

**SPECIAL**

**25,000-WORD  
SCHOOL**

**STORY!**

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

# The GEM 2<sup>D</sup>

LIBRARY

of  
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 915.  
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**TOM MERRY & CO. RAID THE ENEMY CAMP!**

(A lively incident from the magnificent extra-long story of Tom Merry & Co. on holiday, 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.

#### LONGER SCHOOL STORIES!

**T**HIS headline will gladden the hearts of my regular readers, I feel sure, for pretty well every letter in my daily mail-bag contains an earnest request for longer Tom Merry yarns. Gemites henceforth will be on an equal footing with their "Magnet" brothers. Mr. Martin Clifford has buckled to with a will; his one idea is to please. And he can certainly do that. These longer stories will give your favourite author more room to spread himself. Don't run away with the idea that the "extra" length is so much padding. Not a bit of it! The increased space will make for a better story every time. You've sampled the fine camp and caravan series, and you must admit that these Tom Merry yarns are really tip-top. Well, I've still better stories in store for you.

#### THE "NEWS" SUPPLEMENT!

No, we're not keeping this fine little feature out in the cold indefinitely. You'll see it again within the next few weeks as sparkling and as humorous as ever. I might say more humorous than ever, for I've been paying especial attention to this feature with that idea uppermost. Keep your peepers open, chums, for the new "News" supplement.

#### ST. JIM'S JINGLES!

This is another little surprise for you, which will take the form of a number of poems dealing with the most prominent St. Jim's characters. These poems go with a hearty swing, and I feel positively certain beforehand that Gemites will welcome them with open arms. Look out for No. 1, featuring the character of Eric Kildare in verse.

#### THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

The mere mention of this world-famous volume is sufficient to catch the interest of every true Gemite, for there is no other Annual on the market like it. No other Annual, either, records the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. Most of you know that this monster volume of school and adventure stories is published on

#### SEPTEMBER 1st

—not so very far off. Having said that, you will need little urging from me to place an order without delay for a copy of the 1926 edition. Is it as good as last year's Annual? It's better—much better!

#### "MAGNET" FREE GIFTS!

Just a word about the topping Free Gifts of Four Cut-out Stand-up Photos of Famous Cricketers that are being given away with every copy of our Companion Paper the "Magnet" Library this week. They represent action-photos of W. W. Whysall, P. Mead, F. E. Woolley, and A. E. Dipper, and are distinctly good. Apart from the Free Gifts, Gemites will be doing themselves a good turn if they get this week's "Magnet," for there is an extra-special "Bunter" story, a fascinating competition, a special humorous supplement, and a magnificent detective story.

### NEXT WEEK'S PROGRAMME.

#### "KIDNAPPED!"

Another extra-long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. on their caravan holiday.

#### "THE CRIMSON CLAW!"

A long instalment of this powerful new mystery serial, featuring "Penny" Rudd and the sinister Yen How.

#### MY READERS' OWN CORNER!

Another delicious Tuck Hamper and more money prizes awarded to readers for interesting paragraphs, and a repetition of the offer.

**Your Editor.**

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**You Know A Good Joke? Let's Hear it, Chum!**

*Delicious Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Pars.*

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: **The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.**

#### QUITE SIMPLE!

Boss (to new office-boy, who has just entered the office with a look of great complacency on his countenance): "Well, you caught the post with those two letters, then?" New Office-boy: "Yes, sir; just managed it. But you made a funny mistake. You put the twopenny-halfpenny stamp on the London letter, and the penny stamp on the foreign letter." Boss: "Dear me! What a stupid mistake! What ever did you do?" New Office-boy: "Oh, I made it all right, sir! I noticed it just before I put them in the box, so I slipped in the post-office and altered the addresses!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Laurence Brown, 20, Hasting Terrace, Marshfields, Bradford.

#### TRY AGAIN!

"Do you drink coffee?" asked the doctor of an aged patient. "Yes," was the reply. "Coffee," continued the doctor, "is a very slow poison." "Yes, very slow," came the answer. "I have taken it daily for nearly eighty years!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss Margaret Simmonds, 38, Goodwyns Vale, Muswell Hill, London, N.

#### WHAT HE KNEW!

Pat: "Have you ever been to America?" Mick: "Why, yes, hundreds of times!" Pat: "Have you been to Canada?" Mick: "Why, yes, thousands of times!" Pat: "I suppose you have seen Niagara Falls?" Mick: "No; it fell before I arrived!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to John G. Evans, 45, Pembrey Road, Llanelly, Carm, South Wales.

#### CUTTING!

A determined-looking man entered the barber's shop and demanded a hair-cut without conversation. "Excuse me, sir," said the man in the shop, "but—" "I won't excuse another word!" interrupted the customer. "I've just left my regular barber because he was so talkative, and I insist on your cutting my hair without chatter!" When the click of the scissors had been going on for about ten minutes the man in the chair found that his head was like a well-worn scrubbing-brush. "What do you mean by this?" he roared. "It's the best I can do, sir," replied the man. "I haven't cut anybody's hair before in my life! You see, the barber's gone out to lunch. I'm the plumber just come to look at the geyser!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Hawker, 91, Parade, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham.

#### SCOTCH GRATITUDE!

The hotel porter had just seen to the depositing of the Scotsman's luggage in the van, and went up to the carriage door, expecting a tip. "Luggage in safely, sir," he said. "Ope you'll 'ave a comfortable journey!" "Verra sorry, laddie," said the Scotsman, "but I've given ma sma' change to the chambermaid!" "She told me you didn't give her anything," answered the porter. "A', well!" retorted Sandy. "If I didna gi'e your bonnie lass anything, what sort of a chance d'ye think ye've got?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss A. Devine, 53, Mill Lane, Wallasey, Cheshire.

#### IRRITATING!

Judge: "The jury finds you not guilty of stealing the aerial wire." Prisoner: "What do I do now, sir?" Judge: "You may go." Prisoner: "And can I keep the wire, sir?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. S. Turner, Gateacre Nurseries, Halewood Road, Gateacre, Liverpool.

### TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

WHEN TRAILS MEET! Along the trail of the St. Jim's caravan come Patchy and Snooky—two precious rogues whose purpose in following Tom Merry & Co. is as mysterious as it is sinister. From another direction come Gordon Gay & Co.—out for a schoolboy "rag." The sparks are bound to fly when the three trails meet!

# THE SHADOWED CARAVAN!



A Rousing, Extra-Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co.'s Adventures on Holiday.  
By POPULAR  
**Martin Clifford.**

## CHAPTER 1.

### Making Gussy Cross!

"NOW, Gussy, old top—"  
 "We're ready, old man—"  
 "Weally, deah boys—"  
 "Buck up!" admonished Monty Lowther.  
 "We're waiting for that special treat—"  
 "That special surprise!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "You can't back out now, you know, Gussy. You promised that after supper you'd give us a special treat—"  
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"  
 "Let's hope it's a box of chocolates he's going to hand round," said Blake, eyeing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hopefully. "Old Gussy's a good sort—full of ripping surprises. I bet a doughnut he's got a whacking great box of ripping chocs somewhere hidden away."  
 "Weally, Blake—"  
 "If he has, then the sooner he hands 'em round the better," said Herries.  
 "Hear, hear!"  
 "Bai Jove! Weally, deah boys—"  
 "Now don't waste time gassing, Gussy," urged Manners. "Don't keep us in suspense any longer, old chap. We're dying to know what the special treat is."  
 "Yes, rather!"  
 "Vewy well, deah boys; I will keep you waitin' no longah."  
 And Arthur Augustus rose gracefully from his seat on the short, stubby grass.  
 Over the New Forest the shades of night were falling fast—to quote the poet—and over the windswept heath the western sky was a mass of crimson and gold. Against it showed dark clumps of old Scots pines, with smaller but more numerous clumps of gorse and bramble and heather. In the distance, cropping the short grass, were a few stray wild ponies. Save for them, not a sign of life was visible over the wild Hampshire landscape.  
 Long ago the St. Jim's caravan party had left the rolling downs of Sussex far behind, and many, many miles of the beautiful county of Hampshire had rumbled under the wheels of their motor-caravan. And now, here they were at sunset deep in the heart of the New Forest, camping for the night before resuming their wanderings.  
 It was not an ideal spot where they were camping, but it was pleasant, and certainly beautiful. No human habitation was in sight, but the juniors had chosen a little wooded dell, sheltered from the wind by a clump of silver birches, with a tinkling, silvery stream of clear water at the bottom of the dell.  
 That part of the New Forest was quite unknown to the juniors, who preferred the byways to the highways, and who had rigidly avoided the beaten track in their search for new scenes and new adventures.  
 Where the road they had followed led to, they had not

the faintest idea—it was really less a road than a cart-track. But they knew it was leading towards the sea, and it was the sea the schoolboy caravanners were making for at a very leisurely pace.  
 The camping place was scarcely a score of yards from the road, but it was well-hidden from it, and the juniors had the feeling that they were hundreds of miles from civilisation in that solitary spot, silent save for the whispering wind and the murmuring brook.  
 They had run the lumbering caravan over the rough grass, and had shoved the tents up and built a camp-fire. Baggy Trimble had been kicked into activity, and very soon, many hands making work light, a hot supper had been ready, with hot coffee to wash it down—for the evening was slightly chilly after the heat of the day, and the juniors felt they needed something hot.  
 But supper was over now, and the juniors were reclining at ease on the grass round the leaping flames of the camp-fire, waiting for Arthur Augustus to keep his promise—a promise he had made during supper to give his chums a "treat." The promise had mystified his chums very much, and they were more than curious to know what it was.  
 They soon knew.  
 After rising gracefully to his feet, Arthur Augustus flicked a crumb from the sleeve of his elegant blazer. Then he screwed his celebrated monocle more firmly into his noble eye, and coughed:  
 "Hem! Ahem! A-HEM!"  
 His chums blinked up at him.  
 "Got a cough, old man?" inquired Lowther anxiously.  
 "Bai Jove! No, I have not, Lowthah! I was merely cleahin' my thwoat before beginnin', deah boy."  
 "Oh, crumbs!" groaned Lowther. "Now isn't that like old Gussy, you fellows? He's going to inflict a speech upon us."  
 "Weally, Lowthah—"  
 "Isn't that just like Gussy?" went on Lowther. "Always spoils everything! Can't do a generous act without taking the gilt off the gingerbread by making a speech. If you must make a speech first, Gussy, for goodness' sake cut it short."  
 "Lowthah, you uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I have no intention whatevah of makin' a speech. I was merely cleahin' my thwoat before beginnin' to sing—"  
 "To—to whatter?"  
 "It was a yell."  
 "To sing!" explained Arthur Augustus, beaming round him genially. "I pwomised you fellows that I would give you a treat, and I intend to keep my word, bai Jove! I am goin' to sing you a tenah solo, deah boys."  
 "Great Scott! And is that the special treat?" howled Blake.  
 "Yaas, deah boy."  
 "The dashed pleasant surprise?" hooted Tom Merry.  
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"Yaas. I thought at first of givin' you Tosti's 'Good-bye,' or the Toweador's song frowm 'Cahmen.' But, upon weflection, I have decided to give you 'Where My Cawavan Has Wested,' as I weward that as bein' much more appropwiate, deah boys. Now just wemain quiet, and I will begin. Hem! Ahem! A-HEM!"

Once again Arthur Augustus coughed—or, rather, cleared his throat, and then he began to warble:

"Where my caravan has wested,  
Flowahs I leave you on the gwass,  
All the flowahs of love and memowry,  
You will find them when you— Yawoooooh!"

Arthur Augustus knew perfectly well that the word "Yawoooooh!" did not come in the famous old song; but he put it in, nevertheless—he could not help it. And it was a cushion that made him do it—a cushion flung by the irate Blake, and which took Arthur Augustus clean under the chin and deposited him on his back.

The tenor solo came to an abrupt termination, and a yell of laughter went up as Arthur Augustus rolled over.

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"You—you feahful wuffians!"  
Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet, seething with righteous indignation.

"You—you feahful wuffians!" he repeated, stuttering with wrath.

"Ruffian yourself," said Blake warmly. "A heartless ruffian, I call you—leading us poor chaps to expect a treat, and then inflicting that awful row on us!"

"Bai Jove! You—you dare to call my tenah solo an awful wov, Blake?" stuttered Gussy.

"A frightful row, then, if you like that better," said Blake. "We've had enough of your dashed tenor solos at St. Jim's without being tortured with them on holiday."

"Oh, let him go on with it!" said Herries, his eyes suddenly gleaming. "Look here, you chaps, let the awful ass sing if he wants to. And I'll accompany him on my cornet."

"Will you?" hooted Blake.  
"Why not?" said Herries warmly. "I can play, can't I? And I can easily drown old Gussy's shrieking. I've brought it with me—"

"Have you?" said Tom Merry with deadly grimness. "Well, you'd better not jolly well bring it out, that's all, Herries. Great Scott! Why, your dashed cornet-playing's worse than Gussy's shrieking!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"  
"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy—"

"I put it to the company," said Tom, looking round. "Are we going to allow the night to be made hideous by Gussy's catawailing and Herries' honking—"

"Not likely!"  
"Rather not!"

All but Herries and D'Arcy answered in the negative. "That's enough, then," said Tom. "The rule on this tour is that the wishes of the majority count. You hear that, Herries?"

"Oh, all right!" grunted George Herries.  
"And you, Gussy?"

"I wufuse to speak to you, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus haughtily.

"Look here, Gussy—" began Blake.  
"I wufuse to speak to you either, Jack Blake," said Gussy, turning his head away.

"Oh, very well!" said Blake, winking at the company. "I was only going to warn you—"

"I don't require your warnings, Blake!"  
"But I wanted to tell you—"

"I wufuse to hear you!"  
"That there was an earwig—"

"Bai Jove!"  
"On your collar," chuckled Blake.

"Oh, bai Jove!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

He leaped to his feet, brushing frantically at his collar as he twisted round, trying to glimpse the earwig.

"But it's all serene now," said Blake cheerfully. "It's gone now, Gussy."

"Oh, thank goodness!" gasped Arthur Augustus, making as if to seat himself again. "How howwid! I hate—"

"Yes, it's gone now, Gussy," went on Blake cheerfully. "It vanished down the back of your neck a couple of sees ago."

"Yawoooh!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus leaped into the air and started wriggling frantically, with one hand stuffed down the back of his coat-collar.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped. "Pway help me, you fellows, instead of lyn' there eacklin'. Oh, bai Jove! Gwooooh! Ow-wow! I can feel the howwid thing— Gwooooh! Pinchin' me, bai Jove! Oh, gweat Scott!"

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Arthur Augustus detested earwigs—as Blake well knew—and the thought of one exploring his silken underclothing almost drove the swell of the Fourth at St. Jim's frantic. He danced and wriggled and gasped and yelled.

"Better help him, you chaps," said Blake. "Come on!"  
"Right-ho!"

And Gussy's kind chums jumped to help him willingly enough. They grasped their chum, and, turning him upside down, they started to shake him violently.

Shake, shake, shake!  
"Yoooop! Oh, bai Jove!" roared Gussy, kicking frantically. "You feahful wascals! Weflease me at once! Yawooooop!"

Bump!

D'Arcy's obliging chums obeyed him instantly. They released their yelling chum, and after standing on his head for a brief instant, Gussy tumbled over and buried his aristocratic nose in the short turf.

For a moment he lay there gasping, and then he leaped to his feet, suddenly remembering the earwig, and made a wild dash for the caravan nestling beneath the silver birches. Doubtless he had a strong desire to administer a fearful thrashing all round. But the more immediate task was to get rid of the horrid earwig. A moment later, behind the locked doors of the caravan, Arthur Augustus was tearing off his clothes at express speed, heedless of the laughter that floated in through the open windows.

## CHAPTER 2. Old Enemies!

"POOR old Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"It's too bad, though," grinned Tom Merry, re-seating himself on the grass. "Was there an earwig, Blake?"

"I think so," said Blake. "Though it might have been a fly, or a smut from the fire. Anyway, it serves Gussy right for letting us down over his dashed special treat."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

The juniors were still laughing when a youth came into view from behind the motor-caravan. He was a cheerful-looking youth, possibly a trifle older than the juniors, with a shock of rather reddish hair, and merry blue eyes. His face, just now, was streaked with oil and dirt, as were his hands and bare arms, and his somewhat rough clothes were likewise stained and oily.

It was Nippy—Nippy from Nowhere, as he chose to call himself—the driver of the motor-caravan. Nippy had not been the driver when the juniors had started their tour. The man they had engaged had proved a rascal—he had, after giving no end of trouble to the caravanners, decamped and left them stranded, taking their valuables with him. And it was through Nippy that the rascal had been caught and the valuables recovered.

When the juniors had first met Nippy, he had been a paid hand at a travelling menagerie. But owing chiefly to the brutalities of two of the showmen, called Patchy and Snooky, he had left his job and thrown in his lot with Tom Merry & Co.

