like that. I washed into you, and imagined it was the twamp."

"The—the tramp?"

"The twamp Twimble was yellin' about," said Arthur Augustus. "I washed out, hopin' to catch the wascal, and went right into you in the dark."

"What rot!" snorted Jack Blake, turning and subjecting the quaking Baggy to a withering glare. "I don't believe there was a tramp at all. The fat ass was dreaming, of course!"

"Oh, really, Blake!" mumbled Baggy Trimble, who was shaking with fright. "I tell you it was a tramp—a great, hulking brute, he was. I woke up and felt his hand on my face."

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "So that was what the row was about? I heard that fat ass yelling, and we ran over. You say you saw someone, Trimble?"

"Yes, of course, I did!" burred Trimble. "I woke up suddenly and saw him—a great brute. I—I grappled with him—"

"You fat fibber!"

"Well, I jumped up, and tried to," amended Trimble. "But I banged my head on top of the bunk, and that stunned me for a bit. Then I yelled for help."

"Well, that's truthful, anyway," said Blake. "You did yell, and no mistake, you fat idiot! This comes of gorging other people's grub, you greedy pig! Dream again and yell out like that, anyway, and—"

"Half a mo., Blake," said Tom, eyeing Baggy fixedly. "If Baggy did see anything—"

"Of course, he didn't!" snorted Digby. "His first howl must have awakened us, and we saw and heard nothing. The fat idiot was dreaming, of course."

"I wasn't, I tell you," stammered Baggy. "I only saw the figure dimly, but I swear I saw it, you chaps. If you'd only rushed out sooner—"

"I jolly well wish that idiot, Gussy, had rushed out a

bit sooner and missed me!" growled Tom Merry, rubbing his nose ruefully. "Anyway, did you see or hear anything, Gussy?"

"Wathah not," said Arthur Augustus, staring at Trimble. "I fancied I did, and that's why I washed out; but it must have been you fellows, you know. It is pwetty plain the fat wottah was dweamin'!"

"We'll have a look round to make absolutely sure, anyway," grunted Tom. "The row hasn't awakened Sunny Jim, anyway," added Tom, as he glanced across and saw the flap of Mr. Cobb's tent still tied up. "Come on!"

"Shall we root that rotter out?" asked Lowther.

"No; let him alone," said Tom. "It's a marvel he hasn't heard the row as it is, though."

Not one of the juniors really believed that Baggy had actually seen anything, and Tom only suggested a search to settle the fat junior's fears. There was certainly no need to rouse Mr. Cobb to help in the search. And it was a very half-hearted search. Tom roused the dying embers of the fire, and the flames shot up and flickered against the back-ground of trees.

There was nothing unusual to be seen or heard, however, and after a very brief search round, the juniors gave it up. Lowther suggested giving Trimble a good, sound bumping for causing all the needless rumpus, but none of the juniors felt equal to the task, and Baggy scuttled into his bunk. There he started again to protest that he was speaking the truth, but boots slung from the other bunks soon quietened him. And after a short time silence once again settled down upon the encampment as the tired caravanners dropped off to sleep again.

That morning none of the St. Jim's juniors were early risers. In the big tent, Tom Merry was the first to get up, and the sun was high in the sky when he looked out upon a beautiful summer morning.

"Oh, ripping!" said Tom, glancing out over the wide, sun-lit common. "Rouse out, you slackers! Show a leg, there!"

As Tom's chums were rather slow to obey, he dragged and rolled them out of their blankets, and there was a chorus of protestations, followed by a general assault upon Tom by his chums with pillows. But once up, all the juniors were very soon dressed, glad to be up and about on such a morning.

Tom Merry ran over to the caravan beneath the trees. From within sounded movements, and an excited clamour of voices. To Tom's astonishment, he found the occupants still in their pyjamas, and apparently busy going through the pockets of their clothes.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Tom Merry, stopping in the doorway and staring. "What's this game?"

Blake looked up, showing a puzzled, excited face.

"I'm blessed if we know yet, Tommy," he said seriously. "But it looks jolly queer. Gussy can't find his gold ticker, and my wristwatch seems to have gone, too."

"And mine!" grunted Digby, staring round him blankly. "It was only a blessed gunmetal watch, but it was a jolly good one."

"Bai Jove, deah boys—"

He was interrupted by Baggy Trimble, who gave an excited squeak.

"I say, you chaps, my silver turnip's gone, too!" he howled. "It's that tramp—the tramp who was here last night. I told you, didn't I? Now perhaps you'll believe me. Oh, crumbs! My silver turnip! It wouldn't go, but it was a jolly good watch!"

"Great pip!" said Tom Merry, in alarm. "Are you sure the things have gone?"

"I feah there is no doubt about it, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, in a scared voice. "I wemembah distinctlay placin' my watch— Oh, bai Jove! My wallet's gone, too!"

"Your—your wallet?"

"Yaas," wailed Gussy. "It's gone—vanished, bai Jove!"

"With—with all your money in it?" gasped Tom.

"Yaas, nearly twenty pounds, bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Blake in horror. "My dashed wallet's gone, too; there was three quids in it!"

"And mine!" yelled Digby suddenly. "With nearly four quids! Oh, my hat!"

With Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Herries watching aghast in the door, the juniors frantically went through their belongings again and again. But there was not the slightest doubt about it. The watches had gone, likewise the wallets and purses; even Baggy Trimble had lost five bob in addition to the silver turnip that was a good watch but wouldn't go. Moreover, the final search revealed the fact that pencil-cases, fountain-pens, and other items of value had also gone.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, when the juniors eyed each other at last blankly. "Baggy must have been right, then—there must have been someone in here last night, after all."

"You wouldn't listen to me!" wailed Baggy Trimble. "It's



"On him!" shouted Tom Merry. "Down with the rotter!" Crash! A hefty tap from Tom Merry's fist took Mr. Cobb full on the nose. He yelped, and the next moment the juniors were swarming on the rascal, and he measured his length in the ditch, roaring madly. (See page 20.)

your fault. If you'd gone after the blessed tramp when I told you—"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Blake crossly. "My hat! This is the limit, you fellows! Hadn't we better have a hunt round for the blighter?"

"What's the good of that?" snapped Tom. "The tramp will be miles away by this, you ass! Only thing we can do is to let the police know. Let's have something to eat first, anyway. Jove! I wonder if Sunny Jim's lost anything? It was funny he didn't— I wonder—"

A startled look came suddenly into Tom's eyes, and without a word he dashed from the caravan, taking the steps in a jump. He made at a run for the little patrol tent, a growing, alarming suspicion in his mind.

The tent-flap was still laced, and Tom wrenched it back in a crack. Then he gave a yell.

The tent was empty, and the bed had obviously not been slept in.

Mr. Cobb was gone. Like the watches, the wallets, and other personal belongings of the caravanners, Sunny Jim had very evidently vanished in the still hours of the night.

CHAPTER 11.

Nippy Again!

TOM stood and stared.

From the caravan Blake and the others came running. They had heard Tom's excited yell, and they already guessed the truth.

"Gone?" panted Blake as he ran up.

Tom pointed into the little tent.

"Gone right enough!" he growled grimly. "It's pretty plain that our dashed valuables have gone with him, too, the scoundrel!"

"Have you chaps lost anything, then?"

"No. Baggy's saved us that," said Tom, smiling grimly. "He'd have cleaned our tent out, if Baggy hadn't wakened up and made him bolt. Well, my hat! What idiots—what howling idiots we were to trust such a fellow! We might have known he was only eating humble pie last night for a purpose of his own."

"He must be an out-and-out rotter!"

"No doubt about that!" groaned Tom, looking about him grimly. "Well, the sooner we get on the trail the better, chaps. My hat! Stranded and robbed of nearly all our cash! If it isn't the giddy outside edge!"

The juniors eyed each other glumly—very glumly. Here they were, miles from the nearest town, with a motor-caravan that none could drive, and with only a few pounds between them. In addition to the loss of their valuables, they were in a decidedly awkward position—all realised that.

"If only the dashed van were on the high road, it would be better, in a way!" grunted Tom. "Anyway, it's no good grouching. Let's get things moving. We'll have a cup of coffee, and then while some of you chaps are getting brekker ready I'll go to the village for the local bobby. After that I think some of us had better walk over to Melton and see about hiring a driver."

It was the wisest course that occurred to the juniors then, and in a few moments the kettle was boiling on the oil-stove, and soon the aroma of freshly-made coffee pervaded the encampment. And, after hurriedly swallowing a cup, Tom started out for the village across the common.

And while he was away the rest of the juniors were busy. From the edge of the woodland they gathered armfuls of firewood, and a camp fire was soon blazing merrily. Over the fire three sticks were stuck, gipsy fashion, for the oil-stove was scarcely big enough for the cooking of enough food for eight hungry schoolboys—or, rather, thirteen, according to Lowther, who insisted upon counting Baggy Trimble as half a dozen. Then, leaving Baggy busy with a large frying-pan loaded with rashers of frizzling bacon, the rest of the juniors went for a bathe in the clear stream that ran through the woods.

They had just finished dressing again when Tom came back. He reported that the village was really only a tiny hamlet, and that the nearest policeman was three miles away.

But his journey had not been for nothing, for he brought back some fresh eggs and butter, and soon all were enjoying a breakfast of bacon, and eggs, and steaming coffee, and cold ham, with bread-and-butter and marmalade to

finish the meal. It was just as the meal had ended that Lowther made a suggestion.

"Look here!" he said. "What's the good of giving that rotter more time to get away? Let's leave Melton for a bit and get on his trail. We're scouts, and should be able to pick up his trail, anyway."

"Good wheeze!" said Tom. "Why didn't we think of that before, chaps? Let's— Hallo! Who's this merchant?"

A figure had suddenly appeared on the edge of the woodland—a slight, youthful figure in dusty clothes and a tousled, untidy mop of uncovered hair.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Lowther, staring. "It's that menagerie chap—Nippy they call him, I think. What the thump—"

The juniors jumped up from the grass, and eyed the menagerie youth curiously as he came towards them, a curious grin on his cheery features.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "It is Nippy wight enough—the fellow who rescued me from that wotten bear! How wippin'! I wanted to express my gwatitude to the deah boy, and heah he is!"

The youth came up, with rather a longing glance at the steaming coffee and remnants of the meal.

"I've been searching the common for you chaps," he grinned. "A farm yokel told me you were camped hereabouts. Do you chaps happen to have lost anything—a thing with a nose like a red lamp and a mouth like a rat-trap?"

"Cobb!" yelled Tom.

"Sunny Jim!" gasped Lowther excitedly. "You don't mean—"

"I don't know what the merchant's name is," grinned Nippy; "but if you do happen to have mislaid him I can tell you where to find him again."

The juniors eyed him eagerly. The description was certainly rather vague, but it fitted Mr. Cobb, their absconded driver, for all that.

"You—you mean our driver, I suppose—" began Tom. "That's the chap!" said Nippy, with a chuckle. "I saw him driving your van yesterday—the chap who bashed into Bruno's cage. I recognised him at once."

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom excitedly. "Where is the cad, then? Look here! The brute's robbed us—pinched our valuables and done a moonlight. Where is the rotter?"

"I'll soon tell you that," grinned Nippy cheerfully. "I left him in a barn. I thought that was it. It was like this. I happened to be dossing in that barn last night, and about two this morning I was awakened up by somebody entering the barn. I lay quiet, thinking it was a tramp, and I was jolly glad I did afterwards. He didn't see me in the straw, and he took a stub of candle from his pocket and lit it. I spotted him then, and was curious—especially when he started taking things from his pockets—things I knew couldn't belong to him. There was a gold watch—"

"Mine, bai Jove!"

"And a huge silver turnip—"

"Mine!" howled Trimble.

"And a wristwatch—"

"Mine!" snapped Blake.

"And goodness knows what else. Anyway, when I spotted the wallets as well I saw the matter was jolly serious. I guessed he'd robbed you chaps, and done a moonlight. So when he'd dropped asleep I slipped out and closed the doors. Then I shoved the bar across—"

"Good man! And is he there now? Quick!"

Nippy chuckled.

"I expect so," he grinned. "I left him there, and since then I've been hunting about for you fellows."

"Bai Jove! That is vewy good of you, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Tom, his eyes gleaming. "If you'll just tell us where—"

"I'll lead you there soon enough," said Nippy. "I got a licking through him last night, and I'd like to dot him one on his red signal-lamp."

"But—"

"You see," grinned Nippy, "that little smash-up upset old Patchy—the chap with one eye, you remember—and he took it out of me last night with a dog-whip. That's why I left the show."

"Oh, you've left the menagerie?" said Tom, understanding now.

"Yes, I was sorry to leave old Bruno and the rest of the animals; they were great pals of mine. And the gov'nor, old Jackson, wasn't a bad sort. But I was fed-up with Patchy and Snooky—two brutes who had it in for me. Anyway, that won't interest you chaps. What about starting off?"

The juniors were only too eager to do that, and, leaving Baggy Trimble in charge of the encampment, they started out without further loss of time.

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Through the thick wood Nippy led them, and once in the open meadows beyond the juniors and Nippy put on speed and ran hard.

Nippy called a halt when three or four fields had been covered, and the juniors stopped, panting and breathless.

"There's the barn," he said, pointing through a gap in the hedge. "I vote— Great Scott! What's that row? Oh, my hat!"

The juniors had also heard the "row," and now they saw the reason and gasped.

Coming across the field from the direction of the barn was a familiar figure—a rather dusty, oily gentleman, with a very wide mouth and a very red nose.

It was Mr. Cobb, their absconded driver, and Mr. Cobb was running for his life, yelling as he ran. And behind Mr. Cobb, brandishing a stout stick, and catching Mr. Cobb every now and again a fearful whack with it, was a burly, red-faced farmer. Behind the farmer ran a grinning yokel, armed with a hayfork.

"I'll teach you to come dossin' in my barn, and smokin' in my hay!" the angry farmer was roaring. "You mouchin' good-for-nothin' tramp, hey? I'll show you 'ow I deals with tramps!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yarrooooh! 'Ere, stop it, you old fool!" roared Mr. Cobb. "Stop— Yooooop!"

The irate farmer, who had apparently caught Mr. Cobb locked up in the barn, gave the fleeing rascal a final resounding whack, and gave up the chase, as did his man.

"Oh, my hat!" choked Tom Merry. "Good old Turnips! Ready, you fellows? Here's making hay for us! Good!"

Sunny Jim, looking anything but sunny, came charging for the gap in the hedge, and the juniors crouched down and waited for him.

Gasping and panting hoarsely, Mr. Cobb reached the gap, and plunged through.

"On him!" shouted Tom Merry. "Down with the rotter!"

"Hey! Leggo!" roared Mr. Cobb frantically. "Ow! Oh crimes! Yarrooooh!"

Crash!

A hefty tap from Tom Merry's fist took Mr. Cobb full on the nose. He yelped, and the next instant the juniors were swarming on the rascal, and he measured his length in the ditch, roaring madly.

CHAPTER 12.

Exit Mr. Cobb!

"GIVE the fwrightful wascal gip, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Don't let him— Ow! Yawoooooh!"

It was the turn of Arthur Augustus to howl as one of Mr. Cobb's rather dirty fists took him under the chin. It was only a wild, luckless swipe, but there was no little force behind it, and Arthur Augustus sat down suddenly, roaring.

Luckily—for his elegant clobber—there was no water in the ditch, and, jumping up again, Arthur Augustus piled in to the melee.

But it was soon—very soon—over; Mr. Cobb fairly vanished from sight beneath the swarm of juniors, and a moment later he was helpless, with several of the irate juniors seated upon him.

"That's got the rascal!" panted Tom Merry, wiping his perspiring brow. "Phew! Thank goodness we were just in time!"

"Yaas, wathah!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Ow! My chin's dislocated, I weally believe! Nevah mind, bai Jove! We're collared the wascal, deah boys."

"Yes, and now for the stuff," said Tom grimly. "Hold him fast!"

"What-ho!"

Mr. Cobb let free a stream of lurid remarks, and struggled frantically as Tom started to go through his greasy pockets. But Lowther tapped his head sharply with a stick until both the flow of language and the struggling ceased.

Tom found it easy after that, and Mr. Cobb's pockets were emptied on the grass. There was quite an assortment of articles belonging to the juniors among them—in fact, Mr. Cobb had little else in his pockets. Gussy's gold hunter was there, as were the others watches and articles.