And an exceedingly useful youth he had proved to be to the caravanners. He was a clever driver, and possessed an almost uncanny knowledge of engines. And though he was curiously reluctant to speak of his private affairs, and though there was obviously a mystery surrounding his upbringing and life in general, the juniors had taken him as he was, and during those first days of the tour they had become quite attached to him.

As he came up to the juniors, wiping his hands and arms on an oily rag, Tom Merry gave him a cheery hail.

"Cheerio, Nippy!" he called. "Give the work a rest for a bit, old chap. Great pip! Haven't you finished tinkering with that old engine yet?"

"Just finished," grinned Nippy. "I've been giving the old box of tricks a good cleaning up; it needed it. Well, what's the programme for to-morrow, chaps?"

"I'm blessed if I know," confessed Tom. "I haven't looked at the giddy map for days, Nippy. I was thinking of running along the coast for a bit, though."

"Good egg!" said Blake. "We could do with some sea-bathing."

"What about going on through Christchurch to Bourne-mouth?" said Digby. "We could do some cinemas, and have a good time all round."

Tom Merry shook his head and chuckled.

"We're giving towns a miss on this trip," he said emphatically. "For one thing, we don't want the bobbies collaring Nippy."

"Not much risk," grunted Herries. "Nippy looks older than his years. Blow the licence—"

"We won't risk it, though; we don't want to lose Nippy," grinned Tom. "We can run along the coast, though, and



"Baj Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, wriggling in the strong grasp of Patchy. "Welease me, you wascal! If you do not welease me at once I shall be obliged to use stwong measures, my man!" The man with a patch over one eye grinned. "Not likely, by hokey!" he said, shaking the St. Jim's junior. (See page 6.)

stop at small places if we want to. We're not far from the sea now."

"Good!" said Nippy, nodding. "I could do with some bathing, too; and I know this coast fairly well. There's a decent little place called Pine Bay somewhere about here. Anyway, I'll have a good wash now; I need it."

And with a grinning nod, Nippy grabbed a bucket and trotted away towards the stream at the bottom of the dell.

"Jolly decent chap," said Blake, following him with his eyes. "We were lucky to get him. We should have been in a fine hole if he hadn't turned up."

"That's so," said Tom slowly. "I—I wonder who the chap is? He wasn't dragged up in that menagerie, I know. He speaks jolly well, and his manners are as good as dear old Gussy's even. The chap's rather a puzzle."

"No biznay of ours," said Manners.

"I know that. But—but it's queer. I can't help wondering why those brutes, Patchy and Snooky were so anxious to get him back to the show again."

"They said he was dashed useful with the animals. I don't wonder they wanted him back," said Blake.

"That's right enough," said Tom, frowning. "But it's queer that they want him back so badly that they'd follow us half across Sussex to get him back."

"Well, we've left the brutes far behind now, anyway," grinned Blake. "I fancy we've seen the last of Patchy and Snooky, old top. In any case, why worry? We've handled the beauties once, and we can handle them again."

"That's so, I suppose. But—Hallo, here's Gussy again!"

"With fire and brimstone in his giddy optics," grinned Lowther. "Look out for trouble."

From the direction of the caravan came Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with features red and wrathful. His eye gleamed behind his eyeglass, and as he approached the grinning juniors he turned up his cuffs in a businesslike manner.

Quite evidently Lowther was right—Arthur Augustus meant trouble.

"Found the giddy earwig, Gussy?" asked Blake genially.

Arthur Augustus eyed him frigidly.

"No; I have not found the eahwig, Blake!" he retorted heatedly. "I do not believe there evah was an eahwig, Jack Blake."

"Go hon!" said Blake.

"You were pullin' my leg, you fwrightful wottah, Blake," said Arthur Augustus quite crossly. "I will ask you to be good enough to put your hands up, you wottah!"

"You are going to give me a fearful thrashing, Gussy?"

"That is what I wpose to do, Jack Blake."

Blake turned his head and regarded his chums sadly.

"Did you fellows expect this of Gussy?" he asked.

"Not at all!"

"Rather not!"

"Neither did I," said Blake grimly. "Is this the way you always treat your guests, Gussy?"

"Baj Jove!"

"Ask them to be your guests on a caravan tour, and then start licking them. Oh, Gussy!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, though there was rather a disturbed look in his noble eye now. "I—I— Undah the cires, I will not twash you, Blake—"

"Thanks, old chap!"

"I wefuse, howevah, to have anythin' furthah to do with you wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus hotly. "I wegard you all with uttah contempt. You have insulted me, and twated me with gwoss diswespect."

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to look heah, and I wefuse uttably to speak to any of you, atfah your wuffianly conduct!"

"Thanks no end! Peace at last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!"

"Look here—"

"Wats! I wepeat—wats!"

With a last withering glare at his heartless comrades, Arthur Augustus strode away.

"Come back, fathead!" roared Tom Merry after him. "Where on earth are you off to, you chump?" D'Arcy had reached the top of the slope, and he stopped and looked back at his chums in the dell.

"I have already requested you not to address me, Tom. Mowwy, and I refuse to answer you one word."

With that Arthur Augustus vanished over the rise. "Oh, let him rip!" laughed Blake. "He'll be back soon enough—fishing for an apology; that's all the ass wants!"

"Hope he doesn't wander far away, anyhow," said Tom Merry. "Soon be dark now, and it's easy enough for a chap to get lost round here."

"Here's old Nippy again," said Manners. The arrival of Nippy just then interrupted the conversation. Nippy was washed, and now he looked a different fellow from the oily, grimy youth of some moments ago. He dropped on the grass by the side of the juniors, and in the general chat that followed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was completely forgotten.

Meanwhile, that somewhat touchy junior had tramped through the little birch-wood and reached the road. His intention was to go for a walk, during which to muse on his wrongs. He was inwardly seething with wrath. As a matter of fact, it was not so much the earwig episode that had upset Arthur Augustus, but the sad fact that his ungrateful chums had "turned down" his offer to sing them a tenor solo. Arthur Augustus prided himself exceedingly on his fine tenor voice, and their refusal to hear him had hurt him badly.

"Wottahs!" murmured D'Arcy, as he strode along the road in the gloom. "I weally do not like to think that the wottahs are jealous of my voice, but I must say that it weally seems like it, bai Jove!"

Musing thus, Arthur Augustus strode on, careless of direction. He stopped suddenly, however. It occurred to him that to wander far from the camp was unwise, seeing that the country was unknown to him, and that darkness was coming on.

But he did not wish to return to face his grinning chums just yet, and, after a moment's reflection, he seated himself on a pile of stones by the roadside.

Darkness was falling rapidly over the New Forest, and not a sound disturbed the deep stillness, until quite abruptly Arthur Augustus became aware of several sounds along the road behind him—the sound of hoofs clattering on the hard road, the crack of a whip, the rumble of heavy wheels, and the sounds of angry, hoarse voices.

Arthur Augustus stood up and stared back along the road. It rather surprised him to find traffic on that lonely spot at such an hour, but as he looked he saw what it was.

Along the rough road a caravan was rumbling; a gipsy van it appeared to be, rickety and unpainted. Between the shafts was an old, decrepit horse, but the animal was ambling along almost at a gallop, the van lurching and bounding behind it.

Then Arthur Augustus saw the reason. Running on either side the horse were two rough-looking men, and they were urging the wretched animal on with blows and oaths.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was very tender-hearted indeed, and anything that remotely approached cruelty to animals touched his tenderest spot, and also made him angry and indignant.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "The bwutes! Fancy floggin' the poah beast like that! I weally must wemonstwat with the wottahs!"

And D'Arcy stepped out into the road to carry out his intention.

That it was rather an unwise proceeding to remonstrate with two such rough-looking men in such a lonely spot at such an hour did not seem to occur to Arthur Augustus, or if it did, he was too stout-hearted to trouble about that. At all events, he did remonstrate.

"Stop! Stop, you bwutes!" he shouted indignantly.

The horse stopped quickly enough, glad enough to do so. The men also stopped, and stared at Arthur Augustus as though he were a ghost.

"By hokey!" said one thickly, blinking in the gloom at the junior. "Blowed if it ain't a youngster, Snooky. Callin' us blokes names, Snooky! 'Ere, young 'un, wot—By hokey! Blamed if it ain't one of them young 'ounds, Snooky!"

The man's voice ended in an excited yell. He seemed to recognise Arthur Augustus, and at the same moment Arthur Augustus seemed to recognise him.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped in alarm. "Patchay and Snokay! Oh deah!"

He blinked uncertainly at the two men, and then, before he could think of moving, a rough hand closed on his arm, and Patchy's bleary eyes were glinting into his.

"It is!" yelled Patchy. "It's the young gent with the

winderpane in 'is eye. One of them young 'ounds as kicked us outer their camp when we was arter Nippy. We've caught 'em up at larst, Snooky!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. The alarmed swell of the Fourth grasped the position quickly enough now. The caravanners had not done with Messrs. Patchy and Snooky, after all. Like Nippy, the two rascals had obviously left the menagerie for good, and were, for some mysterious reason, still on the track of Nippy. They had followed the caravanners through most of Sussex, and now they had followed across most of Hampshire.

That the rascals were still after Nippy, Arthur Augustus could not doubt.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, wriggling in the strong grasp of Patchy. "Welease me, you wascal! If you do not welease me at once I shall be obliged to use strong measures, my man."

The man with the patch over one eye grinned. "Not likely, by hokey!" he said, shaking the junior. "You young 'ound—Ow! Yooop!"

D'Arcy had taken "st Wong measures." His clenched fist clumped home on Patchy's stubby chin, and the rascal's grin vanished, and he howled.

"'Ere, you young imp, none of that!" he snarled. "'Ere, inter the van with him, Snooky!"

"But—but look 'ere, mate. It's Nippy we wants."

"O' course it is, you fool!" snarled Patchy. "But if we lets this kid go to warn the others, what charnce have we of catchin' Nippy, eh? I arks you. 'Ere, come on!"

"Bai Jove! Welease me, you wuffians! Ow, ow! You wottahs! Help! Oh, bai Jove! Wescue, deah boys! Wescue, St. Jim's! Wescue! Gwooooh!"

D'Arcy's sudden, but rather late appeal for aid was stifled as a rough, grimy hand was clapped over his mouth. Then he was lifted like a child in the ruffian's powerful grasp, and carried into the dark, stuffy van. He was flung on to one of the two bunks, and in a flash his wrists were twisted round his back and tied there. Then, after gagging the helpless junior, Patchy left the van and re-joined his companion.

He muttered to him in a low tone for a moment, and then the whip cracked, and amid a shower of blows the horse ambled on again. But this time it turned off the rough track and took to the wild heath, and went rumbling and bumping over the ground. It reached a distant rise, and was outlined for a moment against the last remaining glow of the red sunset, and then it vanished from sight.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### On the Trail!

TOM MERRY yawned prodigiously, and lounged to his feet.

"Jove, I'm tired, you fellows," he yawned. "What about turning in? Got to be up early in the morning, you know. No slacking."

"I'm jolly tired, too," said Blake, following Tom's example, and rising from the grass. "I suppose old Trimble's in his little bunk long ago, and—Great pip! Where's old Gussy, you chaps?"

"Mum-my hat!" There was a startled gasp from the rest of the juniors round the dying camp fire. Blake's sudden question startled them. They had forgotten the very existence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Since Arthur Augustus had departed in a "huff" the juniors had reclined on the warm grass, yarning of St. Jim's—of cricket and boating, and of life in general at the great public school. And Nippy had also told stories of show life—of his adventures with wild animals and with tame animals, and of life in general with a travelling menagerie. So engrossed had the juniors been in his exciting stories that they had forgotten time and everything else, including Arthur Augustus.

But now, as the juniors got to their feet, Blake had remembered that junior with sudden alarm.

"Great Scott!" gasped Blake. "I'd clean forgotten the idiot. Where on earth can he have got to, you chaps?"

"No need to worry yet," said Tom, his face clearing. "I bet the ass has sneaked back, and is snoozing in his tent now."

"Oh, good!"

Though none of the juniors had seen Arthur Augustus return, they realised that he might easily have done so without being seen, or wanting to be seen. Blake hurried across to the white tent, pitched some yards from the caravan, and vanished inside.

He came out the next instant, however, and, shaking his head at the crowd of juniors, he ran on to the caravan. He dived inside, but was out again the next moment, shaking his head again.

His face was quite strained when he ran back to his chums,

"He's not in the tent, chaps, nor in the caravan," he reported, his voice showing his keen anxiety. "That fat ass Trimble's there, snoring like billy-ho. But—but Gussy can't have come back!"

"Phew!"

"What's happened to him?"

The faces of the juniors became rather concerned. Long ago the last glimmer of the setting sun had vanished in the west, and round the St. Jim's encampment the shades of night had fallen like a velvety cloak. A glorious harvest moon was rising high over the trees, however, and the night was still and silent. On his high horse or not, the juniors could scarcely conceive a reason why Gussy should stay away from camp so late, unless—

"He must have met with an accident or something, you chaps," muttered Tom Merry uneasily. "The chump's perhaps fallen into a gully and hurt himself."

"Very likely."

Tom Merry strode to the dying fire and kicked it into a blaze. The flames leaped up, lighting up the silver birch trunks with a lurid light, and showing up the shadowy encampment in the dell. Then Tom Merry shouted—shouted at the top of his voice.

"Gussy! Where are you, Gussy?"

Tom's chums took up the cry, and in the silence their voices sounded terrific. But no answering cry came. The eerie note of a solitary night-bird was the only sound that broke the stillness.

"Better start searching," said Blake. "Oh, the awful ass! We should be able to pick up his tracks. He went through the wood there."

"There's a fair amount of light still, and the moon's rising," said Tom; "but it won't be an easy matter to pick up his trail, for all that. We'll try, though."

Without further ado the juniors and Nippy plunged into the wood, after Tom had rushed to the van for a pocket-torch. And as they expected, it was easy to track Gussy to the road. The difficulty started then. The ground was rough and hard, with scarcely any mud or dust. And though Tom Merry and his chums were trained scouts, they had to confess themselves beaten at last. Here and there

they picked up Gussy's footprints, but at last they lost the "sign" completely; neither could they find it in the tricky light, though they searched for some time.

"It's no good, I'm afraid," said Tom at length. "I've got an idea, though. It's more than likely that poor old Gussy's lost himself—wandering about the heath in a circle, and perhaps not so far away, for all we know. I'm going to climb one of these trees, chaps."

"Good idea, Tommy!"

"I'll try it, anyway," said Tom. "I'll be able to signal with the lamp, and if he's lost he'll see it, perhaps."

Stuffing the pocket-torch in his pocket, Tom ran to the nearest tree—a fairly tall Scots pine—and began to swarm up the bare trunk like an active monkey. He vanished from sight at last amid the black shadows of the foliage at the top.

As he expected, Tom could see for quite a distance, and it was an eerie experience perched up above the silent, desolate forest. Below him, stretching out for miles, was the waste of trees and thickets, like shadowy pools of ink in the moonlight.

Tom scanned the country all round him carefully, hoping to see some movement amid the waste. And at the same time he switched on his torch and flashed it round.

For some moments, clinging to his precarious perch amid the sparse foliage, Tom flashed his light around, and then quite abruptly he stopped.

His keen, youthful eyes had caught a glimmer of light—flickering light—in the shadowy distance. It flickered in and out; obviously a camp-fire.

For some brief seconds Tom stared hard at it, and then he began to descend the tree, hope in his heart.

"Well?" was the cry when he dropped to the ground at last, panting and breathless. "Seen anything, Tommy?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I don't quite know what to make of it, chaps," he said; "but there's a fire over there—over a mile or so away, I should think. It's a camp-fire, I fancy."

"Gipsies!" grunted Herries.

"Perhaps so," said Tom. "But it may be Gussy. He may have sprained his ankle, or something, and lit a fire, hoping

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to attract our attention. And if it is gipsies, then perhaps they've seen something of him."

"Did you mark the place, Tommy?" asked Blake.

"Yes, I've marked the direction," said Tom. "It's beyond that black clump of trees over there. Looked a long way, though. Anyway, it can't be so very far, unless it's a thumping great fire. I vote we go and investigate."

"I'm game, anyway," said Blake.

"Same here."

All the juniors were game. They could not bear the thought of inaction, and they could not think of anything better to suggest.

"Better not all go, though," said Tom, looking at his chums. "Look here, Nippy, you stay behind and guard the camp. Trimble's no good for that; he'd sleep through an earthquake. If Gussy should happen to return while we're away, you'd better climb a tree and flash one of the motor-lamps. We'll be on the look-out for it."

"Right-ho!"

Nippy was obviously disappointed at being left behind; but he ran back to the camp without a word, and Tom started off with his chums. Before coming down the tree Tom had carefully taken his bearings, and he led the way unhesitatingly across the rough ground.

Almost in silence the juniors tramped along, Tom now and again flashing his light around him, still in the hope that the missing Gussy would see it.