"Thank goodness, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he pocketed his watch and examined his wallet. "All the cash is heah, deah boys—not a penny gone!"

The juniors took charge of their property—Tom Merry taking charge of Trimble's silver "turnip"—the one that wouldn't go—and every penny of the stolen money in the wallets and purses was there. Sunny Jim had had no time to spend any—at hostelries or anywhere else.

Mr. Cobb watched the proceedings with eyes that glittered with fury and disappointment. But his game was up, and he knew it.

"Well, you precious rascal!" said Tom Merry, eyeing him

scornfully. "So this is how you repaid us for our kindness, you villain!"

"Hang you!" snarled Mr. Cobb.

"So that's your tune, eh?" said Tom grimly. "Very well. I expect the bobbies will be glad to get hold of you. It strikes me you're used to this game. I suppose that driving licence and the references were forgeries, eh? I bet the references were, anyway."

Mr. Cobb scowled, and the juniors guessed that Tom had hit the mark. But just as suddenly his face changed, and he assumed his humble, sorrowful expression.

"Look here, young gents," he whined. "Don't be hard on a bloke! I ain't never done anything like this afore. I was just tempted, you know. I did it on the spur of the moment, like. Don't bring the police into this here."

"Yank the brute along!" snorted Blake. "He deserves six months, and I bet he gets it!"

Tom Merry grinned and shook his head. He had most people's dislike of police-court proceedings, and, moreover, he did not want more delay than could be helped on the tour.

"We won't get the bobbies on the job," he said. "But we'll jolly well make it warm for this brute. Twenty with that stick, Lowther, and a dip in the pond there, should do the trick nicely. Over with him!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"Here, what—you young 'ounds! Don't you dare—Yoop!"

Mr. Cobb was whirled over, burying his nose in the ditch bottom. Many hands held him, and the stick began to rise and fall.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Mr. Cobb had already had a few hefty whacks from the farmer that morning, and he liked this second dose less than the first. He howled and roared fiendishly.

But it was over at last, and the juniors yanked him to his feet for the second part of the punishment. He was fairly rushed to the pond, lifted on high, and sent flying.

Splash!

Tom had called it a pond, but that was really paying it a very high compliment indeed. For it was really a large-sized ditch, covered from side to side with a rich coating of green slime and weeds—highly coloured and highly smelling.

Mr. Cobb went into it sprawling, and when he reappeared again he was a sight for men and little fishes—as Lowther expressed it. He trampled ashore, lurching and staggering on the muddy bottom of the ditch.

"That's that," said Tom, as the rascal came ashore, spluttering and gasping and groaning. "I expect he hasn't enjoyed that, but it's better than six months, anyway. And he deserves that, at least."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're lucky to be rid of the rotter," said Blake warmly. "And the only thing that maddens me is that that awful ass, Gussy, paid him a month's wages in advance."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on. Let's get back," said Tom. "Hallo, he's had enough!"

Mr. Cobb had had enough, without a doubt. He shook his fist at the smiling juniors, and then, with one last Hunnish glare, he tramped away and vanished through the trees. It was unlikely the juniors would ever see Mr. Cobb again.

"Well, I'll be getting off now," said Nippy, grinning. "Glad to have been of service, you fellows. Cheerio!"

He was turning away, but Tom Merry made a leap, and grabbed him fast.

"No, you don't, my pippin!" he said grimly. "We owe you something, old chap, for what you did for Gussy yesterday, and now for this. You're coming back with us, old chap. You've had no brekker, I'll be bound!"

"Well, I haven't," said Nippy, smiling ruefully. "I—I don't mind if I do come along for a cup of coffee, anyway."

"Good man!"

The juniors surrounded Nippy, and escorted him back to the encampment. Tom Merry eyed the chap very thoughtfully several times as they went along—indeed, all the juniors were just a bit puzzled about Nippy. What such a fellow was doing attached to a menagerie they could not imagine for the life of them. The fact that he had left it on his own proved that he had no relatives belonging to the show. His obvious refinement, his speech and manner and his whole appearance suggested a good home and refined environment.

And he was a likeable fellow—the juniors mentally agreed upon that. They took to him, one and all, at once. During the walk back to the camp Tom tried to draw him out a little, but it came to nothing. Nippy was willing enough to discuss his life at the menagerie, but he was not willing to discuss his private affairs at all.

"I'm just Nippy From Nowhere," he said, grinning. "That name's been good enough for me for a long time, and I fancy it should do for you chaps. What's in a name, anyway?"

"But—but, hang it all, haven't you anywhere to go?" gasped Tom Merry.

"You needn't worry about me," was the grinning answer. "I can look after myself all right. I'm going to tramp about, and I'll find a job sooner or later. I just got fed-up with the menagerie job," he concluded airily, "and so I chucked it."

The juniors left it at that, and the next moment the camp was reached. Baggy Trimble jumped for joy to get his property back, but he showed little gratitude to Nippy. In fact, he flatly and loftily refused to cook breakfast for Nippy—until Lowther and Blake kicked him often and hard, and then Baggy set to work quickly enough.

After breakfast Tom Merry, who had been conferring with his chums, approached Nippy.

"Look here, Nippy, old chap," he said, "old Gussy here has just made a jolly good suggestion. Why not stay with us here for a bit? And if you like you can come along with us when we're fixed up with a driver—for the rest of the vac, if you care to. We owe you a lot, you know, and—"

"My dear man, I'm not taking charity," grinned Nippy, though his eyes plainly gleamed at the tempting thought. "It's a job I want, not charity. Thanks, no end, for all that!"

"Well, we've no real job, of course—unless you can drive," said Tom, shaking his head. "But there's plenty of work in a camp, and—"

"Half a second," said Nippy, with a chuckle. "What about that driving job? It will suit me down to the ground. I've driven bigger and more awkward buses than that old caravan at the show lots of times."

"But—but—"

"Watch me!" grinned Nippy.

And, stepping to the motor-caravan, he cranked up after a struggle with the ancient engine, and then swung himself lightly into the driving seat, and rammed home the clutch.

The next moment, with Nippy's one hand on the wheel as he leaned out and looked back along the van, the van began to back towards the gates. Along the ruts it moved straight as a die, and went gliding between the narrow gate-posts as clean as a whistle.

For twenty yards and more Nippy steered the unwieldy vehicle back along the narrow cart-track, and then he brought her back, again gliding safely between the posts, to bring the old Noah's Ark to rest in exactly the same spot it had started from.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy.

"Good man!" said Blake heartily. "You can drive, and no mistake."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! How wippin! And will you weally take on the job, Nippy?"

"Like a bird!" said Nippy, his eyes gleaming eagerly. "That's if you'll have me, of course. I can make myself useful in other ways, too."

"Great pip! Have you, eh?" said Blake. "I should jolly well think we would. What do you say, Tommy?"

Tom Merry was just as eager and enthusiastic as his chums, but he suddenly thought of a drawback to the arrangement.

"What about a giddy licence?" he said, frowning. "I've just thought of it. Nippy isn't old enough—"

"Wot!"

"Bunkum!"

"Don't be an ass, Tommy!" snorted Blake. "Great Scott! Are we to lose a chance like this just because a giddy bobby may pop up? No fear! We're in a hole, and there's no getting out of it, unless we take Nippy on."

Tom Merry nodded. It was true enough—they were in a hole. He knew it would be a very difficult matter indeed to find a suitable driver who would accompany them on tour.

"Very well," he said at last. "We'll risk it, and trust to luck."

"Good man!"

"Huwwah!" cheered Gussy gleefully. "Then it is all wight—quite all wight once again. And now let us get on the woad again, dear boys."

"Hear, hear!"

And so it was settled. Immensely relieved that their troubles seemed over—that they had got a driver at last—the juniors rushed round, making ready to move on. An application of boots quickened Baggy with the washing up, and the juniors packed up smartly, while Nippy set to work on the engine, brightening and cleaning things up a bit. He seemed to have an uncanny knowledge of mechanism, and the juniors soon dropped any doubts they had as they saw how he handled Noah's Ark.

But they were not fated to move on yet—not without

(Continued on page 27.)

THE MYSTERY MAN FROM CHINA!

Across thousands of miles of land and sea Penny Rudd, international protector, travels in search of the mysterious Yen How, the strange prince from China, who holds the secret of the little jade claw!



THE CRIMSON CLAW!

The OPENING CHAPTERS of a new and powerful Adventure Story of Chinese mystery and intrigue.

BY
LESTER BIDSTON.

CHAPTER 1. The Man from China!

PING!

Pendennis Rudd pitched face forward, his limbs grotesquely spreadeagled over the steps of Scotland Yard. An alert official, sighting a shadowy figure speeding towards Whitehall, jumped the sprawled form and dashed away in swift pursuit.

Five minutes later the shot youth opened his eyes, groaned with the realisation of an abominable headache, and stared stupidly at the grizzled veteran who was deftly swathing his head in lint.

"Ouch!" he protested feebly. "I'll be glad to know what you're doing, sir?"

"Patching a skull that might easily have been past patching," the surgeon snapped. "A sixteenth of an inch difference, my lad, and the bullet would have remained inside instead of merely flicking the skull in passing."

Penny Rudd stared at the medico in momentary surprise. Then, as the paralysis passed swiftly from his brain, he nodded understanding.

"Oh, I remember now!" he murmured. "I was coming to Scotland Yard, to see Sir William Nash, when the building dropped on me, or something of that sort."

"You're in Sir William's room now," the doctor replied. "It so happened that he was chatting with me in the hall when we saw you bowled over like a shot rabbit. He had you carried in here, then returned to the hall to inquire if your assailant had been captured."

"He was sighted, then?" Rudd asked eagerly.

"Before he'd gone ten yards," the medico answered.

He gave a final pat to the bandage that now circled Rudd's head, threw the tools of his craft into a bag, and stepped towards the door.

"You'll do now," he continued briskly. "Sit where you are, and I'll tell Nash you wish to see him." He chuckled wickedly. "It isn't usual for a crime to be staged on the Yard's own doorstep, so he'll be glad to question you, I've no doubt."

"I've travelled five thousand miles to question him," Rudd answered pointedly.

But that was not the doctor's business, and he passed out without comment. Left alone, Penny Rudd smiled wryly at the thought that, in orderly London, he should have had a closer call than ever an adventurous life in lawless China had brought him.

"It proves how closely I've been watched," he mused. "And that, in turn, proves that the fellow I'm hunting is not so far away."

Before he could pursue the agreeable thought the door opened to admit a tall, alert man, who favoured him with an agreeable smile.

"So there's no great harm done, I believe," he said. "I'm glad of that, but sorry to tell you that your cowardly assailant got clean away, thanks to the fog."

"I'm not surprised," Rudd answered. "When Yen How shoots his getaway is quicker than the flash of his own gun."

"Yen How?" Sir William repeated inquiringly.

"Yes, sir. But I must present my credentials, if you are

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to understand who and what Yen How is," Rudd explained quickly. "I've a letter here from Lord Rawson, of the British Embassy in Peking. I'll be glad if you'll read it, sir."

Sir William Nash accepted the sealed note with a puzzled frown. As a rule, people approached the great C.I.D. expert with something of humility, yet this youth spoke with complete assurance, passing over his miraculous escape as casually as if it was a commonplace in the day's work.

Then Sir William opened the letter—and understood.

"Dear Nash," he read.—"This is to introduce Pendennis Rudd, International protector of the white peoples resident in the Orient. He is visiting London on a matter of extreme importance to the Europeans in China, and I will take it as a personal favour if you will give him the assistance of the vast and efficient machine you control.—Yours,
"RAWSON."

The Assistant-Commissioner's glance lifted from the note in frank surprise. Pendennis Rudd! Why, the very name conjured up visions of heroic adventure in every savage country of the Far East. Where trouble was, there Pendennis Rudd would sooner or later appear in the role of rescuer. Not that his name or deeds often met the public eye, for seldom did the breath of up-country crime filter through to civilisation.

But the diplomatic circles knew and blessed the name of Rudd, and many a helpful hint had come to Nash himself of yellow desperadoes who were making for England.

Yes, Sir William was openly amazed. It seemed hardly possible that this lad could be the famous Penny Rudd. His broad shoulders and deep chest gave testimony to a fully-developed frame, admitted; but his smooth chin, calm grey eyes, and humorous mouth looked innocent enough to belong to a school-lady of the kindergarten age.

But the C.I.D.'s chief kept these thoughts to himself. It was evident that Rudd had arrived in London on big business, and equally evident that he was not expecting, or wanting, compliments.

"You've a claim on the Yard," Sir William said simply. "Now, tell me, in what way can we help you?"

Penny Rudd hesitated, as if arranging his thoughts with care.

"I've mentioned the name of Yen How," he began quietly. "It may sound theatrical, Sir William, but I look upon Prince Yen How as the arch-villain of the world."

"Indeed!" Nash answered, slightly cynical. "We reckon to have some pretty ripe specimens in London."

Rudd nodded.

"You have; but your rogues and thieves, even your gunmen, are spring lambs by comparison with Yen How," he replied. "There's hardly a crime in the calendar that How isn't thoroughly familiar with. Rebel, thug, pirate—he's been everything in turn, and made a dividend-paying job of each one."

"A prince, did I hear you say?" Nash questioned.

"A descendant of Emperor Yen, who ruled the empire a century since," Rudd explained. "A man educated beyond the ordinary, and one armed with strange powers that make his crooked mind trebly dangerous."

"Er—yes!"

The drawled word, the lift of eyebrow, and the tiny smile warned Rudd that the Commissioner was hardly taking him seriously.

"Your patience, Sir William, whilst I tell you something of myself, the record of this yellow prince, and the reason I have followed him over half the world," he continued soberly. "I know the East, sir, simply because I was born and reared in China. For three generations the Rudds have lived in that overcrowded country, and most of my days are passed as a Chinaman amongst Chinamen. I find its harsh dialects easier to speak than I do the tongue I'm using now."

"And your wonderful knowledge of the yellow race has benefited English men and women times without number," Nash admitted kindly.

"Because I'm English to the last kick, wherever I was born," Rudd replied casually. "I merely sketched my history to show that I can get behind the scenes of a mysterious stage, for the real China is still a locked book to Europe. Now, sir, we'll come to Yen How, of whose existence I first became conscious exactly twelve months ago. About that time I realised that a new power was arising in China, that the old hatreds were dying, and other laws of force coming into being."

"To me it appears that China has a new government every month, and that each successive one but increases its weakness," Nash interrupted. "It lies like a sprawling giant, bleeding from a hundred wounds, gradually sinking to death and decay."

"That was so in the past," Rudd agreed. "State hated State, north fought south, east was jealous of west. Then began the killing off of those who fomented the civil wars that were making China the world's fool. A new and sinister name began to be whispered about—the name of the 'Crimson Claw.' Its agents began to appear in every town and village; they attacked the old fighting bosses all over the country, and invariably beat them at their own favourite game of murder."

"A vendetta society working for the good of China?" Nash asked, interested at last.

"No, sir," Rudd answered; "a murder society working for the good of Prince Yen How. Wherever one of the old order passed out, a puppet of How's was elevated to his place. As the result of nearly a year of investigation, I am convinced that How is amassing enormous wealth, that on six of the western States he is already omnipotent, and that the talons of his 'Crimson Claw' are slowly but firmly fastening on the rest of China."

"Yet that is surely China's own affair," Sir William protested. "I cannot see what it has to do with England, and more particularly with Scotland Yard."

"You will in a moment," Rudd assured him. "Lately, in the six States I have mentioned, a strange fatality has reached out to the white people. Many prosperous up-country traders have died by various 'accidents,' many more have taken their own lives without any known need." He paused impressively. Then: "Regarding the latter, I have proved that each and every one had been visited by Yen How within a week of his unaccountable end."

Nash stared. "You credit this yellow prince with strange powers," he said sceptically.

"I do," Rudd replied grimly. "Yen How, besides being a prince, is an outcast priest from the secret Llamasery of Hajjar. If you knew the East as I know it, you would admit that few things are impossible to the wizards armed with the knowledge of Hajjar. How has that knowledge. In his warped mind it makes him a law unto himself and a menace to mankind."

"I cannot arrest him for that," the Commissioner said irritably.

"Nor do I ask you to," Rudd smiled. "What I want from you, sir, is help in tracing either Yen How or a French detective named Jules Vidoc."

"Vidoc, of Paris?" Nash asked, in surprise. "What on earth has he to do with this business?"