But nothing happened, and they had been tramping nearly half an hour when Tom suddenly stopped and pointed ahead.

Through the bunch of pines ahead of them showed a glow—a flickering light—the dancing flames of a camp-fire.

"Oh, good!" breathed Blake.

The juniors pressed on, stumbling into hollows, and over hidden roots and clumps of gorse, and crushing through tangled brambles in the dim and uncertain light.

Tom gave a whispered warning at last, and halted, enjoining silence. They had reached their objective at last—a gully almost surrounded by thickets. From the gully had proceeded the glow of the camp-fire, and now they saw the flames clearly, also the camp.

It was a gipsy encampment right enough, or so the juniors thought at the moment.

In the gully a caravan was rested, just visible in the dancing firelight. Close by a horse was tethered—an old horse, bony and half-starved it looked. And by the camp-fire reclined two rough-looking men, smoking, and talking in low, gruff tones.

The juniors stared at the romantic scene. The flickering light from the fire shone on dark thickets, and glimmered on the glass panes of the caravan windows. It also shone on the stubby, evil faces of the two men. And suddenly Tom Merry gripped Blake's arm hard and gave a gasp.

One of the men had just turned his head, and his face was clearly visible. It was not a pleasant face, and its ugliness was enhanced, so to speak, by a black patch over one eye.

Tom Merry almost dropped as he recognised that face.

It was the face of Patchy, the rascally showman, whom the juniors believed they had left behind in far-away Sussex. And if it was, then the other man—the smaller man—must be Snooky, without a doubt.

A sudden gasp from Blake told Tom that he had recognised the rascals, too.

"You see who they are, Blake?" breathed Tom. "Patchy and Snooky, those awful rascals! Well, I'm hanged!"

"Phew!"

The sight of the rascals almost took the juniors' breath away.

"Well, this beats the band!" muttered Blake. "And we thought we'd given the rotters the go-by long ago. They must have been on our trail all the time, Tommy."

"Looks like it. They must have come by the road we took to get out here, anyway. My hat! It looks to me as if this may account for old Gussy's absence."

"You—you think they've stumbled on Gussy, and collared him?"

"It's more than possible, you chaps!"

"My hat!"

The juniors looked at Tom in the gloom. Yet his theory was certainly sound. The fact of the two rascals being in the neighbourhood gave a new significance to D'Arcy's absence.

"If he is here," said Tom grimly, "he'll be a prisoner in that dingy caravan, you fellows. I'm going to find that

out. You chaps lie low, and don't attempt to chip in unless things go wrong."

Without waiting for his chums' reply, Tom slipped silently away, vanishing from their sight in an instant. Stepping with the trained caution of a scout, Tom crept through the thickets, and round to the rear of the caravan.

Here, under the trees, it was pitch-dark; but though hidden himself, he could see the camp clearly. To reach the steps of the van, however, he had to cross two or three yards of ground lit by the dancing firelight.

Tom decided to make a dash for it. On tiptoe, with his heart in his mouth, he sped across the danger-zone, hoping against hope that the van door would be unlocked.

It was—luck was favouring the daring junior. He was up the steps like a flash of light. The door was not even closed, and the next moment the junior was within the caravan.

Inside, he waited a moment, dreading the angry yell that would tell he had been seen. But it did not come, and taking his torch from the pocket of his blazer, Tom cautiously switched it on, carefully avoiding the high windows. And as he did so there sounded a startled gasp in the van.

"Bai Jove!"

"Gussy!" gasped Tom. "Oh, good!"

Though he had half-expected it, and though he had visited the van in search of his chum, Tom almost jumped out of his skin at hearing that well-known exclamation.

But he quickly recovered himself, and in a flash he was at the bunkside, slashing at the bonds that held his chum captive. It was done at last, and Arthur Augustus stood swaying painfully on his legs the next moment.

"No gassing, now, Gussy," breathed Tom. "We've got to get clear—no good risking a fight with those dangerous brutes."

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, what wot!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to depart until I have given those wascals a fearful thwashin'. They have bwutally illtreated me—have gagged me with a howwible gag even! They only took the beastly thing away a few moments—"

"You awful ass!" hissed Tom Merry. "Come on—let's get out of this!"

He grabbed his chum by the arm, and pushed him towards the door of the van desperately.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy— Oh, bai Jove! What—"

Crash! Clatter! Crash!

It was a saucepan, or some other household utensil, that the protesting Arthur Augustus caught with his elbow, and sent crashing and clattering to the floor.

"That's done it, you idiot!" snapped Tom. "Come on!"

From outside had sounded a startled cry, and even Arthur Augustus saw the folly of waiting longer after that. Tom rushed out of the van, and went flying down the steps, with D'Arcy at his heels.

At the same moment, Patchy and Snooky, alarmed by the noise in the van, came charging across from the fire.

The two parties almost collided, and then, at the critical moment, as Tom swerved to avoid a wild, sweeping blow from Patchy's huge fist, his feet went clean from under him on the short, slippery turf.

He went crashing down, but, as it happened, he did not go alone. Unable to stop his headlong rush, Patchy went hurtling over his prostrate form, and crashed down, burying his face in the earth.

Though half-dazed, Tom was up in a flash. He saw D'Arcy dodging a blow from Snooky, and he ran in swiftly, landing a neat right under the rat-like rascal's bristly chin that brought a yelp from him, and sent him reeling back. Then Tom shouted:

"Run for it, Gussy, you ass!"

And Gussy ran for it, though it is doubtful if he would have done so, had he known Tom was not alone. But he did run, and Blake and the others, who were just about to charge in to the rescue, also turned and ran when they saw their chums were well away.

With furious yells and oaths ringing out behind them, Tom Merry & Co. took to their heels, heedless of the rough going.

Blindly they dashed through the bunch of pines, heedless of knocks and bruises, but once in the open beyond the going was easier. The moon was higher now, and the heath stretched before them almost as light as day.

Risking pitfalls underfoot, the juniors dashed on, and presently the sounds of pursuit died away behind them. Then Tom Merry called a halt, and the juniors stopped, breathless and panting.

Arthur Augustus was the first to speak, and he turned on Tom Merry indignantly.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy!" he exclaimed heatedly. "Why did you wush away like that? Theah are seven of us to deal with the wascals!"

"You—you ass, Gussy!" snorted Tom. "Is that all the thanks a chap gets for getting you out of a nasty hole? We don't want a scrap with those brutes, anyway."

# ANSWERS

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"It's no good, Baggy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You've got to wash or be washed!" "Yaas, wathah!" "In with him, then! Now, altogether! Up——" Splash! "Yaroooooh!" Baggy Trimble's fat form hit the smiling wavelets some yards out with a tremendous splash, and Baggy's howls of fear and wrath ended in a sudden gurgle as he went under. (See page 10.)

"Wubbish! Uttah wot! I have a vevy good mind to weturn alone to administah the thwashin's those wuffians have wicly deserved, bai Jove! I am weally——"

"You—you burbling ass!" hooted Tom. "What's the good of fighting those brutes? They've no sense of fair-play, and some of us might get hurt—badly, perhaps. Anyway, we're well out of it."

"But, weally——"

"Collar the ass!" said Tom briefly.

"What-ho!"

The juniors were "fed-up" with Arthur Augustus, and they collared him quickly enough, and rushed him on, protesting vigorously but vainly. They did not release him until the camp was reached.

As the juniors arrived at the camp, Nippy rose from the fire and hurried to meet them.

"You've found him, then!" he exclaimed. "Oh, good! What happened?"

Tom Merry soon told, and Nippy's fate grew troubled as he listened.

"This is rotten, you chaps!" he muttered. "I'm dashed sorry to be the cause of all this rumpus. How did you bump into the rotters, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus related how he had been captured. He told the story coldly and briefly.

"Well, now, isn't that just like Gussy?" said Blake.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "You can all go and eat coke, bai Jove!"

With that, D'Arcy walked away towards the tent. Evidently he intended to let the sun go down on his wrath—and the moon. But the others were too worried to trouble about Gussy.

"It's getting jolly serious," said Tom. "Those chaps have obviously followed us. They're still after you, Nippy. Haven't you any idea what they're after?"

Nippy slowly shook his head, and coloured a little.

"I—I don't really know," he said, a trifle hesitatingly. "It isn't because they want me back at the show, I'm certain. But I'm sorry to cause you chaps all this trouble."

"My dear man, don't think about that," said Blake, with a laugh. "What the thump could we do without you, anyway?"

"After all, it's adding a spice of adventure to the tour," grinned Lowther. "It's nice to think we're being tracked and can expect to get a knock on the napper any time."

"It won't be for the chap who gets one, though," grinned Tom. "Anyway, we've beaten them once again. And the trouble is we daren't bring the police on the job on account of Nippy. We'll have to fight them on our own, chaps. But we'll have to keep our peepers continually skinned. I vote we clear out of this early in the morning."

"And I also vote someone stays up to keep guard for the rest of the night," said Manners soberly. "If those merchants follow us and try any tricks——"

"Good idea," said Tom promptly. "Look here, I'll keep first watch, anyway."

"And I'll keep the second," said Blake promptly. "We can easily have our snooze out when the van's on the move to-morrow."

So it was settled. Nippy and the rest of the juniors turned in after that eventful night, and, putting fresh fuel on the fire, Tom seated himself just outside the glow, and started his vigil. When his time was up, Blake took his place, and so the night passed. But nothing happened. Neither of the watchers saw signs of the two rascals. And when sunrise came the next morning the caravanners breakfasted and packed up. Half an hour later they were well on their way again towards the sea.

#### CHAPTER 4. In the Briny

"THERE we are!"

"The merry sea waves!"

"Oh, good!"

It was the sea—in sight at last!

Noah's Ark—as Lowther had facetiously dubbed the lumbering caravan—rumbled to a halt.

Seven dusty and sun-burned juniors, with cheery faces also halted. The motor-caravan had been crawling along for the last hour at a snail's pace, and the St. Jim's juniors—or seven of them, at all events—had been walking alongside, glad of the exercise and the open air.

Long ago they had been aware that they were approaching the sea. There was no mistaking the keen tang of the salt-laden breeze. But they halted now at the first sight of the sea.

There it was, sparkling and sun-kissed in the early August morning. Topping a slight rise, the juniors had come in sight of it—the long line of cliffs against the blue skyline, with a deep embayment facing them, through which the shimmering waters of Christchurch Bay showed, less than a quarter of a mile away. In the hazy distance, like great, slumbering monsters, was a glimpse of the Needles.

"Oh, good!" grinned Tom Merry. "It does your giddy optics good to see it!"

"Yes, rather!"

A fat face showed above the open half-door of the van behind the driving-seat, as Baggy Trimble looked out questioningly.

"I say, you fellows!" he said. "What are we stopping for—a little snack?"

"No; a little smack, and it's for you, Baggy," said Lowther, and he flung an apple core at Baggy's fat face. The core smote Trimble on the nose, and Trimble vanished from sight with a yelp.

"Good shot!" said Nippy, who had ducked just in time. "Well, you chaps, what about it? Right or left?"

The juniors understood why Nippy had pulled up now.

The van had reached cross-roads, where the lane they had come by merged into a larger road, going to right and left. To the right it wound away towards a tiny cove, on the sandy shore of which a small village nestled.

"That's Pine Cove," said Nippy. "What about camping there?"

"Looks tophole!" said Tom. "Yes, right, old man."

Nippy drove home the clutch, and the caravan rumbled on again after the juniors had swarmed aboard. They were eager to camp, and Nippy put on speed a little.

"Soon be camped now," said Tom Merry, giving Trimble a cheerful dig in his fat ribs. "Then you can have a much-needed wash in the briny, Baggy."

"Ow wow!" gasped Trimble. "You ass! You needn't punch a chap! I'm not jolly well going into the beastly water, anyway! That's flat!"

"Aren't you?" said Tom. "We're going to see about that, my fat pippin. We can't have lazy slackers who won't wash with us—eh, you fellows?"

"No fear! Baggy must wash!"

"I jolly well won't!" hooted Baggy. "I don't need a wash, I tell you! Yah! If there's going to be any trouble, you fellows, I shall just clear off and leave you in the lurch. There!"

"You mean that?" said Lowther eagerly.

"Yes, I mean it!"

"Thank goodness! A chance to get rid of the fat frog at last, chaps!" said Lowther, with satisfaction. "All we've got to do to get rid of Baggy is to make trouble. Well, we'll do that soon enough. I vote we start by giving the fat toad a sound bumping."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yah! Beasts!" howled Trimble.

And, making a flying leap for one of the bunks he scrambled inside, and clung on to the sides.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums roared, but to Baggy's relief they did not "make trouble" by carrying out Lowther's suggestion.

"This looks a ripping place," said Tom Merry, glancing through the doorway. "I vote we stay here for a few days and take it easy. We can spend our time exploring and swimming, and what-not."

"Is what-not taking it easy, like swimming and exploring?" inquired Lowther.

"Rats!" said Tom. "You jolly well know what I mean, you ass! Hallo, Nippy's pulling up again!"

Noah's Ark rumbled to a halt, and Nippy poked his head into the caravan.

"Jolly nice camping-place here, Merry," he said. "Come and have a look!"

The juniors tumbled eagerly out of the caravan.

They found it, as Nippy had claimed, a very nice camping-place—or it certainly appeared to be from some distance away. It was a little wooded hollow, a snug little valley less than a hundred yards inland from the road. Through the trees, still farther inland, showed the red roofs of buildings—evidently a farm.

"Oh, good!" said Tom. "Nicely screened, and only a few minutes from a farm and the village. That will do nicely."

"Yaas, wathah!"

A rough cart-track led over the downs to the glade, and

Nippy started his engine again, and the van rolled and lurched off the road on to the cart-track. A suitable spot was chosen, and then all set to with a will; only Baggy Trimble setting to with an ill-will—having had to be kicked into activity as usual.

The tents were up at last, and all made ship-shape, and then the juniors got their towels and bathing-costumes out. They had been obliged to miss their usual bath that morning, and they were eager to make up for the omission.

Nippy volunteered to stay in camp, and the juniors agreed. Baggy Trimble also volunteered to stay in camp, but Tom Merry & Co. did not agree.

"Come on, you fat slacker!" said Tom grimly. "I've said you need a wash, and you're going to have one."

"Sha'n't!" yelled Trimble. "Yah!"

With that Baggy made a dive for the van steps, but Lowther was too quick for him. He yanked Baggy back, while Tom rooted out a spare costume and a towel.

"Here you are, Baggy," said Tom, flinging the towel and costume over Trimble's fat shoulder. "I expect you'll bust the costume getting in it, but it'll be bust in a good cause."

"Yah! Beasts! I tell you— Yarroooooh!"

Baggy yelped furiously as a towel flicked him over his right ear; he yelped still more as another towel flicked him over his left ear.

"Keep it up!" ordered Tom Merry cheerfully. "A stubborn mule needs the whip."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

Flick, flick, flick!

With towels flicking to right and left and behind him Baggy howled and made a rush to escape. But the juniors would have none of it. They could run faster than Baggy, and they easily headed him in the direction they wished him to go.

Escorted by the laughing juniors and the flicking towels, Trimble ran on, roaring, until he reached the road, and then he stopped.

"It's all right!" he howled. "Ow-ow-wow! Yooon! Stopit, you beasts! It's all right! Ow! Yow! I'll come!"

"That's good enough, then," said Tom. "Cease fire, chaps! Now you know what to expect, Baggy."

"Beasts!"

Baggy did know, and he gave no further trouble. Grumbling and fuming he accompanied the grinning juniors as they climbed up the slope to the cliff-top. As his eyes scanned the beach below, Tom Merry grunted.

"No good there," he said emphatically. "Too many dashed stones and pebbles! Let's try a bit farther on."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors tramped on, their eyes on the look-out for a more suitable bathing-place. Below, for some distance towards the village, the beach was rough and pebbly, and in any case they saw no place to descend from the cliff-top. But as they tramped on, the pebbles gradually gave place to smooth sand, and suddenly Blake gave a whoop as they came to a series of steps running steeply down the cliff-face.

"Here we are!"

"Hip-pip!"

At a break-neck pace, with Baggy panting and gasping in the rear, the St. Jim's juniors went down the steps to the beach below. Baggy would dearly have liked to turn tail and bolt back, but he knew what to expect if he did.

It was a lonely spot, and, finding a sheltered nook, the juniors quickly changed into their costumes and dived into the cool sea—all excepting Baggy Trimble. That junior stood shivering on the marge, so to speak. Lowther yelled to him.

"Come on, you fat slacker! No backing out!"

"He isn't in yet," grinned Blake. "I vote we help him in."

"Good wheeze!"

The juniors waded ashore and made a rush for the nervous bather. Baggy yelled and took to his fat heels across the golden sands.

"Tallyo-ho! Yoiks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughing uproariously the juniors went in chase of Baggy. They caught him up very quickly, and they hauled him back, yelling and kicking and struggling.