"He arrived in Shanghai four months ago on a supposed sight-seeing vacation," Rudd answered. "Privately, I heard through our people that he was over to find why a French money-king was transferring enormous sums to How's account in Minyak."

"That'll be the case of Count Henri. I heard a little of it," Nash admitted.

"I know nothing of his investigations, or where they led him," Rudd continued. "I only know that, eight weeks ago, whispers reached me in a Shanghai dope den that the records of the 'Crimson Claw' had been stolen. French Vidoc was named as the thief, and Yen How was said to be hot on his track. Later, I found that Vidoc had sailed on a Westbound steamer, disguised as a coolie, and that How had vanished from China."

Quite suddenly the Commissioner's interest had deepened to intensity. He leaned forward, his forehead ridged in tense lines, his eyes alert with startled bewilderment.

"Disguised as a coolie, you say?" he whispered. But before Rudd could reply a short, sharp knock echoed from the door, and it opened to admit a burly fellow who looked more the prosperous farmer than a C.I.D. man.

"The Limehouse victim has just been identified, sir, as—" He stopped abruptly, noticing Rudd. "I beg your pardon. I thought you were alone."

CHAPTER 2.

Yen How Strikes!

"COME in, Welbeck," Nash invited. "You were about to say that the Limehouse victim had been identified as Jules Vidoc, of the Paris Prefecture?"

Welbeck's eyes opened and his eyes goggled in blank amazement.

"The report only came in this second," he stammered. "How in goodness did you guess, sir?"

"I didn't guess," Nash smiled. "This young man has just told me."

The inspector turned a doubtful glance on Rudd, the glance of the keen-witted professional who is constantly on the defensive against the amateur.

"Ah! And who may he be, Sir William?" he asked tolerantly.

"Pendennis Rudd," Nash drawled slyly.

"Rudd, of China?" Welbeck's frown vanished, and he held out a welcoming hand. "Why, Mr. Rudd, I'm named 'Asiatic' Welbeck down Limehouse way, but I'll have to take a back seat if you've come to join the Yard."

"He hasn't," Nash said quickly. "He crossed over specially to help poor Vidoc, though why the Frenchman should have made for London instead of Paris is beyond me."

"You forget he was being hunted by every brute who owned allegiance to the Crimson Claw," Rudd answered. "He'd jump at the first chance of skipping China, and that chance was evidently a Londonbound steamer." He took



The youth opened his eyes and stared up stupidly at the medico who was deftly swathing his head. He gaped for a moment, then, remembering what had happened, muttered: "I was coming to Scotland Yard to see Nash, when the building dropped on me, or something of the sort!"

(See page 22.)

pity on Welbeck's open bewilderment, and re-told his story in a few terse sentences. "I'm used to disappointment where How's concerned," he sighed in conclusion. "But I'm sorry for Vidoc's sake, that I arrived too late."

"A day too late, just as Welbeck was ten seconds too late," Nash said. "Tell him, Welbeck, what happened last night."

The inspector cleared his throat with a self-conscious little cough.

"I'd never have known that ragged rat for Vidoc, or anything but the half-starved coolie he appeared to be," he mused. "You must understand, Rudd, I was down in Pennyfields late last night on a little matter of opium smuggling, not dreaming of trouble, nor wanting it. Coming through Castor Street, I heard a patter of racing feet behind me, an ominous sound in that neighbourhood and at that hour. I could see nothing for mist, but the fellows were coming straight towards me, and I waited. When barely ten paces away the chase swerved from the pavement to the road, and I was stepping off the sidewalk when a terrible scream broke into horrible coughing. Six quick steps brought me to a crowd of Chinamen, who broke apart as I appeared. But I caught one creature bending over a misshapen bundle, and, before I realised the game, he straightened and slashed at me with his knife."

He grinned sourly. "I wasn't hipped, being out on a peaceful job," he continued, "but the loaded cane I always carry put the brute to sleep in record time. The bundle of papers he held dropped into my pocket, my whistle brought several constables on the scene, and we portered both knife-man and victim to the district station a block away. Then I hurried back to the Yard to report what seemed to be a plain, sordid crime of slumdon."

"It has since proved to be anything but plain," Nash sighed. "The captured knife-man is a huge Chinaman from the Manchurian area, who ignores every question we put to him."

"It wouldn't be Yen How, that's certain," Rudd interrupted. "He works by more subtle methods than knives. But the papers? What information did they contain?"

"None that we could understand," Nash answered. "They proved to be a quantity of Chinese writings that, translated, formed a senseless rigmarole. They were obviously in code; one, I must admit, that baffled first Welbeck, then our expert. This afternoon the papers were sent to Professor Forshaw, a scholar whose knowledge of the Eastern mind is profound. An hour ago he telephoned me, saying the papers are the ground plan of a colossal crime, and that he'd have them decoded to the last letter by ten o'clock to-night."

Penny Rudd had sat with knitted brows, impatiently waiting the end of Nash's story.

"Who took the papers to Forshaw in the first place?" he asked quickly.

"Welbeck, of course, so that he could explain things to the professor," Nash replied.

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" Pen groaned. "You don't know Yen How, else you'd have brought Forshaw here and guarded him with a dozen men whilst he did that job."

"This is London, not China, sir!" the Commissioner snapped irritably.

"Yet I'll warrant he has been shadowed every minute since last night," Pen cried. "The papers have already cost Vidoc his life; they probably tell all I've been trying to find out this twelvemonth past regarding Yen How's aims." He jumped to his feet, upsetting his chair in a crescendo of impatience. "Oh, I know you couldn't foresee Yen How and all the strange tale I've told of the Crimson Claw. But, please, understand that Forshaw is in the most terrible danger, and that the guarding of the papers is vital."

"Welbeck, you'll go at once!" Nash ordered, without hesitation. "You'll accompany him, Rudd?"

"Oh, rather!" Pen answered. "I'll be obliged if you'll phone Fan Shen, my assistant, asking him to bring the gadget box along. He'll understand, sir. And this address will find him."

"And we'll find a car waiting in the courtyard," Welbeck said pointedly. "Come, Rudd, your news has turned this case upside down, and shown me the need for haste."

A church clock was booming the hour of ten when the car drew up outside No. 55, Bellamy Mansions, Hampstead. Whilst Welbeck was asking the Yard chauffeur to wait their return a shadow detached itself from the wall and stepped between the inspector and Rudd.

"Ev'rythink allee lite?" a sibilant voice whispered anxiously. "What him cotton lag doing on nut, Pen?"

"A token from Yen How," Rudd answered. "Vidoc's gone under, but the yarn'll have to wait, Fanny. Inspector, this is my pal and helper, Fan Shen."

THE GEM LIBRARY. No. 914.

Welbeck had jumped when the voice first whispered in his ear. He now flashed a light and looked on plump yellow features that, somehow, made him smile. The tiny mouth, topped by a minute snub nose, was in keeping with beady black eyes that hinted unusual humour in one of the Celestial race.

"Hope you'll be less trouble to me than some of your colour," Welbeck smiled. "But, come, Forshaw's flat is on the second floor, and your hints have made me jumpy."

He relaxed, however, when a trim maid ushered them into the professor's snugery. There was the old gentleman calmly reclining on a cushioned chair, a book in his hand, a cigar between his lips. Pen looked with interest on this man, whose profound writings on the Orient were well known to him, being struck by the shrewdness of the thin face and the bulging dome of head that told of reasoning powers beyond the ordinary.

"Evening, professor!" Welbeck began crisply. "I've come for the Chinese papers, as you suggested. These fellows are keenly interested, and we're all very eager to read your translation."

The professor laid down his book and turned lack-lustre eyes on the inspector.

"Have you—I mean—er—yes, of course you are!" he stammered weakly. "The translation—now—er—let me see? Yes, yes, of course, the translation."

He looked absolutely bewildered, staring doubtfully from Welbeck to Rudd, glancing distastefully at Shen, then back to the inspector. To the three amazed onlookers, it was painfully clear that he was wondering who they were and what on earth they were talking about.

"The translation you were making for Sir William Nash," Welbeck prompted. "You must remember, sir—the Chinese papers in code I brought to you this afternoon."

For a moment the frown on Forshaw's face deepened. Then he smiled whimsically and shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, yes, the Chinese papers," he giggled. "A good joke to play on an innocent old man—did the same kind of thing myself in my student days."