"It's no good, Baggy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We can't have an unwashed tramp accompanying us on the tour, old top. You've got to wash or be washed."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In with him, then! Now, altogether! Up——"

Splish!

"Yarrooooooh!"

Baggy Trimble's fat form hit the smiling wavelets some yards out with a tremendous splash, and Baggy's howl of fear and wrath ended in a sudden gurgle as he went under.

"Back!" warned Lowther. "Just look at the tidal wave he's kicked up."

"Help! Murder! Rescue!" howled Baggy, wallowing

about frantically in three feet of water. "Help! I'm drowning, you heartless beasts! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy managed to get on his feet at last, and started to wade ashore. Tom Merry waved him back.

"That's not enough, Baggy!" he called. "You'll stay in, old top, or we'll pitch you in again. Understand?"

"Yah! Beasts! Oh crumbs! Grooooh! I'm wet through! I shall catch my death of cold, and it'll all be your faults, you rotters! Yah!"

"Mind you stay in—up to your fat neck, at least," warned Tom. "If we spot you trying to dodge, we'll come along and give you socks."

"Beasts!" gasped Baggy.

But he stayed in, for all that, and the other laughing juniors left him to it and dived in to enjoy themselves.

"That's dealt with Baggy," said Lowther, with satisfaction. "Now what about dealing with that silly chump, Gussy? He's been on his giddy high horse long enough!"

"Oh, let him rip!" grunted Blake.

But Lowther was determined not to let Gussy "rip" any longer. In addition to allowing the sun and the moon to go down on his wrath, Arthur Augustus had allowed the sun to rise upon it again that morning. And, though he certainly had exchanged words with his erstwhile friends, they had been icy, and they had been few and far between. In chilly dignity Gussy had breakfasted with the chums, in chilly dignity he had taken his share in the work and routine of camping, and now in chilly dignity he had accompanied them for a bathe that bright summer's morning. The lofty dignity of Arthur Augustus had been offended, and that was a very serious matter indeed—to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Over breakfast Blake certainly had apologised most humbly and handsomely, and Arthur Augustus had melted a little, and all looked like being merry and bright once more. But just at the critical moment, Gussy had caught Blake winking at the others, and Gussy had immediately "frozen" again, and the apology had ended in smoke, so to speak.

It was very sad, but there it was; Arthur Augustus was still on his high horse.

But Lowther was determined to rouse him from his mood of depression and dignified "rot," as he expressed it. He ran back across the sand to the little heap of clothes, and fumbled for a moment in the pocket of his blazer. With something in his hand he ran back and plunged in again.

"What the thump is the ass up to?" exclaimed Blake.

They watched Lowther swim out towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That junior had taken no part in the "washing" of Baggy Trimble. He had dived in alone, and swum some distance out, and was now floating on his back, basking under the hot sun.

They saw Lowther swim out past him, and then turn back. Obviously Arthur Augustus had not seen him, and when within a few yards of him, Lowther, who was an excellent swimmer, dived abruptly, and vanished from sight.

What happened next was rather alarming.

Without warning, Arthur Augustus suddenly gave vent to a most fearful yell, and leaped almost a foot out of the water. Then he started to splash and leap and prance about in an extraordinary manner, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Yawwooooooh! Oh, bai Jove! Yoooooop! Wescue, deah boys! Oh crumbs! Gwooooh! Yawwwoooooh!"

"What the thump—"

The juniors watched the extraordinary antics of Arthur Augustus in astonishment—until Lowther suddenly appeared some yards away, a gleeful grin on his face.

"What the thump have you done to the ass, Lowther?" demanded Tom Merry. "Great pip! Look at him!"

For the antics of Arthur Augustus were truly weird and wonderful. He rolled and plunged, and kicked and yelled, and then he started to swim, still kicking madly, for the beach.

"It's all right!" grinned Lowther. "I thought I'd waken him up a bit. I've fastened a giddy paper-clip on his big toe. It's a whopper with a strong spring, and he thinks it's a crab or a lobster, or a giddy octopus that's got him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter, as Arthur Augustus plunged ashore, and rolled over on the sands.

"Yawwoooooh! Help, deah boys! It's got me! A beastly cwab! Oh, bai Jove! Yawwooo— Gweat Scott!"

Gussy's howl ended in an exclamation of astonishment as he suddenly caught his first glimpse of what was clinging to his big toe. His expression was a sight when he made a sudden grab and plucked the paper-clip off his big toe.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, bai Jove! You—you awful wuffians!"

Arthur Augustus sat on the golden sands and stared at the paper-clip. Then he glowered at the laughing chums with feelings too deep for words.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you fwightful spoofers, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you awful wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "This is some of your wotten work, Lowthah, you awful ass!"

With that Arthur Augustus jumped to his feet, his eyes gleaming with wrath and chagrin. He was about to make a rush at the laughing Lowther, when he paused abruptly.

His noble eye had just seen something decidedly queer—and at the same moment his chums saw it, too.

From the rocks behind which the juniors had left their clothes a figure had just emerged, and gone speeding across the sands towards the steps up the cliff.

It was that of a youth in Boy Scout's uniform. He went speeding away, with his shoulder ribbons streaming behind him in the breeze.

"What the thump—" began Tom Merry.

"It's somebody been monkeying with our clobber!" snapped Blake. "After him, in case— Mum—my only hat!"

Blake stopped, and simply gasped like a stranded fish.

For at that moment an extraordinary thing happened.

From behind the pile of rocks something showed—huge and white. It was a huge bundle of clothes—their own clothes, which they had left in neat piles on the beach. It hovered in the air just above the rocks, and then it began to sail up into the air before their very eyes.

Up, up, up, it went, apparently with means of support, crawling up the cliff face like a great white spider.



Hails from bonnie Scotland. A curly-headed youth and as shrewd as they make them. A member of the New House, and the able assistant of George Figgins, the House's leader. A splendid all-round fellow is Kerr, great at sports, and clever at his studies. Always ready for a jape, and is a splendid impersonator—which fact the School House has learnt to its cost! United in the closest friendship with Figgins and Wynn, with whom he shares Study No. 4 in the New House.

"G-great snakes!"  
 "G-goo' gracious!"  
 "Mum-my hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. watched it with staring eyes that seemed likely to leave their sockets.

### CHAPTER 5. An Ultimatum!

IT was extraordinary—positively uncanny.

Open-mouthed, the eight bathers watched as the crawling bundle of clothes reached the top of the cliff and vanished over the edge.

"G-goo-good gracious!" gasped Tom Merry.

He was absolutely dumbfounded.

But suddenly Blake gave a yell, and pointed upwards. Several grinning faces, surmounted by Scouts' hats, had appeared over the edge of the cliff.

"It's a jape!" howled Blake. "It's some dashed Scouts, and they've pinched our clobber. That chap we saw dash away must have tied them up in a bundle, and the others pulled the bundle up on the end of a cord."

"Oh, my hat!"

Blake was right—there was little doubt about that. It was just some unknown Boy Scouts having a lark with them.

"Who the thump are they, though?" gasped Tom Merry, staring keenly up at the grinning faces. "I—I seem to know them, somehow. Hallo, what's this coming down? Look out!"

Something came dropping down towards them at the end of a long cord. It seemed to be a stone, and as it touched sand Tom Merry pounced upon it. It certainly was a stone, but tied to it was a piece of twisted paper.

Tom Merry opened the paper—and then he jumped.

There was writing on it, and, like the grinning faces above, the writing seemed curiously familiar to Tom Merry.

He blinked at the writing, and then quite suddenly he understood. For the writing ran as follows:

"Dear old sleepy Saints,—Cheerio!

Fancy meeting you here—and fancy you meeting us! Sorry—so sorry—to have to pinch your clobber, but our motto is, 'Business as usual,' even on holidays.

If you want your giddy clobber back, be good enough to sign—all of you—the ultimatum on the other side, and return via the card.

If you won't sign, we shall keep your clobber until you do—if it means till the end of the vac, old dears. The state of your togs tells us you haven't a change with you, so you'd better sign, and take it smiling.

Wake up! We spotted you trotting down the steps, and if you'd not been so sleepy you'd have spotted us.

Hear us smile!—Your dear old pal,

"GORDON GAY."

"Gordon Gay!"

It was a yell as the St. Jim's juniors read that extraordinary epistle.

"Well, I'm hanged!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

The juniors gazed blankly at each other, and then up at the grinning faces lining the top of the cliff. There were four faces there now—the one who had tied the bundle up had reached his accomplices by this time.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Well, this beats the band! I'd heard those dashed Grammarians were camping out for the vac on the South Coast somewhere, but I never dreamed we should meet them here."

"Rather not! It—it's the limit!"

The juniors were staggered. That they should stumble upon Gordon Gay & Co., the rival juniors from Rylcombe Grammar School, close to St. Jim's, was, indeed, the limit.

But there was no doubt about it.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Blake, shaking his fist up at the cheery Scouts above. "It looks as though they've got us in a cleft stick."

"Oh dear! What's the ultimatum, Tommy?"

Tom turned the paper over. He read out the ultimatum set down thereon. It was brief and to the point—too much to the point for Tom Merry & Co. It read:

#### "ULTIMATUM.

"We hereby declare and place on record that we, the undersigned, are a sleepy lot of incompetent asses!

"We hereby admit that Rylcombe Grammar School have been, are, and always will be, top dogs, and that St. Jim's is hopelessly dished, diddled, and done brown, as it always has been.

"We hereby admit our inferiority in sports, in japing,  
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and in everything else, to the young gentlemen of the Rylcombe Grammar School.

"We humbly beg pardon for past misdeeds, and humbly request that our clobber be returned to us.

"(Signed) etc.—"

At the bottom were pencilled lines—apparently for the names of Tom Merry & Co. to be signed upon.

Tom Merry & Co. blinked at the extraordinary document. "Great Scott!" gasped Tom. "And do the asses expect us to sign that? Why, I'd rather sign my death-warrant!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat, yes!"

The juniors blinked at each other with growing wrath and indignation. Even Arthur Augustus had forgotten his wounded dignity in face of that astonishing ultimatum. They knew only too well why Gordon Gay & Co. wanted it. The rivalry between the two neighbouring schools was historic and incessant. With that document in their possession, Tom Merry & Co. knew that their deadly rivals would make the most of it on returning to Rylcombe. They would have the ultimatum framed, and copied, and broadcast, as it were, to all and sundry. The discomforted Saints would never hear the last of it. They would be obliged to hide their diminished heads for terms.

It could not be—it must not be. Tom Merry & Co. were determined upon that at once. They would never sign it whatever happened.

"But what on earth can we do?" groaned Blake. "They've got us, no doubt about that. We've no other clothes scarcely. They've got us beat!"

"Yaas, wathah!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, almost beside himself with dismay. "Oh deah! We must weally sign it, Tom Mewwy. In any case, my clobber will be feahfully ewashed and wumpled. Oh, bai Jove!"

"Rot!" snorted Tom Merry. "Blow your clobber, Gussy! We're not climbing down to this—no fear! But—but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughter, faint and gleeful, came down from the cliff-top. Gordon Gay & Co. were enjoying the situation. Then came Gordon Gay's voice—all of them recognised it now.

"What price the Saints now? How d'you like 'em done, Tommy?"

"You awful rotters!" hooted Tom Merry. "You can laugh. We'll make this square, you see if we don't. Come on, you fellows, let's risk it and go up after them!"

"Better not!" called Gordon Gay, his voice sounding faint and cerie. "We'll just clear out with the clobber if you do!"

But Tom Merry & Co. did not heed the warning. They started off at full tilt for the steps. With Baggy Trimble puffing and blowing like a grampus behind them, the incensed juniors were speeding up the cliff steps, careless of cuts to their bare feet.

They reached the top, breathless and panting, and then they looked about them.

The cliff-top, like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, was bare—as was the distant road. Gordon Gay & Co. had kept their word—had vanished, and with them had gone the raided clothes.

"Let's hunt for the rotters!" snorted Blake. "They can't have got far, and there are heaps of hiding-places on these dashed cliffs. Come on, spread out and search."

"Half a minute," said Tom Merry. "That looks like their camp over there. There's no other in sight, anyway."

He pointed, and the juniors followed the direction he indicated. Beyond the sleepy village in the cove below showed two white bell-tents, on a patch of green grass just above the beach. It was the Grammarians' camp without a doubt—no other was in sight. The juniors could just make out two figures in Scout's uniform, moving about the small camp.

"Two of 'em!" said Tom, with satisfaction. "That means they're only six altogether; looks like it, anyway. Good! By jingo! I've got an idea, you fellows—a stunner!"

"Well, let's hear it, quick!" snapped Blake crossly. "I'm blessed if I like this game."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Gay and his pals must be hiding somewhere near," he said grimly. "They may be watching us now, waiting to see what we do. What about raiding their camp and taking it away, lock, stock, and barrel? How's that?"

"But, you ass—"

"Easy as winking," grinned Tom. "Our camp can't be seen from here; they obviously don't know where it is, or how we came, for that matter. What about rushing back and getting Nippy to run us down to their camp. We'll pack their tackle up and take it to our camp. I bet we can manage longer without our togs than they can without their dinner, not to mention their dashed camp!"

"Phew!"

"Good man, Tommy!"

As the idea soaked in, it fairly took Tom's chums by storm. It sounded beautifully easy.

"Come on, then!" snapped Tom Merry.

He led the way with a rush, and his chums followed hard at his heels, Trimble bringing up the rear. They soon crossed the deserted road, and were at the camp in no time. They found Nippy busy on the engine with an oily rag.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated staring at the juniors. "What the thump—"

"Quick, Nippy!" shouted Tom. "Get your old bus going at once—crank up! I'll tell you the game as we go along."

Without waiting for Nippy to act, Tom sprang to the starting handle, and whirled it round. And—for a wonder—after sucking and gurgling a little, the engine started with a bang and a rattling clatter.

"Up you get, Nippy!" snapped Tom. "Take her through the village as hard as you can lick her. Inside, you chaps!"

The juniors—excepting Trimble—leaped aboard the caravan, and Nippy waited for no more. He leaped into the driving seat and let in the clutch.

"Look after the camp, Baggy!" yelled Tom. "You can be getting dinner ready. We sha'n't be long!"

"Here!" yelled Baggy. "Don't leave—"

The roar of the engine drowned Baggy's further remarks as the van lurched and bumped its way along the cart-track. It reached the road and went rumbling at quite a good speed towards the village. As they rumbled along, Tom Merry, who had donned a raincoat, and had seated himself with Nippy, explained the situation. Nippy grinned and nodded.

"Right-ho!" he chuckled. "This is a game after my own heart. Tell me when to turn."

"Just through the village," grinned Tom. "There's a little lane that leads right up to their camp. I spotted it from the top of the cliffs."

They rumbled on, Tom keeping a sharp look-out for signs of the enemy. But a low hill hid the cliff-top from view of the road, and he had little fear of Gordon Gay & Co. seeing them, though the Grammarians were not likely to guess who were aboard the van.

They were through the village in a very few minutes, and Nippy turned the van into the lane. They could see the Scouts' camp clearly now, and in a matter of seconds the van had rolled through a gateway, and was pulled up on the grass just before the two white tents.

As the van lurched and bumped to a standstill there was a shout, and two Scouts came running up from the campfire, where a large stew-pot hung on three sticks. They had been preparing dinner, apparently, for one held a knife and a potato, and the other had a cabbage in his hand.

Tom Merry recognised them at once. They were the brothers Wootton, of Rylcombe Grammar School.

As Tom jumped to the ground they blinked at him as if they could scarcely believe their eyes.

"G-great pip!" gasped Harry Wootton. "It's—it's Tom Merry! Well, my only topper! Am I dreaming?"

"No, not at all," grinned Tom Merry. "You can drop that cabbage and that potato, old nuts. There's going to be no dinner for you to-day. Now, you chaps!"

At Tom's cry Blake and the other St. Jim's juniors leaped from the van. At once the brothers Wootton grasped the fact that this was no friendly visit.

"Back up, Harry!" yelled Jack Wootton. "It's a raid! Oh, you rotters!"

As he spoke Jack Wootton threw the cabbage at Tom Merry, fairly bowling that junior over. But Harry Wootton was given no time to throw the potato, or to do anything, in fact. He went down with three St. Jim's juniors swarming over him.

"Down with the Gwammah School!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Down with the cheeky wottahs!"

It was over in a very few seconds. The brothers Wootton fought gallantly—as they always did—but it was useless. The odds were too great. They were tied up into neat bundles and thrown into the caravan.

"Now to work, you chaps! Hallo, there's their trek cart! Oh, good!"

The triumphant Saints set to work with a will, dismantling the camp. They were old hands themselves at the game, and it did not take them long. The tents were dismantled very quickly and packed on the trek cart, as were the bedding and cooking utensils; even the stew-pot was taken and packed with other things into the caravan.

The work was finished at last; not a vestige of the Scouts' camp was left standing. Then Tom wrote a brief note, and, sticking it on a Scout's pole, he jammed the pole into the soft earth.

"They'll see that when they're looking for their camp," he grinned. "I've told dear old Gordon that he can have his camp back when he brings our clobber back. And when he brings our clobber back we'll give him socks for his cheek. What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors lost no further time. They tumbled aboard Noah's Ark, ignoring the savage remarks and futile glares of the alarmed Wootton brothers.

Then the van rumbled away, homeward bound, with the loaded trek cart towed behind. It rolled on through the pretty, sleepy village of Pine Cove, and just outside the village they met four Scouts tramping along.

They were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, Carboy, and Gustave Blanc, the French junior.

"Hallo!" grinned Tom Merry. "Here they come. They



haven't the clobber, but I expect they've hidden it somewhere."

He turned round and called through the open half of the door behind the driving-seat:

"Here they come, chaps!" he said. "Don't let them spot you!"

"Right-ho!" called Blake from within.

As the Scouts came nearer Tom ducked down behind the bonnet. The van drew level with the Scouts, who barely

glanced at it as they tramped along, laughing among themselves. Obviously, they did not dream it belonged to Tom Merry & Co.

But Lowther, who couldn't resist such a chance, grabbed the nearest thing to hand as the van passed the Scouts. It happened to be an apple, and it whizzed through the open van window and took Gordon Gay clean on the chin.

"Yarrooooooh!"

Gay roared fiendishly, and sat down with a bump on the dusty roadway. The van rumbled on, leaving Gordon Gay seated in the road, rubbing his aching chin, and shaking a furious fist after it. And from the interior of the van came a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That surprised dear old Gordon, I'll bet," chuckled Monty Lowther. "But it's nothing to the surprise he'll get when he reaches his camp, or rather, the site."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the St. Jim's juniors laughed loud and long as the caravan rolled on to their camp. They had certainly had the last laugh—up to date, at all events.

### CHAPTER 6. Captured!

"OW! Oh, my hat! Ow-wow! The howling hooligan's nearly busted my chin! Oh, crumbs!"

Thus Gordon Gay.

The leader of the Grammarians tottered to his feet on the dusty road, and rubbed and rubbed at his aching chin. The caravan containing the unknown "hooligan" who had flung that apple had disappeared along the road in a cloud of dust.

"Perhaps it was an accident," suggested Frank Monk, trying not to grin. "Some silly ass in the van must have chucked it out, not seeing us in the road."

"Accident!" hooted Gordon Gay. "Who'd chuck a good apple for nothing? It was jolly well chucked on purpose. I—I'd like five minutes with the cad who chucked it, I can tell you. I'd teach him to chuck apples at people on the road. Groooh!"

"It looks jolly queer," said Carboy, shaking his head thoughtfully. "I—I suppose it couldn't have been those dashed Saints in that caravan?"

"My hat!" said Gordon Gay suddenly. Then, just as suddenly, he shook his head. "Couldn't be," he sniffed. "I heard Blake quacking about their trip in the Rylcombe tuckshop the day before the vac started. He mentioned a horse van, so it couldn't be. Anyway, let's get back home to dinner. If those Wootton asses haven't got dinner ready I'll punch 'em!"

In a very grumpy mood Gordon Gay led the way on again. As a matter of fact, Gordon was rather disappointed at the way Tom Merry & Co. had treated his "ultimatum." He had felt certain they would have had to climb down. He had noted the dusty, travel-stained state of their clothes, and he had guessed they had no change of clothes with them. He hadn't the faintest idea where their camp was, and he had imagined that, rather than have to parade through the village, perhaps, in their bathing costumes and towels, they would have been forced to sign the document.

But he knew different now. From the shelter of a thicket some distance towards the village, they had seen Tom Merry & Co. dash away in the opposite direction, and he had realised that their camp was situated somewhere there.

"They must have some spare clobber, after all, you chaps," he grunted, as they walked on through the village. "Anyway, we've got their other clobber hidden in that cave, and we aren't parting with it for nothing."

"Rather not!"

"It's ripping having the beggars here," said Gordon Gay, brightening up a little. "We'll have some fun now."

"I wish they didn't outnumber us, though," said Frank Monk, shaking his head. "Eight to six—counting that fat ass Trimble, of course—is rather rough on us."

"Rot!" grinned Gay. "We'll lick 'em, for all that. We'll have dinner straight away, you chaps; and after dinner we've got to find out where their dashed caravan is. When we've discovered that, we'll fairly make the fur fly. After all, we've dished 'em this morning."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Carboy and Blanc.

But Frank Monk shook his head. He was looking a trifle uneasy.

"It looks rummy to me," he grunted. "Why didn't the asses come chasing after us to try to get the clobber back? It wasn't like them to dash off in the opposite direction like that. Depend upon it, they'd thought of some wheeze to—Mum—my hat!"

Frank Monk stopped dead, his eyes fixed ahead of him.

The Grammarians had just reached the little lane at

the end of which their camp was—or had been—situated. And Frank Monk's eyes missed something at once.

"Where the thump are our giddy tents gone to?" he demanded in wonder. "Look! There's no sign of them. They couldn't have been blown down, hang it all!"

"Great Scott!"

The Scouts stared blankly along the little lane. Their nice white tents should certainly have been visible to them over the hedge of the field they were approaching. It was really most mysterious.

"Come on!" snapped Gordon Gay, rather uneasily.

He set off at top speed along the lane. In a very few seconds they had reached the gateway, and as they dashed through they all gave simultaneous shouts of amazement.

"Gone!"

"Our camp!"

"Great pip!"

"What the jumping jingo—"

It was flabbergasting. The camp had obviously gone. The tents were gone—all the camp paraphernalia gone, even to the stewpot. Only the fire was left to tell the Grammarian Scouts that they were not mistaking the site.

"Well, this beats the band!" gasped Gordon Gay faintly. "Our camp gone, and Jack and Harry Wootton gone, too. Oh, the awful asses! Am I dreaming, or what?"

It was a futile question to ask, but the Grammarian leader hardly knew where he was, so astounded was he.

"It—it's common land, so they can't have been kicked off," he mumbled. "I wonder—Hallo! What's this?"

He ran over to the Scout's stove sticking up from the turf, and snatched at the slip of paper stuck in the cleft. As he opened it out and read he gave a howl of wrath.

The note was in Tom Merry's well-known fist, and read as follows:

"Dear old sleepy asses,—Call yourselves Scouts? Ha, ha, ha! Fancy finding you not here! Here's our ultimatum, old nut! Bring back our clobber, and you shall have your little camp back. Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

(Signed) TOM MERRY."

Gordon Gay fairly danced with rage, and his chums joined him in the dance when they had read the short but pointed note.

"Done! Dished and done brown!" wailed Frank Monk. "I knew there was something fishy about it all. They must have slipped round and done this while we asses were waiting to see if they'd come back again. They could see our camp from the cliffs, of course. That's why—Look!"

Frank broke off to point at the turf.

"Wheel-marks!" he howled. "Wheel-marks of a lorry or something! My hat! It was their caravan we saw, after all, you chaps! It was one of the awful rotters who pitched that apple at you!"

"Oh, mum—my hat!"

Gordon Gay & Co. saw it all now, in a flash. The caravan they had met on the road was Tom Merry & Co.'s, after all—it must have been. The defeated Grammarians looked at each other with sickly looks.

"What's to be done?" groaned Gordon Gay, his usually sunny features glum and hopeless. "What about dinner, for one thing? And what about our pals? They've collared them, too, without a doubt. Oh, what awful asses we were not to watch 'em!"

"No good standing here," grunted Carboy. "Nice leader you are, Gay—I don't think, I'm jolly hungry!"

"So'm I!" snorted Monk and Gustave Blanc.

Gordon Gay knitted his brows.

"No good slanging me!" he growled. "We've got to do something, of course. Oh, won't those cads crow about this! Look here, we've got to find their camp first. My hat! We've only got to follow the wheel-marks of their caravan to do that. Come on!"

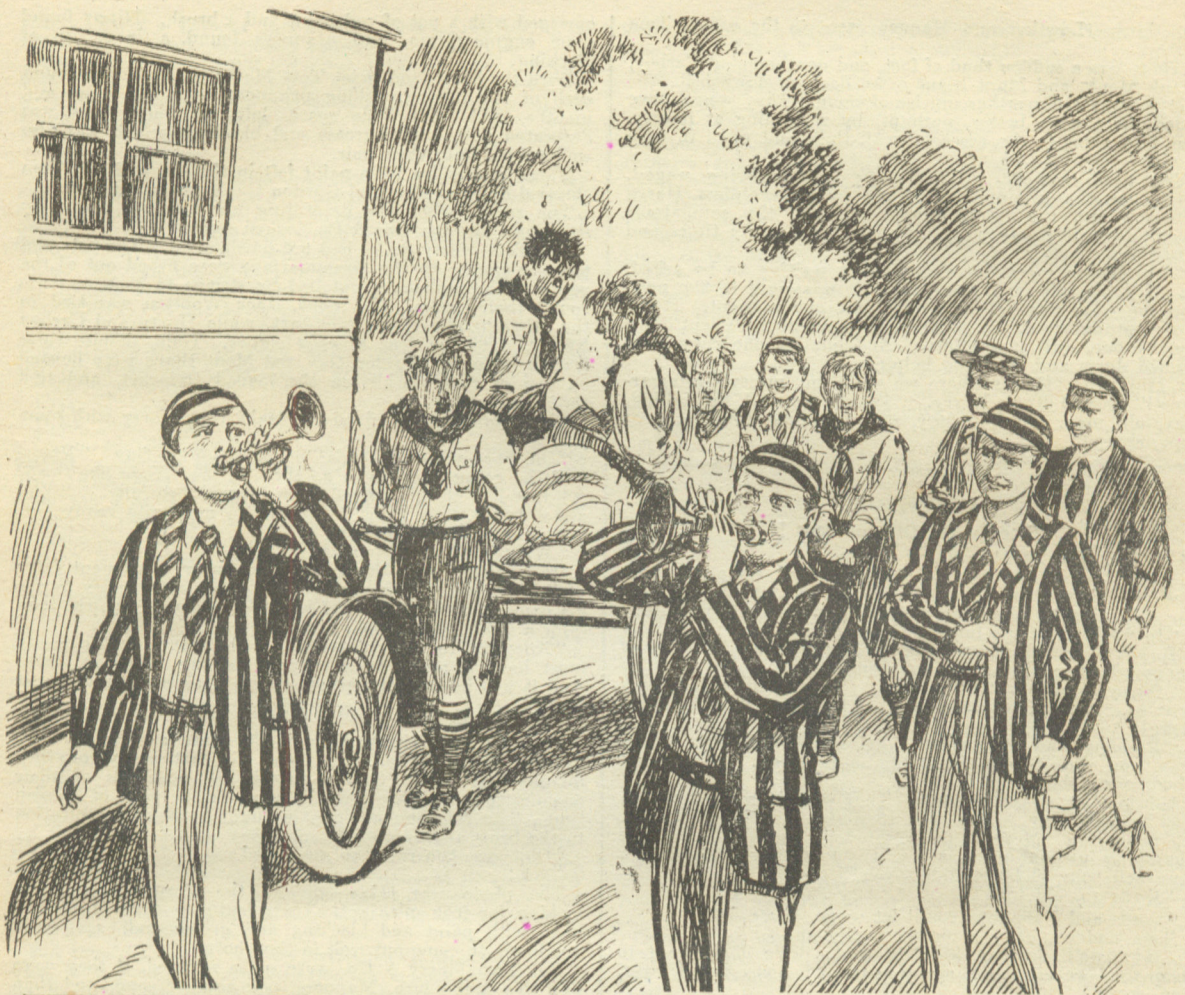
His chums were only too glad to "come on." They had, like Gay himself, been out scouting since very early that morning, and they were ravenously hungry. They followed their leader as he led the way at a run for the road. They reached it, and very easily discerned the wheel-marks of the huge caravan.

They followed the trail up at a run, for the road was thick with dust, and showed it clearly. Through the village the trail led them and up the hill beyond. But just as Gay was about to keep on down the dip into the hollow beyond he pulled up short.

"Half a minute!" he snapped. "I fancy we've found them. Look over those trees—smoke. That smoke's from a camp-fire. They're in that little glade there, without a doubt. It was empty when we passed it early this morning."

"Then come on," said Monk.

"You ass!" breathed Gordon Gay. "Call yourself a dashed Scout? You can see right into the glade from the road. That means that if they are there they can see into the road. We've got to scout round, you idiot! Strategy's our only chance."



As the cavalcade started off along the cart-track, Blake and Herries produced weird and wonderful shrieks and blasts from their instruments. "Tar-rah-rah-rah!" "B-r-r-rrah, rah, rah, rah!" The St. Jim's caravanners roused the echoes of the quiet village street, while Nippy, who was driving the caravan, put on just enough speed to make the hapless Grammarians in charge of the trek-cart pick their feet up smartly. (See page 16.)

"I never thought of that."

"You wouldn't. Come on!"

Gordon Gay left the road, and started across the field at a cautious run, and his chums followed. Reaching the rear of the little wood, he dropped on hands and knees, and started to creep forward over the grass, up the slight rise. They were among the trees very quickly, and, with eyes and ears tensed, Gay led the way among the trees and undergrowth. He stopped at last, and held up a cautious hand.

Stealthily his chums joined him, and the four Scouts found themselves at the top of the glade, staring down into the hollow.

"Oh, good!" breathed Gordon Gay.

The caravan was there, at rest on the grass. Round the camp-fire were seated Tom Merry & Co. and the driver, whom they recognised at once. A simmering pot was over the fire, and a delicious smell of cooking pervaded the glade. Tom Merry & Co. and Nippy, the driver, were having dinner. They had plates on their knees and knives and forks in their hands. Gordon Gay could not help grinning as he noted that all the St. Jim's juniors were wearing raincoats over their pyjamas.

"Don't they just look little dears?" he whispered. "But where on earth are— Oh, I see!"

Gay's eyes suddenly set upon two figures in Scouts' uniforms tied up to one of the wheels of the van on the far side. Close by stood their trek-cart, still loaded with their camp outfit.

At sight of his captive chums, Gay's eyes gleamed.

"Look here, you chaps," he breathed. "Our only chance of doing 'em down is to get our pals loose. They're none of them looking towards the van. Now's our chance."

Gay stared down at the scene below, thinking hard. Then he turned to his chums again.

"I'm going to work round to the other side," he muttered. "With a bit of luck, I'll get to the back of the van without

'em seeing me. Don't you chaps chip in unless things go wrong."

"Right-ho!"

Gordon Gay slipped away, worming his way like a snake through the long grass. He reached the far side of the dell without much difficulty, and then he began to descend the little hill into the camp behind the shelter of the big caravan.

The Wootton brothers saw him coming, and their eyes gleamed with sudden hope as their chums reached them.

"Good man!" breathed Jack Wootton.

In a flash, Gordon Gay had grasped his Scout's knife, and was slashing through the cords. He cut Jack Wootton free, and was just about to start on Harry when a sudden yell rang out:

"Look out, you fellows! Quick! Here's that beast Gay! He's— Yarrooooh!"

It was Baggy Trimble. Baggy had long ago had his dinner, and his absence from the group round the camp-fire had been quite overlooked by Gordon Gay. He came down the caravan steps just then, and his eyes fell upon Gordon Gay at once.

Gordon Gay acted like lightning. He stepped forward and tapped Baggy on the nose, and Baggy's shout ended in a howl.

"Quick! Bunk, Jack—I'll see to Harry."

But Gordon Gay got no chance to do that. Tom Merry & Co. were just a little too smart in grasping what was on. As Baggy's wild shout rang out, they one and all leaped to their feet and came pelting up.

Gay didn't have a chance to use his knife again.

"My hat! On 'em, chaps!" yelled Tom Merry. He flung himself at Gay, and the two rival leaders went crashing down, and rolled over and over, struggling mightily. Jack Wootton hesitated a moment—and was lost. D'Arcy, Blake, Herries, and Digby were on him in a flash, pinning

him down. Lowther and Manners went to the aid of Tom Merry.

There was a sudden thud of feet, and next moment Carboy, Frank Monk, and Mont Blanc came dashing down hill. It was certainly rather unwise of them. They would have aided their cause better, perhaps, by remaining at liberty. But they came to the rescue for all that, and piled in with a will.

The next moment a fierce struggle was being waged, chiefly on the ground. Watched by the helpless Harry Wootton and the funky Baggy Trimble, the combatants fought for the mastery, as they had done many times and oft before.

Then Nippy came up, and without waiting to be asked, he piled in with right good will. It was eight to five now, and the issue was never in doubt for one moment. Hopelessly outnumbered, the gallant Grammarians were sent down one by one, still struggling. And one by one they were pinned down and rendered helpless.