"But it isn't a joke!" Welbeck snapped indignantly. "A man's life probably hangs on the contents of those papers—another man certainly was most foully murdered in trying to protect them."

The professor looked mildly interested for a fractional second; then, again, his face became a mask of indifference.

"Really?" he murmured languidly. "How very interesting!"

"Well, sir, where are they?" Welbeck asked, his colour rising with irritation.

"Gone, sir, gone," Forshaw answered slowly, the smile on his lips belied by the strained enigma of his eyes. "Really, they were of such trifling importance that I—er—threw them into the fire!"

"You what?" Welbeck gasped.

"Burned them," Forshaw answered more brightly. "They proved to be a complete wash-out." He laughed hysterically. "Ha, ha! That's really good! A complete wash-out, because they were merely the records of some Chinese laundry." The laughter suddenly died from his face, but his eyelids twitched nervously. "Most awful tosh, sir, I assure you."

"Amazing!" Welbeck muttered.

He turned to Rudd, his expression reflecting the incredulous astonishment with which he regarded Forshaw's performance.

"There's something very fishy about this, Rudd," he whispered. "Why, an hour ago Forshaw was on his toes with excitement: He actually phoned that Vidoc's life had been well spent in bringing those papers to England."

Through half-closed lids, Pen Rudd had been watching the professor intently. Now, for the first time, he spoke.

"The man's under a terrible nerve-strain, Welbeck," he said softly. "Look at his eyes. I believe he's burned the papers, but, for the rest, he's lying, knows he's lying, and hates himself for doing it."

"Does he?" Welbeck grunted. "He's got official documents in his possession, and he's going to hand them over before I leave this house."

In the pause that followed, Pen whispered a dozen words in Fanny's ear. With a nod of understanding, the yellow lad slipped from the room without a sound.

"Now, Professor Forshaw, I'll have your attention," Welbeck began bluntly. "We've had enough fencing. This matter's serious, and we've wasted too much time on foolery." He strode forward, until his face was within twelve inches of the old man's. "I want those papers, and I want them now! I'll give you a solitary minute to produce them, or—"

He stopped abruptly, his face purpling with rage, his lower jaw protruding like that of an angry bulldog.

That was "Asiatic" Welbeck's way with people who lied to him. Blunt, direct, intentionally brutal—it was a method

of frontal attack that had jolted many a dockside tough into lamblike docility.

On the professor, however, the effect was negligible. He looked slightly more bored, a trifle more pained—and that was all.

"I'm sorry, sir, I cannot get them back." He smiled apologetically, and spread out thin white hands. "Certainly a trifle—not worth quarrelling about. I really did burn the rubbish."

Welbeck grasped the extended wrists roughly.

"I want those papers!" he stormed. "Hand 'em over, and drop your nonsense!"

Fan Shen then sidled back again into the room.

"Allee light, Penny," he said. "The hon'ble woman says there has been a visitor—a 'foreign bloke' she calls him—who left nearly hour ago."

"You hear that, Welbeck?" Pen asked quietly.

"That's nothing to do with the Chink stuff Vidoc bartered his life for," the Yard man grunted.

"I expect it has—quite a lot," Pen persisted. "Will you allow me to question the professor?"

Welbeck hesitated, then stepped back with the cynical expression of one humouring a child. As for Pen, he approached the bewildered old man almost humbly, for he had been warned by the failure of the inspector's forceful methods. China and its people had trained him in vastly different ways.

"Now, sir, the inspector's told you a man's life hangs on the contents of those papers," he began quietly. "Even allowing you have burned them, perhaps you've retained the translation?"

"No—that went as well," Forshaw sighed.

"But you can remember what they were about?" Pen suggested.

"I—I can hardly recall a word," Forshaw said sadly.

"Um! I suppose your late visitor was very interested in the translation you were making?" Pen suggested.

A frown settled on Forshaw's forehead. It was as if he resented this change of tactics.

"Yes—no, no!" he stammered. "Sir, I resent your curiosity in my business."

"I regret it, but the curiosity remains," Pen answered. "An hour ago you thought the Chinese writings of prime importance, I believe?"

"I—I don't know," Forshaw answered weakly. "I don't seem to remember."

"But your visitor had something to say about them, now hadn't he?" Pen insisted. "I'm quite sure he ridiculed the supposed code and made your mystery appear very foolish."

"Yes, he—I don't know," Forshaw mumbled.

He sagged wearily back into his chair and glanced resentfully at Pen.

"Your conduct is abominable, sir," he said petulantly. "You keep on asking questions, you stand and glare—just like he did. Your eyes—he warned me—"

His voice broke pathetically, and his eyelids drooped, as though trying to avoid the unwinking stare that Pen directed on him.

"When phoning Sir William, you spoke of a great crime being outlined in the papers, did you not?" came the next smooth question.

"Yes—I was wrong," the professor whispered uneasily. "I wish you would look away from me, sir."

"From a great crime to a Chinese laundry is a sad come-down," Pen continued evenly. "I'm sure you could explain the mistake."

"I will not—cannot," Forshaw muttered.

For a moment he stared back into Pen's eyes, and the two silent onlookers noticed the little beads of perspiration that flecked his forehead. He half started from his chair, sank back with a groan and covered his face with hands that trembled.

"Sir, your eyes stare and annoy me," he quavered. "You glare just as he did. Oh, have pity, I—"

"But why did you destroy the papers?" Pen persisted, his voice smooth, level, pitiless.

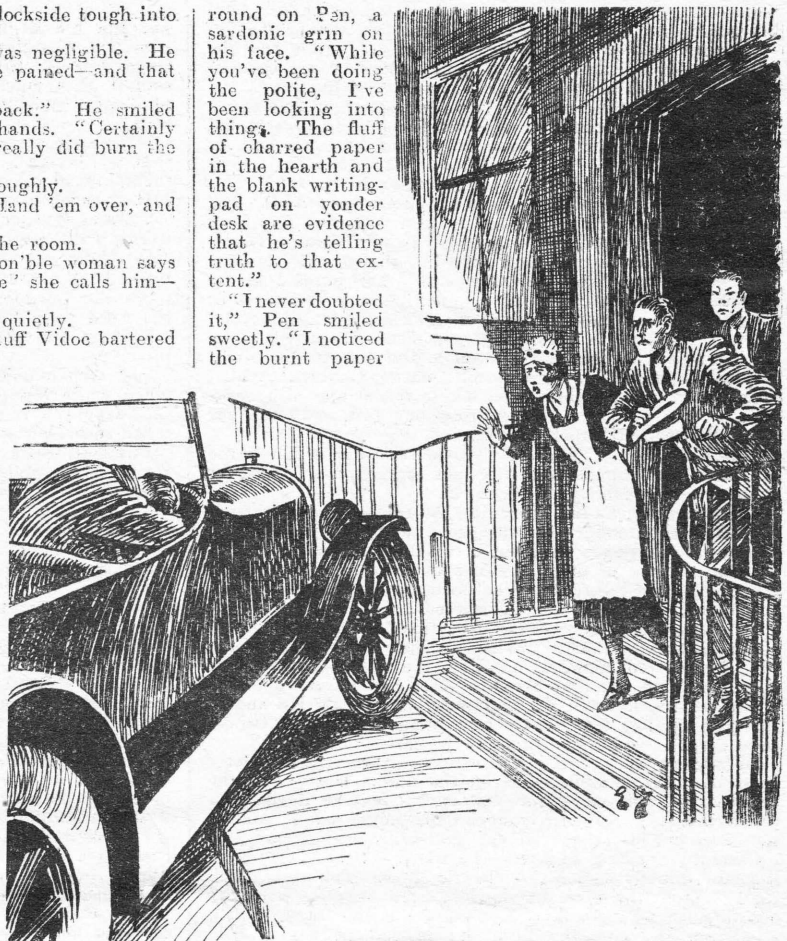
"Because I— He made me!" Forshaw whispered, speaking slowly and breathing in short, jerky gasps as though fighting against every word he uttered.

And then, just when Pen reckoned his persuasive third degree was about to bear fruit, Welbeck butted in and broke the spell.