"Hip, pip! Here's where we smile, my merry Grammar-boys!" gasped Tom Merry. "Thanks no end for calling, Gay, old man. Now, Baggy, you fat funk—some cord or rope, sharp!"

## CHAPTER 7.

### Nice for the Grammarians!

"HE, HE, HE, HE!" cackled Baggy.

He ran into the caravan, and came out next instant with a bundle of cord and string, and leaving his chums to guard the prisoners, Tom Merry set to work tying the fuming Grammarians up.

It was done at last, and Gordon Gay groaned hollowly as he gazed up at his grinning captors.

"Oh, you rotters!" he panted. "It was sheer bad luck beat us. If it hadn't been for that fat frog, we'd have got clear!"

"Perhaps—and perhaps not," grinned Tom Merry. "Anyway, you didn't, and that's the main thing. Now, what about our clobber, old dear?"

Gordon Gay's eyes gleamed. They were in a tight corner, and he saw they would have to make the best of things.

"Look here, Merry," he grunted. "You said in your thumping ultimatum that you'd return our camp if we returned your clobber, didn't you?"

"Quite so, old top!"

"And—and I suppose you'll let us go, if we do?"

Tom nodded, after a moment's thought.

"Yes, we'll do that, kid," he said. "We don't want to keep you—we're not setting up as monkey-house keepers yet, you see?"

Gordon Gay gave a sickly grin.

"Go on—laugh, you asses!" he sniffed. "Our time will come. Well, cut us loose, and we'll bring you your dashed clobber, you rotters!"

Tom shook his head.

"Not much!" he chuckled. "I tell you what we will do, though. We'll cut Monkey, here, loose, and he can lead some of our chaps to the spot where it is. When they come back with the togs, we'll let you go."

Gordon Gay nodded with a grunt—it was not for him to make terms. And a moment later Frank Monk had been released, and he started out with Arthur Augustus, Herries, and Manners to look after him. They were less than ten minutes away, and when they returned they were carrying bundles of clothes with them.

"Heah we are, deah boys," called Arthur Augustus, his face showing his relief at getting his precious clothes back.

"Good!" grinned Tom. "Now we'll turn you out, Gay, my lad. Let this be a lesson to you never to try your futile little pranks on us."

"Oh, rats!" said Gay crossly. "Cut us loose, for goodness' sake. I'm thundering hungry, and we sha'n't get any dinner until teatime now. Oh, you rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's juniors could afford to smile, and they did loudly. Then they quickly changed into their own clothes.

But they did not cut their fuming rivals loose. They tied Frank Monk up to one of the shafts of the trek-cart.

"Here, what's this game?" hooted Gordon Gay. "You said you'd let us go—"

"We're going to let you go," grinned Tom. "But we didn't say how we'd let you go, old nut! You must be taught not to play tricks with gentlemen's clobber, you know. We're going to turn you out, but we're going to turn you out in style."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's juniors got busy then. The Grammarians had started the business, had given them a great deal of trouble, and they were determined to give them trouble of another kind. From the interior of the van Lowther

emerged with a pot of red paint and a brush. Nippy found some engine-grease, and Manners found a large tin of blacking.

With the brush and paint Tom Merry painted rings round each of the fuming, yelling prisoners' eyes and noses and mouths, and what little space left on their faces was decorated with engine-grease and blacking, which was also well rubbed into their hair.

There was still a little paint left in the tin, and this Tom emptied down the back of Gordon Gay's wriggling neck.

The result, when the decorating was finished, was truly startling. Gordon Gay & Co. looked sights.

But Tom Merry & Co. had not finished yet. The pots and pans belonging to the Grammarians were fished out of the van and the trek-cart, and tied by strings to each of them round their necks. This done, Jack Wootton was tied to the other handle of the trek-cart, while Harry and Carboy were tied to the rear at each corner. Then, despite their frantic struggles, Gordon Gay and Mont Blanc were hoisted on top of their tackle on the loaded trek-cart, and tied there securely.

"Now you're nicely fixed up," said Tom Merry with some pride.

"Oh, you—you awful cads!" choked Gordon Gay. "You—can't be going to make us go through the village like this?"

"Just like that," agreed Tom Merry cheerfully. "You asked for it, you know. But we're not quite ready yet. Got your camera, Manners?"

"What ho!" said Manners.

He vanished into the van, to reappear a moment later with his camera. Manners never lost an opportunity to use his camera, and he realised he had a splendid subject here—for a comic photograph, at all events.

"Now try to look pleasant," urged Tom. "We really must have a photo as a souvenir of this occasion, what? And it will be so useful when we get back home again next term."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The faces of Gordon Gay & Co. were a sight as they grasped the situation. It was the last straw—or they imagined it was. Such a photo in the hands of their enemies they well knew would be made the most of in term time. The very thought of it brought beads of perspiration to the brow of Gordon Gay.

"Oh, you—you rotters!" he yelled.

Click!

The photo was taken—though the Grammarians were looking far from pleasant. Their features—covered as they were with paint and blacking and grease and rage—were not likely to come out well in the photo.

But Tom Merry & Co. were quite satisfied, if they were not. To make sure, Manners took another snap, and then he took his camera back into the caravan.

"Now we'll get off," said Tom Merry. "We're not only going to let you go, Gay, old chap, but we're going to take you a little of the way—through the village, you know. I'm sure you'll be grateful."

But Gordon Gay was far from being grateful for their expressions—verbal and otherwise. There was no help for it, however; they had to take it, though they did not take it smiling.

The trek-cart was hitched up by the tow-rope behind the van, and Nippy climbed into the driving-seat as the engine started. Then the triumphant and laughing Saints boarded the van, and Noah's Ark moved off with a rattling roar.

And after it went Gordon Gay & Co.—they had to or be dragged. The trek-cart bumped after the caravan, Gordon Gay and Mont Blanc clinging on desperately with knees and feet to preserve their balance.

In the meantime, Blake had possessed himself of Frank Monk's bugle, whilst Herries rooted out his cornet, and, as the cavalcade started off along the cart-track, they produced weird and wonderful shrieks and blasts from the instruments.

"Tar-rah-rah-rah!"

"B-r-r-rah, rah, rah, rah!"

The grinning Nippy, who was enjoying the fun thoroughly, turned the caravan on to the road, and put on speed for the village; just enough speed to make the hapless four in charge of the trek-cart pick their feet up smartly.

The first houses of the village were soon reached, and then Blake and Herries put their whole energies into the task of blowing wind into the cornet and the bugle. By this time also Lowther had found a poker and a saucepan, and he thumped on it for all he was worth.

"Tar-rah! Tar-rah! Tar-rah!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Seated with Nippy on the driving-seat, Herries and Blake roused the echoes of the quiet village street, while Lowther stood, leaning over the closed half of the door doing likewise with the poker and saucepan.

Though the village of Pine Cove was quiet enough at any time, it was far from being deserted at that time of the



year. It was a popular little seaside place, and plenty of visitors were about—especially plenty of urchins.

The terrific din brought them out in their scores, and very soon a huge crowd of grinning adults and yelling children were accompanying the extraordinary procession on its triumphant and noisy way.

"Haw, haw, haw!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd roared with laughter at the extraordinary figures in front, behind, and on the trek-cart. Gordon Gay & Co. certainly looked strange sights. Their faces, as they glared round at the hilarious crowd, were positively fiendish. They were not enjoying themselves at all.

Once through the village, however, at the bottom of the hill by the cross-roads, Nippy pulled up at a word from Tom Merry, and the tow-ropes was cast off.

"Now we'll get back home," said Tom. "We've given them a good lift on the way, and I think they can manage the rest of the way themselves. Think you can, Gay?"

"You—you—"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Honk, honk, honk!

Nippy sounded his horn, and the caravan backed and turned, while the laughing crowd looked on with interest. Then, with Tom Merry & Co. waving their hands cheerily from the door, the caravan rumbled off back, leaving the hapless Grammarians to get the rest of the way to their camping-place as best they could. Which they did quickly enough, followed still by the cheering, laughing crowd.

The last glimpse the St. Jim's juniors caught of them they were toiling up the hill, followed by the crowd, and what happened to them after that, Tom Merry & Co. neither knew nor cared. They just went on their way rejoicing.

### CHAPTER 8.

#### Gordon Gay's Master-Stroke!

"ROTTEN!"

"Beastly rotten!"

And it was rotten—Gordon Gay & Co. were agreed upon that. It had been a very luckless day for the Grammarians altogether. Even when the Grammarians got back to their camping-site their troubles did not cease. The crowd that had followed seemed to be convinced that an entertainment of some sort would follow that curious procession, and it was a long time before the hapless campers could get rid of them.

But they did at last, and by that time Gordon Gay & Co. were in a state of mind bordering on madness. But after the fire had been lighted again, and after a hurried dinner had been prepared and eaten, they felt much better. After that the Grammarians had rested until tea-time, and then they rested again until supper-time. They felt they badly needed rest after their experiences that day, and they did not at all feel inclined to face the public just yet a while.

Supper over, the Grammarians seated themselves round the camp-fire and gloomily discussed the matter—at least, five of them did. The sixth—Mont Blanc—was on sentry-guard at the gate.

"It's rotten!" repeated Gordon Gay, with a groan. "And the worst of it is the rotters are in the majority—too many for us to dare to tackle in a straight scrap. Our only chance is by strategy."

"Like your dashed strategy this morning?" grunted Monk.

"Rats! That was an accident, you croaker! Who could have foreseen Trimble barging out like that? Anyway, we've simply got to do something, you fellows!"

"What can we do?" growled Wootton major. "They're bound to be on their guard now."

"I'll tell you!" said Gay, his eyes gleaming. "I've been

thinking things over, you fellows, while you've been grouching. And I've got an idea—a stunner!"

"Out with it!"

The others did not sound very hopeful.

"Listen!" said Gay, grinning at his own thoughts. "When I was scouting round their camp at the top of the hollow, I noticed an interesting thing; I noticed there was a pond—rather a decent-sized duck-pond—just at the top, about a dozen yards from the top of the hollow. I remember wondering then just what would happen if the pond were to overflow, or break its banks."

"Well, what would happen?" grunted Harry Wootton, staring. Harry Wootton was rather dense. "What's all this got—"

"Ass!" said Gay witheringly. "If it overflowed it would swamp that hollow, of course. And I bet it has done when there's been heavy rains, too!"

"Oh!"

"Well," grinned Gay, seeing his chums suddenly interested, "why shouldn't we help it to do so? It only wants a spade and a bit of digging, and the job's done!"

"Phew!"

"What a wheeze!"

"And—and you think it can be done?" breathed Frank Monk.

"Absolutely!" said Gay, his face, which was still patchy with paint, creasing into a grin. "It would have to be after dark, of course, and when they're asleep. Well, what about it?"

"Ripping!"

"Top-hole!"

Gay's chums were enthusiastic when once they had gripped the idea.

"It—it's great," agreed Harry Wootton slowly. "But—but that won't help us to get hold of Manners' camera. That's what we want to get hold of—much more than we want revenge even. Great pip! Life at Rylcombe won't be worth while if they have that dashed photo. They'll have dozens of prints taken and spread around, and we shall be the laughing-stock at Rylcombe and St. Jim's."

Gordon Gay nodded, his face frowning.

"I know that!" he said grimly. "We've got to get hold of that at all costs—and quickly, before Manners develops the dashed things. But—but I was thinking about that, too. If we manage to swamp their camp—if it comes off all right, there's no knowing what may happen. In the confusion, I'm hoping to get a chance to get into the caravan unseen. If I can—"

Gordon Gay paused suggestively.

"In any case," he went on grimly, "it'll be a ripping jape, and it'll give them something to be going on with. Are you on?"

"Yes, rather!"

It was a shout, and Gordon Gay grinned and nodded.

"Right-ho, then!" he said. "We'll start getting ready. It must be after ten now. I vote we move off at once!"

"Good egg!"

Gordon Gay's chums were as keen as he was now, and they bustled round, excited and eager. It all seemed so beautifully simple to them. And though they themselves had not seen the pond their leader mentioned, they had the greatest faith in his ideas and leadership.

They were very soon ready. Gordon Gay and Frank carried a spade each, and the others just took their Scout axes.

The last glimmer of sunset had long ago vanished, and it was dark, save for a faint glimmer of moonlight. Skirting the village, the Grammarian Scouts made for the St. Jim's encampment at top speed. They were all panting and breathless when they arrived at last in the little cove above the dell. They had taken no chances, but had approached the spot from the rear over the fields.

It was none too easy to see in the gloom, but all of them had done plenty of night-scouting, and they made no mistakes. Very soon they were in the same spot overlooking the camp, peering down cautiously, as they had done that morning.

Tom Merry & Co. had obviously retired for the night. Their caution had been unnecessary. In the little dell all was silent and dark, save for misty gleams of moonlight and a glow from the dying camp-fire.

"Good!" breathed Gordon Gay. "The asses haven't even left a guard. They don't fear us, anyway. Well, we'll see. Come on!"

He led the way softly round the lip of the hollow. Here, where the trees ended, was a strip of rough ground that sloped downwards to a large and rather slimy-looking duck-pond.

"Phew!" breathed Frank Monk, eyeing it delightedly. "Why, it'll be as easy as making a thumping moat round a sand-castle! Come on! Let's get to work!"

The grinning Grammarians got to work in deadly earnest.

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Gordon Gay and Frank Monk dug and dug away, while their chums helped as best they could with their axes. They made little sound, save now and again when a spade or axe struck a stone. When Gay and Monk grew tired their chums took their places with the spades.

At the end of an hour a deep trench had been dug from the camp side of the natural bank to within a foot of the water. The Scouts had left that foot-thick wall to the last, but now they started to break it down in earnest.

Water was soon gushing over their legs as they worked, but Gordon Gay went on heedless of that detail. The dam they had left was breaking down rapidly, aided by the axes and spades, and suddenly Gordon Gay gave a warning hiss and jumped from the trench.

Just in time his chums followed his example, and the next moment the wall of earth that had been left, broke away, crumbling before a sudden rush of water.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Gay.

Though he had expected a torrent, he had not expected such a torrent as swept through the trench, and went pouring and rushing down the side of the hollow.

Swish! Gurgle, gurgle! Swish!

Faster and stronger became the rushing water, until quite an imposing waterfall was dashing down into the sleeping hollow. Half startled at the havoc they themselves had created, the Grammarians stared fascinated at the rushing torrent. They saw it reach the caravan and swirl round the wheels, and then it reached the two tents, and swirled round those.

Then, quite suddenly a terrified howl split the silence, followed by a chorus of alarmed yells, and from the big tent rushed five pyjama-clad forms. Then, from the small tent, rushed another—Nippy.

Still half-awake, and dripping with water, the St. Jim's juniors stood up to their ankles in the swirling flood and gazed blankly around them. Just then the water reached the camp-fire, and, with a sudden alarming hissing the burning embers went out and a cloud of steam went upwards.

"Great Scott! Look out, you fellows! We're flooded out!"

It was Tom Merry's voice, and his yell was loud enough to awaken the historic Seven Sleepers.

From the caravan sounded voices—a light flashed suddenly. Then the door flew open, and three pyjama-clad forms plunged down the steps, and literally plunged into the swirling flood.

Splash, splash, splash!

"Yawwooooh!"

"Yoooop!"

"What the— Oh, great pip!"

Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle!

It was Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy who dived down the steps of the caravan. Hearing the alarm, they had, naturally, supposed it was a night attack by the Grammarians, and they had jumped out at the call without hesitation.

They soon had good cause to wish they had hesitated.

Arthur Augustus, valiant as ever, was the first down the steps, and he went headlong into the water, and the yell he gave went to as he wallowed in it was terrific. Then Blake stumbled full-length over him, and Herries, rushing down behind, went sprawling headlong over Blake.

And while they sprawled and wallowed there, a dim figure waded round the caravan, and slipped swiftly up the steps. It was Gordon Gay.

Nobody saw him vanish into the van—certainly not Blake & Co., who were much too busy just then. Moreover, the firelight—what little there had been—was gone now, and the Grammarian's dim figure was barely discernible.

Ignoring the shouts and yells outside, Gay acted coolly and smartly once inside the van. As he darted in a fat figure in pyjamas rolled out of one of the bunks, and blinked at him blankly in the dim light of a candle someone had lighted.

Gordon Gay punched Baggy Trimble where his waistcoat would have been had he had one on, and Baggy doubled up and collapsed with a fearful howl.

"Yarrooooh!"

But Gordon Gay didn't heed Baggy Trimble after that. His first glance round the ill-lighted van had shown him Manners' camera hanging on a hook by its strap, and he had it slung over his shoulder in a flash. Then he darted out.

A cloud had just then obscured the moon, and it was black as pitch outside; but dimly Gordon Gay made out vague forms splashing about wildly—obviously Tom Merry & Co. had quite lost their heads for once. They were shouting to each other, their shouts only rivalling the howls of Baggy Trimble within the van.

"M-mum-my hat!" murmured Gordon Gay. "This is prime! Oh, what a jape!"

There was plenty of chance for the Grammarian leader to make his escape unseen, but the temptation to see the end of

the commotion proved too strong for Gordon Gay. He waded quietly round to the back of the great van, and waited for what might happen next.

He could hear Tom Merry's voice shouting above the rest, and then he heard him splashing towards the van.

"This way, you chaps!" he shouted. "Make for the van! The water's going down now. Oh, my hat! What a mess!"

The water was undoubtedly going down—having done its worst. The pond up above had about emptied itself, and the water down below was swirling away down the cart-track fast. Vague forms, gasping and grunting, showed through the darkness as Tom Merry's chums followed him up the steps of the van.

Then Tom Merry appeared at the top of the steps with a lantern, and flashed it over the camp.

Patches of muddy grass, with here and there large pools of water still remaining could be seen. One of the tents was down, and strewn about were blankets and sheets and various other things that had been washed out of the tents by the flood. Like Tom Merry & Co., these were drenched through and dripping.

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Blake, who was peering over Tom's shoulder in dismay. "What on earth has happened. Tommy—a cloud-burst, or what?"

"Cloudburst be hanged!" snorted Tom, gazing in horror at the havoc. "It's that dashed pond up there! The blessed thing must have burst its bank! What's that fat owl yelling about. Shut the fat ass up, someone!"

"Here—hold on, you asses!" yelled Trimble frantically. "Why don't you listen to a chap? He'll get away if you don't look sharp!"

"Eh? Who'll get away?" ejaculated Tom Merry blankly. "You fat—"

"Gordon Gay, of course!" howled Trimble, who was still sitting on the floor. "He hit me a fearful blow in the tummy, and then he went, and he took Manners' camera with him!"

"Wha-a-at?" howled three or four voices.

"It's true!" howled Baggy excitedly. "He came rushing in, and he's taken the camera. I saw him. Look!"

The juniors looked at the hook that held the camera. Then Manners gave a roar of anguish.

"My camera!" he yelled. "It's gone!"

There was no doubting that. The juniors eyed each other with blank faces.

"Gordon Gay!" gasped Tom Merry faintly. "Oh, my only hat! Then—then it was those rotters who did this. I see now. They must have dug a trench and emptied that dashed pond."

"Bai Jove!"

"That—that's it!"

"Great Scott!" stuttered Jack Blake. "Oh, the awful rotters! It must have been them, of course. The blessed pond couldn't have broken through itself! Let's go after the cads—quick! They can't have got far!"

"What's the good?" groaned Tom Merry, dispirited for once. "We scarcely know the way in the darkness, and they do. Besides, they'll be up and ready for us. And we're all drenched through, too. But we will go—never you fear! We're going to have that camera back—the films, anyway!"

"The films are all right," grunted Manners. "I took them out last night. They're in the cupboard there."

"Oh, good!" breathed Tom Merry. "That's done old Gay one in the eye, anyway. That settles it. We can wait to square matters in the morning. I vote we get up at sunrise, and go over and raid 'em. We'll get Manners' camera back, and we'll give the rotters the ragging of their lives!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

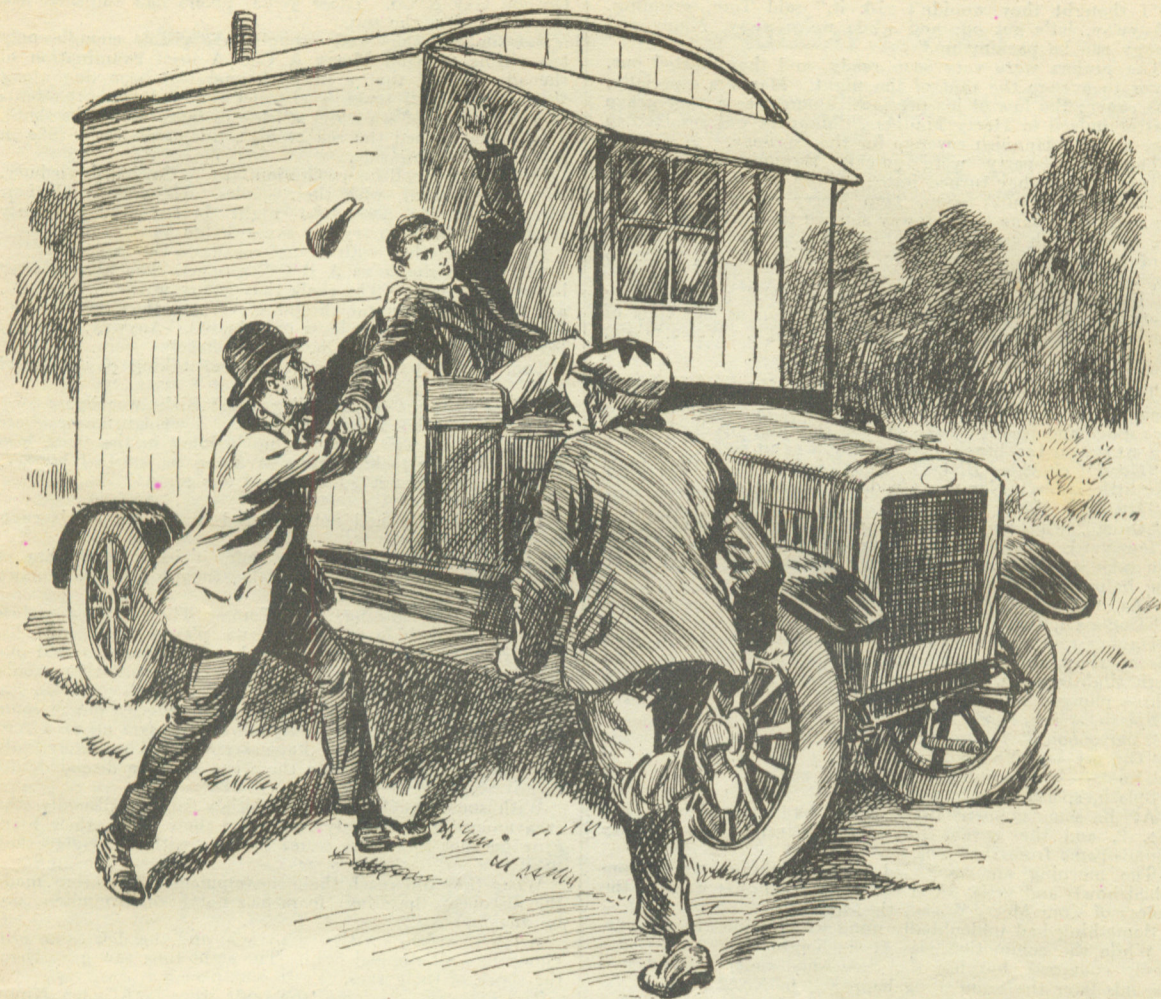
Tom Merry & Co. were unanimous upon that point. They were drenched through, and cold and dismal, and they were thirsting for revenge.

That, however, could wait until morning, as Tom Merry said. None of them felt up to reprisals just then.

"That's settled, then!" snapped Tom. "We'll all have to sleep in the van to-night, though goodness knows how we'll manage to squeeze in. Anyway, let's get some dry things on. And we'll be up with the lark in the morning, my lads, and we'll give those awful cads what for for this!"

In the cramped quarters of the caravan the discomfited St. Jim's juniors disrobed, and after a brisk rub down changed into dry underclothing—their pyjamas being wet through, of course. But there was little sleep for them that night. The beds and bedding in the tents were drenched, and some of the caravanners had to sleep—or, rather, lie—on the bare floor of the van.

Meanwhile, Gordon Gay—little did Tom Merry & Co. dream it—overheard most of what had passed, and had rejoined his chums in the copse above. His face wore a very curious expression, and his eyes were gleaming. He found his chums almost helpless with suppressed laughter.



As the van rumbled to a standstill, Patchy and Snooky came charging forward. "Got yer!" yelled Patchy, his features evil and menacing. "Now, Nippy, my lad—no larks this time! Snooky, you see to those other blamed kids in the van if they comes out. I'll see to Nippy!" Dodging a wild blow Nippy aimed at him with a spanner, Patchy grabbed the boy and wrenched him from his seat. (See page 22.)

Gordon Gay did not give his chums the chance to greet him.

"Come on—home sharp, you fellows!" he said, with a grim chuckle. "Our night's work isn't done yet. Bring those spades and things—we shall want 'em!"

"But—but—"

"I'll tell you all as we go along."

"But you've got the camera, I see!" said Monk eagerly and delightedly, suddenly seeing the outline of the camera.

"I've got the camera, but not the dashed films!" snapped Gay. "But we'll get those in the morning, chaps. Those cads are going to raid us at sunrise to-morrow—or they think they are. Well, we're going to let 'em, and we're going to have a surprise ready for 'em, too! And when they've had that surprise and return home to their own camp, they'll get yet another surprise—the surprise of their lives."

As the Grammarian Scouts stumbled homewards that eventful night, Gordon Gay expounded a dark and daring plot—a plot that fairly took his listening chums' breath away.

### CHAPTER 9. Amazing!

**T**OM MERRY & CO. were up very early the next morning—in fact, they were up exceedingly early. When Tom Merry had spoke of raiding the Grammarian camp at "sunrise," he had not meant it quite literally; he had just intended the word to convey the idea of rising exceptionally early.

The caravanners, however, were up at sunrise for all that. The caravan floor was exceedingly hard and uncomfortable as a resting place, and those luckless members of the party who were obliged to sleep on it—or who tried to sleep on it—spent a decidedly wretched time. They were only too glad to get up at sunrise.

It was the dawn of a beautiful summer morning, but the St. Jim's caravanners saw no beauty in the dawn that morning. They were "fed-up," after the night's unpleasant adventures.

To the juniors' relief, the water had nearly all vanished, save for small lingering pools, here and there, in tiny hollows. But the grass was trampled and decidedly muddy, and the beauty of the little glade as a resting-place for their caravan was gone.

Tom's first act on rising was to climb the slope at the back of the hollow to view the pond—or what had been the pond. His chums accompanied him, and their expressions as they saw the deep trench and the piles of earth, were loud and long and deep. They had been almost certain before that Gordon Gay had been responsible for the flood—they were certain now.

The juniors returned to the hollow, sliding down on the still wet and slippery grass. Then, as the sun rose higher they got busy. A few dry sticks were found and a fire lighted, and Baggy Trimble was kicked out of the caravan, yelling, and forced to turn to with breakfast. After a meal of rashers of bacon and ham, and marmalade, and fresh farm butter, with hot coffee, the caravanners felt decidedly better.

"We'll give those Grammarian rotters socks first," said Tom Merry, yawning wearily, "and then we'll clear out of this and find a fresh camping-place. This little hollow was very nice, but it wasn't an ideal place at all, and it certainly is not a safe place, now those dashed Grammar School chaps are on the warpath."

"Wathah not!"

"Too easy for anyone to approach without being spotted," grunted Blake. "We ought to have guessed that they'd raid us last night."

"I thought they wouldn't risk it," said Tom, grinning. "Anyway, let's get off, and while we're away, Nippy and Baggy can be packing up."

The juniors were very soon ready, and they started out, eager to avenge the raid of the night. Manners especially, was eager; the loss of his precious camera was a very grave matter indeed to Harry Manners. Manners was resolved to take a really Hunnish revenge for the sacrilege.

The raiding-party were quickly through the sleeping village, but as they turned into the little lane leading to the Grammarian Scouts' camp, Tom Merry called a halt. At the end of the lane the gateway showed the white tents with the sandy beach and the sparkling sea beyond. It was really a pretty scene, but once again Tom Merry & Co. failed to appreciate the beauties of Nature.

"Doesn't seem to be anyone on guard," grinned Tom Merry. "They won't dream that we'd raid at this time of the morning, of course. Go quietly, though. We're taking no chances!"

"Wathah not!"

The raiders advanced cautiously along the lane. They reached the gateway, and peered in at the encampment. All was quiet and peaceful save for the rippling splash of breaking waves on the beach. Not a soul was in sight.

"Good!" chuckled Blake. "They're sleeping in their tents like little lambs. Now for a rude awakening of 'em."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Quiet!" whispered Tom Merry. "Not a sound until we're a few yards away, mind! Blake, Herries, Dig, and Gussy can take the far tent; we'll tackle the nearest. We'll have 'em before they're properly awake. Ready?"

"Ay, ready!" grinned Lowther.

"Come on, then!"

Having reached to within a few yards of the tents, Tom Merry charged with a rush. The flaps of the tents were both slightly open, and tearing it open wide, the Terrible Three plunged into the nearest tent.

Splash, splash, splash!

"Yarroooooh!"

"Oh, my—Yooooop!"

"Look—Groooooh!"

Splash, splash, splash, splash!

At the same moment Blake & Co. had charged into Tent No. 2, and the instant following the same extraordinary sounds came from that tent.

The morning air resounded with splashing, and astonished howls and yells. And the yells and howls were in the voices of Tom Merry & Co., the raiders.

Something had undoubtedly gone wrong somewhere.

While the commotion was at its height, No. 1 tent suddenly collapsed, burying the occupants under it, and two seconds later the same thing happened to No. 2 tent.

The canvas of both tents heaved and swayed, and vague, grotesque forms bulged and struggled within amid a muffled uproar of splashing and howling.

It was really extraordinary.

"Wow! Grooooh! Yow!"

Then, quite abruptly, a figure burst out of the bulging canvas of No. 1 tent. It was followed by another and another.

They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—and the Terrible Three of St. Jim's looked sights for gods and men and little fishes.

They were soaked through from head to foot, and not only were they soaked with water, but what looked like ashes and soot, and wet, powdered chalk covered them from head to foot.

"Yooooop! Groooooh! Oh crumbs!"

Ten seconds later Blake & Co. burst from the billowing canvas of No. 2 tent, and they also looked similar dismal sights.

The two raiding parties eyed each other with feelings too deep and wet for words.

Of Gordon Gay & Co. there was neither sight nor sound.

What had happened to them was a deep problem to the raiders—or rather, would-be raiders—a problem they did not attempt to solve then. What had happened to themselves was only too painfully, damply obvious.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry, feeling on the verge of tears. "Oh, my hat! We—we've been done brown, you fellows—dished, crocked, diddled, and done brown! Oh! Oh dear!"

"Oh dear!" wailed Arthur Augustus, looking himself over with a tragic gesture. "Look at me, dear boys! Look at my clobber! It will be absolutely ruined, bai Jove!"

"The roppers must have guessed we intended to raid 'em," went on Tom Merry dismally. "They've dug deep holes inside the tents, and filled 'em with water and muck. They knew we'd try to rush 'em while they were sleeping. Oh, my hat! Oh, wait till I get my hands on the awful roppers!"

He looked round him, apparently hoping to sight the enemy. But there was still neither sight nor sound of

Gordon Gay & Co. Those genial jokers had vanished like the mist before the sun.

But the evil they had wrought was visible enough—only too visible to Tom Merry & Co. A brief examination of the site showed that a deep channel had been dug along the back of both tents, a channel that led from the tents to a large lake of sea-water a little distance along the shore, a lake that joined the sea at high tide, and was a lake in actual fact at low tide.

During the small hours Gordon Gay & Co. had been busy, very busy indeed, with their spades. The success of their attack upon the pond the night before had obviously encouraged them to try the same dodge here.

It had succeeded, with dismal results to the raiders.

"It was as simple as A B C!" groaned Tom Merry, after his examination. "The chalk they got from the cliff yonder, and the ashes from the camp-fire. Where they got the confounded soot from goodness only knows. Anyway, let's get back, for goodness—Oh, my only hat!"

Tom Merry paused, a terrible fear taking possession of him.

"What's the matter now?" grunted Blake wearily.

"Matter!" echoed Tom excitedly. "I want to know where the roppers are now. There's no bedding in the tents, and nearly all their tackle's gone save the tents. I—I hope to goodness they've not gone to raid our camp!"

"Oh dear!"

That possibility had not occurred to the St. Jim's caravanners until then.

"If—if they've taken their stuff, it isn't likely they've gone to our camp," faltered Blake, though he seemed more than doubtful.

"That means nothing," said Tom. "They'd take the stuff they could to hide it in case we played tricks with it. They've hidden their stuff somewhere and gone to raid our camp, as sure as fate. It would be just what they would do. Come on, for the love of Mike!"

Without further ado Tom Merry paused to squeeze some of the water from his clothes, and then he set off at a run. And after him went his hapless chums. They were only too glad to get away from the scene of their dismal defeat in any case.

With shoes squelching, and clothes flapping dismally, the caravanners made speedy tracks for their camp, their fears growing that there was worse to come with every step they took.

When they did reach their encampment at last, they made the discovery that their fears had not been groundless, not by any means.

As they rushed up the cart-track, and the dell came into view, they all stopped dead. The sight they saw gave them the shock of their lives.

The caravan was gone, the tents were both gone, Nippy the driver was gone, too. Save for a litter of rubbish, all that was left of their camp was a camp-fire—and Baggy Trimble.