"Made you, did he?" he snapped harshly. "Then you'll come along and tell that yarn to Sir William." He whirled

round on Pen, a sardonic grin on his face. "While you've been doing the polite, I've been looking into things. The fluff of charred paper in the hearth and the blank writing-pad on yonder desk are evidence that he's telling truth to that extent."

"I never doubted it," Pen smiled sweetly. "I noticed the burnt paper



The two chums from China came out of the house at a run. Then, with cries of amazement, they saw a car straddled across the pavement, its uniformed driver huddled and motionless over the wheel. "It's a Scotland Yard car!" yelled Pen. (See page 26.)

and examined the pad before you'd finished saying 'Good-evening' to the professor."

"Um—did you?" Welbeck answered grumpily. "Well, I can't see that your questions have led you anywhere—your Chinese methods won't do much good in England, Rudd. Anyway, I've got to report to Sir William—a bad end to a promising business." He turned again to the meek professor. "I've neither power nor wish to arrest you, sir, but I'll ask you to come quietly and explain to the chief why you destroyed Government property."

"Oh, I'll be glad to go with you!" Forshaw answered. "I'm quite sure I can explain how stupid this fuss really is."

"Come and try, then," Welbeck grinned sourly. "You fellows returning with me?"

"Nunno, inspector," Pen answered quickly. "By your leave, we'll just hang back a bit."

CHAPTER 3.

The Mind Stealer!

THE moment they were alone, Pen dropped into a chair with a sigh of relief. His wound still throbbled and burned, and the strain of questioning Forshaw had left him tired and dispirited.

"Fanny, beware the mailed fist," he sighed. "If only Welbeck had left me alone, I'm certain that poor, bewildered professor would have spilt the beans in another minute."

"Softly, softly, catchee monkey!" Fan agreed; meaning, of course, that gentle persuasion often carries one farther than force.

"Oh, I'm not blaming Welbeck," Pen answered. "He's used to dealing with dockside toughs—and hands out the only method they understand."

"What d'you make of the venerable professor's fear of your eyes, Pen?" Fan asked, unwittingly reverting to his

native tongue. "His yarn about the laundry was silly, but his fear of you was real enough. Think him snooky?"

"By no means," Pen answered quickly. "He's had the fright of his life from that unknown caller, and the caller was Yen How himself, if I know anything of his ways."

"But what is the dishonourable Yen doing in England?" Fan asked. "He could have found a thousand curs to kill Vidoc and destroy the papers—why need he come here at all?"

"That's exactly the puzzle that bewilders me," Pen replied. "I'm quite sure he never went near Vidoc last night—that killing was too crude. For the rest, I've long had the idea that all the activities of the 'Crimson Claw' in China, big as they've been, are but the prelude to some tremendous coup, here or elsewhere." He jumped to his feet with an exclamation of disgust. "And, confound it, it's pretty certain those burned papers held the whole secret."

For a full minute he prowled about the room, his penetrating glance directed in every hole and corner that might furnish the least hint of Forshaw's amazing conduct. Finally, with pursed lips in which his Chinese friend read bitter disappointment, he turned to the professor's desk and examined every drawer and paper it contained.

"Nothing doing, Fan," he sighed. "Whatever the cause of Forshaw's 'about face,' it's like to remain so, until he chooses to—Hullo! I wonder?"

Quite casually, he had picked up the partially-used writing-pad that lay amongst the disorderly array of papers. Its few remaining pages were virgin white, it appeared to hold no hint or trace of mystery. Yet something in its seeming innocence caused Pen to stiffen abruptly and to peer closer.

"What is it, Pen?" Fan whispered anxiously.

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps everything," the sleuth from China answered quietly. "When Forshaw last used this pad, his pencil scored faint tracings from the last written page to this blank one. If that precious sheet had reference to the Vidoc papers, it'll tell us something, perhaps." He angled the pad until it was almost level with his eyes. "It will need care, though. You brought the case along, Fan?"

In silence, Shen lifted an ordinary leather attache-case from the floor and placed it on the desk. Opening it, he exposed to view a queer collection; bottles filled with coloured acids, bright little steel tools, keys, wire—a miniature museum fit for any rogue's gallery.

Carefully avoiding fingering the white surface, Pen placed the pad directly under the electric light. Taking a small tin box from the case, he slowly dusted every inch of the quarto sheet with the fine black powder it contained. Then, also from the case, he lifted an instrument that closely resembled an ammonia pistol.

"The insufflator, Fanny dear, is the terror of the clumsy criminal who forgets that fingerprints have quite a definite value," he smiled, angling the wide bore over the powdered sheet. "We're not after fingerprints to-night, but I guess this pad is a decided case for insufflator treatment. So here goes!"

On the word, he squeezed the bulb sharply. Fan heard a faint little "plop," a puff of air swept over the page, and every trace of graphite vanished—except where the pencil had scored minute valleys on the shiny surface.

"My sacred ancestors!" Shen cried in delight. "Ruddums, you've brought the words out clear as if they'd been written down specially for you!"

"In patches only," Pen corrected. "Well, we'll see if they refer to the laundry Forshaw mentioned."

Studying the black markings with a powerful reading-glass for a moment, Penny Rudd slowly scribbled down every disjointed letter that was visible, with this result:

"—ese ten dev—knowl—ge—want. When—is ours—crim—claw—talons—world bend—it's Mas—Chang waits—word—Kiss of—All is re—go—day."

"The august sheet is of no use," Fan decided mournfully. "It hints at much, it tells us nothing—nothing worth while."

"It tells us a whole story," Pen answered, his glance intent on the paper. "It tells us that he had, at the time he wrote it, every intention of keeping faith with Commissioner Nash—else why had he persevered to the last word?"

"Then why did he burn it and talk so much rubbish?" Fan asked.

Pen hesitated. When he did answer, it seemed to the Chinaman that he almost hated to speak the thought that was in his mind.

"Fanny, we've seen queer things in the Lamaseries of China, things that would be ridiculed in this matter-of-fact country," he said, at last. "Because the lamas are our friends, they've shown us that mind control, telepathy, and so on, are an exact science with them. They've shown us

a little, a very little, but we must remember that Yen How has the hidden knowledge in full. In other words, I'm convinced that he can steal men's minds at will, that he's stolen Forshaw's, and made him a slave with no will of his own." His glance turned again to the paper. "Now, dry up, old pomegranate, until I've solved this Cross Word puzzle."

For nearly ten minutes his astute brain weighed the words that were visible and measured off the blanks that spaced them. Then, carefully filling in the missing portions, he turned to his assistant with a grim smile.

"Listen, Fanny," he said quietly. "These ten 'devils' have all the knowledge we want. When that knowledge is ours, then will the Crimson Claw bare its talons and the world bend the knee to its Master. Chang (somebody) but waits the word at the Kiss of (something). All is ready, the word goes this day."

Folding and pocketing the paper, Pen stared grimly at his chum.

"In the amiable tongue of your fathers, Fanny, 'devils' mean white foreigners," he said caustically. "If I've read the paragraph aright, ten prominent Europeans have already fallen into How's hands, or soon will do."

But Fan Shen was following his own line of thought. He stood immobile for a moment, his face void of expression. Then:

"The words are as written, yet they rouse the itch of curiosity without satisfying," he murmured. "They tell us not the names of the honourable ten, they tell us not what knowledge How desires, they tell us not where Chang awaits the word!"

"They tell us a heap of 'nots,'" Pen agreed cheerfully. "In short, they leave us guessing, because we've only bagged the last scrap of Forshaw's translation. Still, they tell us enough, old dear, to make it imperative that we return to the Yard without delay."

But that return was not to be accomplished without a startling surprise. Finding they were strangers to London, Forshaw's maid accompanied them downstairs, with the intention of pointing directions to the nearest Tube. Opening the street door, her first glance arrested and held on the pavement outside, and, with a startled scream, she came to an abrupt stand.

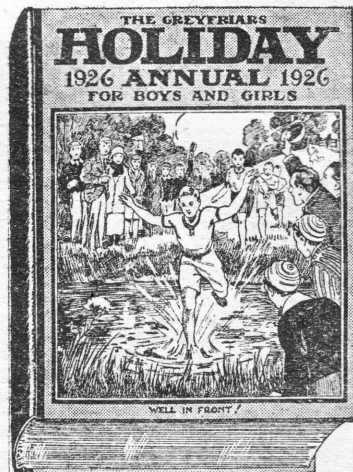
It took the chums from China another second to accustom their eyes to the street gloom. Then, with cries of amazement, they saw a car straddled across the pavement, its unformed driver huddled and motionless over the wheel.

"Great snakes!" Pen yelled. "It's the Scotland Yard car—the one that ought to have taken Welbeck and Forshaw back to Sir William!"

In wondering silence they stared and stared again. Welbeck had sourly stated his determination to rush the professor to the Yard. Yet here, fifteen minutes later, was the car, its chauffeur unconscious or dead, its passengers—where?

(What does this extraordinary occurrence mean? Is it another move of the sinister Yen How? See next week's thrilling instalment, boys!)

ON THE WAY!



Keep a keen pair of eyes open for the world-famous Story Book!

"CAMP & CARAVAN!"

(Continued from page 21.)

further trouble. For just as the juniors finished packing the tents aboard Tom Merry started as a couple of figures emerged from the trees and loathed towards the van. One was a hulking individual with a swarthy face and a patch over one eye; the other was a small, wiry individual with a crafty face and shifty eyes.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What do these merchants want? My hat! It's that chap who kicked up a shine last night—from the menagerie, Nippy!"

Nippy wheeled round with a cry, and as he glimpsed the figures his face went pale and his eyes gleamed.

"It's Patchy and Snooky!" he breathed. "Now for trouble!"

CHAPTER 13.

A Mystery.

TOM MERRY & CO. closed up together as the two men came slouching up. They felt instinctively that Nippy was right—that there was going to be trouble.

"Well, my men," said Tom steadily, "what do you want with us?"

Patchy scowled. He obviously had recognised the van and the juniors. But he seemed not to see Nippy, who was standing a few feet away in the shelter of the van.

"We're after a kid—a little rip what's run away from the show," he growled. "A lad named Nippy, he is—the lad as stopped that there bear chewing up this nob with the eyeglass yesterday. Seen anything of 'im? I bin told in the village as he came this way. Looking for this 'ere camp he was—why, beats me. Anyways— Why, by hokey! There he is, Snooky!"

The man's voice ended in a yell as he suddenly caught sight of Nippy. Nippy came forward coolly.

MARTIN CLIFFORD TURNS UP TRUMPS!

I have a piece of very good news for my readers this week. I have made arrangements with Mr. Martin Clifford for the lengthening of the St. Jim's stories. In future all these popular yarns will be of the extra-long length, so that in place of the second complete story which has lately been a feature of the GEM, my readers will from now on get an extra dose of Tom Merry & Co. I am quite sure that in doing this I am meeting the wishes of the vast majority of my readers, who one and all have been demanding for many months "more Tom Merry." Hitherto Mr. Martin Clifford has been unable to supply me with an extra-long story regularly, but in response to my earnest representations he has now undertaken to write to this length every week. Needless to say the stories will not suffer in any way in quality, but on the contrary will be much improved. Mr. Martin Clifford will now have a fair chance to show what he can do.

"Want me, Patchy?" he inquired calmly, though the juniors could see he was trembling slightly.

"You knows we wants you!" roared Patchy furiously. "Us bin 'untin' all over the place for you, you little 'ound! 'Ere, come along!"

He made a stride to grab hold of the boy, but Tom Merry stepped forward in his path, his eyes gleaming.

"Half a minute, my man!" he said steadily. "If Nippy wants to go back with you, well and good. If he doesn't, then you can take your paws off him and clear out. See?"

Patchy snarled.

"E'll 'ave to come whether he wants to or not!" he vowed, glaring at Nippy. "E belongs to the show, and—"

"No, he doesn't," said Nippy. Now he saw the juniors intended to back him up he seemed suddenly to lose his fear of the bully. "No, Patchy; I've finished with Jackson's show for good and all. I could stand the animals, and I could stand the guv'nor; but I can't stand you brutes! You've knocked me about just as you've knocked the animals about—animals as I was too fond of to leave. But I've had enough. Last night was enough for me."

Patchy muttered an oath. He stared at the defiant youth, his eyes glinting evilly. Then just as suddenly he changed his attitude.

"Now, look 'ere, Nippy," he said, in a grotesque attempt to be genial. "This 'ere won't do, you know. I knows 'ow fond you is of animals, and nobody knows 'ow to handle 'em like you does. How you does it beats us all. But I knows you won't leave 'em like this 'ere. You come back with me, and you won't get no lickings agen—I'll see to that. Isn't that right, Snooky?"

"That's right," agreed Snooky, nodding his head and grinning—an evil grin. "Now, come on, Nippy, lad; be sensible, like."

"No fear!" said Nippy promptly, grinning at the remarkable change in the two. "Go on being wolves, Patchy; tryin' to be lambs doesn't suit you!"

The juniors grinned—they couldn't help it. Patchy and Snooky looked exceedingly ugly.

"You've heard that, my man!" snapped Tom Merry, becoming serious again. "Nippy won't come back! He'd be a dashed fool if he did. You've had your answer. Now you can clear."

"Ho, can I?" hissed Patchy, clenching his great fists suggestively. "You get outter my way, you little rat! You keep outter this, or I'll knock your durned head off! Now, Nippy, are you comin'—or not?"

"No!"

"Then we'll thundering well make you!" roared Patchy in a furious burst of rage. "Defy me, will yer? Here, get hold of the little rat, Snooky!"

As he spoke he made a sudden rush at Nippy, his bleary eyes glinting wickedly. But Lowther stopped his rush. In his hand Lowther had one of the patrol tent-poles, and he rammed it neatly between Mr. Patchy's legs as that ugly ruffian lumbered past.

Crash!

Patchy measured his length on the ground with a crash like a falling tree. But he was up again, breathless and raging and roaring like a maddened bull.

"Back up, chaps!" cried Tom Merry.

And the chaps backed up like a shot. Scarcely was Patchy on his feet again when Merry, Blake, Lowther, and Manners made a rush at him.

Tom Merry met a fist like a leg of mutton, and went spinning away, dazed and sick, his head reeling.

Blake met another and all but went down, but it was, fortunately, a glancing blow, and he recovered himself swiftly and returned to the attack.

With the three clinging to him desperately Patchy lurched about, hitting out furiously. By this time, D'Arcy, Digby, and Herries had piled in on to Snooky, and they, too, went lurching about until Herries got a leg behind the wiry ruffian, and he went crashing down, and before he could rise again the three sprang on him, pinning him down.

By this time Nippy, also, had piled in with a will—and it was with a will. The menagerie wail had a goodly number of scores to settle with Patchy, and he made no bones about returning them now.

He joined the four at grips with the mighty Patchy, and his weight and determination made all the difference

Patchy went down at last, and stayed down, still struggling like a madman, making the morning air hideous with his savage ejaculations.

Then Baggy Trimble took a hand in the game. As a rule Baggy gave scraps of all kinds a very wide berth—Baggy was no fighting man. But he quite distinguished himself now. Possibly he realised that Patchy's chances of harming him now were negligible.

At all events, Baggy acted promptly. He picked up a large frying-pan he had just been cleaning, and he gave Mr. Patchy a fearful clout over the head with it.

Bang!

"Yarooooooh!"

Patchy's howl of woe awakened the echoes of the sunlit glade, and Patchy ceased to kick and smite and struggle.

"Good man!" panted Tom Merry, grinning despite his aches and pains. "Now the other chap."

Bang!

"Yarooooooh!"

If anything, Snooky's howl of pain exceeded Patchy's in its fiendishness. He also ceased to fight, and D'Arcy, Digby, and Herries, rolled him over and sat on him. He lay quite still, groaning.

"Now some cord, or rope, or something, Baggy! No, don't give 'em any more!" grinned Tom, as the valorous Baggy was about to give the rascals another dose. "They've had enough, I fancy."

Patchy and Snooky had had enough—there was little doubt about that. Those fearful clumps with that large frying-pan had put the finishing touch to Patchy and Snooky and taken all the fight out of them. They just lay still under the juniors pressing knees, and groaned and gasped.

Baggy rushed for the caravan and vanished up the steps. He reappeared in a couple of seconds with cord and rope enough to bind an army. In a very few minutes the wrists of the wriggling but helpless Patchy and his fellow-prisoner were secured behind their respective backs.

They lay there in the grass and glowered up at the triumphant juniors with dark eyes glinting evilly with rage and hatred.