That fat member of the St. Jim's party was seated in solitary state on the grass, with his hands tied behind him, and his fat face the picture of woe.

He gave a howl at sight of Tom Merry & Co.

"Rescue, you fellows!" he howled. "Quick! They've gone! They've taken the van and the tents, and Nippy, and they've gone! Oh dear!"

"M-mum-my hat!"

The caravanners could scarcely believe their eyes.

Yet it was only too true. The caravan and tents had been spirited away, and the sight of Baggy with his hands tied told them at once who was responsible.

They surrounded the yelling Baggy, and Tom Merry quickly cut him loose.

"What—what on earth's happened, Baggy?" he gasped.

"Oh dear!" groaned Baggy. "It was just after you'd gone. They must have been hiding near, and watched you go. The awful beasts came rushing on us, and we had no chance at all. I—I fought like a lion, but it was no good."

"Never mind the fibs," snapped Tom, shaking the fat junior. "Tell us the truth. Where have they gone? D'you know?"

"Ow! Stop shaking me, you beast! I don't know! They said they'd go on through Wiltshire, and then do Devonshire, and then—"

Baggy was interrupted by a combined howl.

"Wha-a-at?"

The St. Jim's juniors were flabbergasted. They had imagined Gordon Gay and his chums had taken the van for a lark, perhaps for the day, even. They had never dreamed they would take it for good. As the truth dawned in upon Tom Merry & Co. they almost fainted.

"Well, upon my word!" gasped Tom. "I—I—I—I—"

Words failed him. The situation called for more words than he could command at the moment. His chums were equally beaten in that respect. They gaped and gasped.

"Oh, bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus at length. "But—but, weally—but—weally, the frightful wottahs can't do it! They daren't, bai Jove!"

"Daren't, can't!" choked Blake. "You—you dummy! Haven't they done it? It's just the thing Gordon Gay would do. He—he's got the most awful cheek, the most frightful nerve of anyone I know. Oh, my only hat! Dished and done! Oh, the awful cads!"

"The feahful wottahs!"

"The—the daring burglars!"

"The—the blessed Huns!"

Tom Merry & Co. fairly let themselves go as the full extent of Gordon Gay's perfidy became clear. The air fairly hummed with expressive phrases for some minutes, and then Tom Merry turned to Baggy again.

"But what about Nippy?" he snorted, his voice trembling with wrath. "Didn't the ass put up a fight?"

"Oh, yes!" groaned Baggy. "But it was no good. They tied him up and pitched him into the van. He vowed he wouldn't drive 'em, and Gay said they'd find a way of making him drive when once they'd got clear."

"But—but who drove them away—the dashed caravan, I mean?"

"Carboy," mumbled Trimble. "He said he'd driven a motor-caravan before when he was vanning with his elder brother last summer. Anyway, he did it—drove it off easily enough. And, I say, you chaps, they've taken all the grub, every bit! They've only left us our clobber and things. The beasts!"

"Well, I'm hanged!"

Tom Merry was the first to get a grip of himself, and he set his teeth hard, as he looked round at his chums.

"Well, it's no good whining about it," he said grimly. "Old Gay's more than got his own back this time. He's fairly done us in the eye. But we're not beaten yet, not by a long way. He's gone, but we're going after him, you chaps, if we have to trail him across England. We're not going to throw down the sponge to Gordon Gay!"

"No fear!"

"Wathah not!"

"I suppose he thinks we'll take it lying down, and spend the rest of the vac in his camp while he's vanning in our van, eh? Well, if he does, he's made a thundering big mistake. We've had a tidy smack in the eye, but we're not knocked out yet. You've got plenty of cash, Gussy, haven't you?"

"Yaas, quite a decent sum left yet, Mewwy."

"Good! Then here's the programme, chaps. We'll have to dry our togs first, of course—blow it! And then we'll start on the trail. The togs ought to be dry by noon. When they are dry, we're going to the local garage, and we're going to hire the swiftest thing they've got, even if it's a blessed furniture-van. And we're going on the trail, my lads. And when we do trail 'em down—well, the fur's going to fly!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good man, Tommy!"

"That's the programme!"

Tom Merry settled down to work. It took more than a smack in the eye to beat Tom Merry & Co. Fresh wood was heaped on the fire, until the flames leaped high, and then the juniors took their clothes off and changed. The litter of articles the raiders had left proved to be their underclothing and personal belongings, and as these were dry now, the juniors changed into them, and donned their raincoats.

Then, while the steam was rising from their drenched garments, Tom Merry & Co. waited. They neither looked nor felt very happy, but they looked and felt very resolute and determined. Gordon Gay & Co. were, no doubt, laughing now, but it remained to be seen if they were fated to have the last laugh.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Nippy Refuses!

"THIS is prime, Gay!" said Frank Monk, with a grin. "Top hole, old chap!" said Harry Wootton. "The wheeze of a lifetime. How did you manage to think of it?"

Gordon Gay yawned, and chuckled gleefully.

It was hours—many hours—since Gordon Gay & Co. had left Pine Cove with the captured caravan, and many miles had rumbled under the heavy wheels of Noah's Ark. And now the caravan was at rest on a grassy clearing of the New Forest, and just off the road.

Gordon Gay & Co. were resting. They had had no sleep at all that night, but during the morning, as the van rumbled and bumped over the rough roads, Gay, Monk, and Harry Wootton had slept in the bunks of the caravan. Now Carboy, Jack Wootton, and Mont Blanc were taking their turn in the bunks, after the van had been run off the road to that grassy clearing, and a hurried lunch had been devoured by the hungry juniors.

While their comrades slept, Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Harry Wootton sat on the fallen trunk of a tree gleefully discussing their great victory.

And it was a victory, there was no doubt about that. The prospect of joyful weeks' touring the counties with a borrowed caravan, hired and fitted up at someone else's expense, was a pleasant one, certainly.

There was only one fly in the ointment, however, and that was provided by Nippy, the driver of Noah's Ark. Nippy had resolutely refused to drive the van, and he had put up a stiff fight at the beginning. Indeed, it was only a few minutes ago, in order to let him get his dinner, that the Grammarians had released him from his bonds, and allowed him his freedom. And as they were miles away from Pine Cove now, the Grammarians had considered it quite unnecessary to tie him up again.

The problem of how to get round Nippy in order to get him to go on driving for them as he had done for the St. Jim's juniors was a big one. True, Carboy could drive—his chums shuddered as they thought of how he had driven them that morning. But he could drive only after a fashion that did not suit his chums at all. Besides the risk from the police, there was the risk to limb and life with Carboy driving. In the last two miles, he had had at least twenty narrow escapes of upsetting the lumbering van into the ditch, and even iron-nerved fellows like Gordon Gay & Co. were getting a trifle nervous of Carboy's driving.

Luckily, they had met only one vehicle on the road so far. It was a gipsies' caravan—or so imagined Gay & Co.—and the man leading the horse had been an ugly-looking customer with a black patch over one eye, and his companion was a wiry, foxy-looking gentleman with rascal written all over him.

Carboy had missed the caravan by about an inch, and the gipsies' language had been painful and free. Gordon Gay & Co. had been not a little puzzled over those gipsies. It had seemed to them that the man with the patch had deliberately tried to drag his horse across the road to block it, and only Carboy's reckless driving had frustrated his designs, whatever they were.

It was certainly strange, and the stranger part was that, on looking back, Gay had seen the gipsies turn their dingy van round and start after the touring caravan, the man with a patch over one eye flogging away at the horse, and both men running alongside.

Nippy could have told them who the men were, and why they acted so queerly; but Nippy had been lying trussed up in the van, and had therefore seen nothing.

Gordon Gay was thinking of them now, though he did chuckle at his chums' remarks and question.

"It struck me in a flash when I was listening to Tom Merry last night," he said modestly. "I'll admit it was a great wheeze. But—but, I say, you chaps, what about wakening Carboy and getting on now? I didn't like the look of those dashed gipsies coming after us like that. They can't be so far behind, and they looked to me as if they meant mischief."

"Rats!" sniffed Frank Monk. "We'll handle those two merchants all serene, you ass!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Gordon Gay. "We don't want trouble with ugly customers like them, anyway. There's another thing, chaps. Those St. Jim's bounders may take it into their heads to come after us; you never know. Let's do a flit, I say—sharp!"

"What about that ass, Carboy?" said Harry Wootton. "The awful idiot will either drive us all potty with worry, or drive us into a giddy hospital. If only that chap, Nippy would—"

"Nippy's the trouble, of course," grunted Gordon Gay thoughtfully. "We'd better tackle him again now."

"What's he up to now?" said Monk.

He nodded across the clearing to where Nippy was on the steps of the caravan.

"Only closing the van door," said Gay carelessly. "I expect one of the chaps inside has wakened up and asked him to close it. It's jolly draughty with both doors open."

"He's closed 'em both now," said Wootton, a trifle suspiciously. "What's the chap up to? I think—"

"He's a jolly obliging chap—I rather like him," said Gordon Gay, not noticing his chum's sudden suspicion. "It beats me how they got hold of a fellow like him, so decent and all that. Anyway, I'll call the beggar and tackle him."

Gordon Gay shouted to Nippy.

"Just a minute, Nippy, old top!"

Nippy seemed to give a start, and then he came over to the Grammarians, a queer grin on his cheery features, and with his cap on the back of his sandy hair, as usual.

"Want me?" he asked coolly.

"Yes," said Gay, grinning at him. "Look here, what about throwing in your giddy lot with us, Nippy? You don't want us to kick you out, do you? I'm blessed if I can see why you shouldn't drive for us as you did for those St. Jim's bounders. We'll pay you what they paid you—more,

if you want it. And we'll see you have a good time, old chap. Why won't you?"

Nippy chuckled.

"You don't understand," he said. "There's such a thing as loyalty to one's employers, you know."

"Rot!"

"And there's another thing," said Nippy coolly. "I don't like you fellows, you know."

"You—you don't?"

"Not a bit. You're such a lot of silly asses, you know," explained Nippy, with delightful frankness. "Your faces give me a pain, and your talk makes me wonder what you're doing outside an asylum."

"Wha-what?"

"You—you cheeky—"

"That's telling you what I think of you," said Nippy cheerfully. "And this is showing you what I'll do to you!"

With that Nippy gave Monk and Gay a swift shove in the chest of each that sent them toppling backwards over the tree-trunk they were sitting on. Next instant, before Harry Wootton grasped what was happening, Nippy had treated him likewise. Then he was off like the wind.

He reached the caravan long before Gordon Gay & Co. had scrambled to their feet, and, leaping to the starting-handle of the van, he wrenched it round desperately.

By a miracle, the engine fired at once, and the daring Nippy made a flying leap for the driving-seat, and scarcely three seconds later the old Noah's Ark leaped forward with a bound and a roar.

Carboy had backed the van from the road on to the clearing when they had arrived, so that, luckily, Nippy had a clear road before him.

With a terrific rattling and banging the caravan lurched off the grass on to the road, and Nippy wrenched the wheel round. By that time, Gay, Wootton, and Monk, their howls of fury drowned by the roar of the engine, came charging up, and Gay leaped frantically for the footboard.

But Nippy had expected it, and was ready. One fist left the driving-wheel and took Gordon Gay under the chin, and Gordon Gay roared and fell back on to his chums behind.

They all sprawled in a heap together in the road, and the caravan gathered speed and rumbled on, lurching and bounding amid a cloud of dust.

"After the awful cad!" roared Gay frantically. "Oh, my only hat!"

He scrambled up desperately, his face red with wrath and dismay. Frank Monk and Harry Wootton also scrambled up and gazed blankly after the disappearing caravan.

It had all taken place so swiftly and so unexpectedly that they were absolutely flabbergasted.

"Quick!" howled Gay. "He'll get away yet. Come on!"

He bounded away, and his chums went after him in a flash, and all three went pounding along the dusty road for all they were worth.

"It'll be all right, you chaps!" panted Frank Monk. "Our fellows inside have wakened up. I can hear them shouting. They'll soon deal with the rotter."

"No, they won't!" yelled Gay. "Oh, you asses! Didn't you see? The crafty rotter's locked them in the van, and tied a rope round the handles of each door. That's what he was doing when we spotted him at first."

"Oh crumbs!"

Gay's companions groaned in chorus and put on speed. Frank Monk realised with dismay that he had good reason to be suspicious of Nippy's curious movements round the van. He had been locking the doors while their chums slept, and had wound a rope round the handles to make the doors doubly secure. They realised, too, that the windows were too small to allow escape from the van.

Though realising that the position was desperate, Gordon Gay & Co. were not the fellows to give in so easily. They pounded on, hoping against hope that a miracle would happen to stay Nippy's escape.

And a miracle did happen—or what seemed like a miracle.

Nippy was driving hard now, getting all he knew out of the wheezy old engine. And he grinned and chuckled with gleeful satisfaction as he drove. From inside the van sounded yells of fury, and the crashing on the doors rivalled the clanking and rattling of the ancient engine. But the row only added to Nippy's satisfaction and joy.

But his satisfaction and joy were short-lived. Quite suddenly the youthful driver gritted his teeth, and slowed down his engine with a muttered growl of anger.

Ahead of him, barely twenty yards away, a caravan was drawn right across the road. It was a dingy, rickety affair, with an ancient horse in the shafts, and the man holding the horse's head wore a black patch over his eye.

Nippy recognised him at once. It was Patchy, his old enemy, and with Patchy was Snooky. Nippy had seen the van coming along from afar, but he had not recognised it until then. He had forgotten all about Patchy and Snooky.

He remembered them now, however, and his face paled. It was too late to turn—too late to do anything but stop.

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A deep ditch ran alongside the road on both sides, and, realising his helplessness, Nippy brought his lumbering vehicle to a standstill.

It flashed on the boy instantly that his only chance was either to bolt, or to release the imprisoned Grammarians; but, as it happened, he got the chance to do neither.

As the van rumbled to a standstill, Patchy and Snooky left the horse's head and came charging at the van.

"Got yer!" yelled Patchy, his features evil and menacing.

"Now, Nippy, my lad, no larks this time! Snooky, you see to them blamed kids if they comes out; I'll see to Nippy."

Dodging a wild blow Nippy aimed at him with a spanner, Patchy grabbed the boy and wrenched him from his seat. Nippy went to earth sprawling, and Patchy's heavy grasp fell on him.

"Come on, you young 'ound!" he hissed. "You won't get away agen, my lad!"

He started to drag the struggling boy towards the horse-caravan, and it was just at that moment that an interruption occurred.

There sounded a swift pounding of feet on the dusty road, and next instant three Scouts came rushing up, panting and breathless.

They were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Harry Wootton, and none of the three stopped to ask questions. Gordon Gay's fist hit Patchy's bristly chin with a resounding smack, and Patchy roared furiously. Then Monk and Wootton piled in, and next moment a furious fight was raging in the roadway.

But against the two full-grown men even such redoubtable fighters as the three Grammarians stood little chance, and suddenly Gay gave a yell.

"Break free, Wootton," he yelled, "and let our chaps out!"

Wootton obeyed in a flash, realising they could never hope to beat the rascals alone. He left the fight, and sprang up the steps of the caravan. Tearing loose his Scout's knife, he slashed at the rope round the door-handle.

It parted almost at once, and, luckily, the key was in the lock as Nippy had left it. Harry Wootton turned it in a flash, and as he did so Jack Wootton, Carboy, and Mont Blanc, who had been staring helplessly at the amazing scene from the windows, leaped out to the rescue with yells, half-dressed as they were. And as they did so there came still another interruption. During the struggle, unseen and unheard in the excitement, a large touring-car had been racing along the road from the direction of the sea. And now it stopped, and seven active figures leaped out, with yells of encouragement.

"Rescue, St. Jim's!"

"Wescue, deah boys! Go for the wascals!"

Tom Merry & Co. had arrived.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Honours Even!

TOM MERRY & CO. poured from the touring-car, and went to the rescue with a rush. They stopped to ask no questions—the sight of Patchy and Snooky was quite enough for them. And they were in the right mood for a scrap just then. Their troubles that morning had been endless. When at last they did manage to get a car, they had had still more trouble to get hold of a driver; the car proprietor refusing stoutly—and perhaps wisely—to let them take the car themselves. But they had procured the car and the driver at long last, and at long last they had trailed the "borrowed" caravan.

They had fully expected a scrap. But they had never dreamed that that scrap would turn out to be for Gordon Gay & Co., instead of against them.

But so it was proving. The sight of Nippy struggling in the grasp of the rascals, and of Gay, Monk, and Harry Wootton striving to aid him, and of the rest of the Grammarians—one in pyjamas and two half-dressed—was startling and puzzling, but Tom Merry & Co. did not stay to puzzle it out.

They just piled in.

It was the finish for Messrs. Patchy and Snooky. Those unwashed and unshaven gentlemen gave up the fight there and then, greatly to the disgust of Tom Merry & Co., who badly wanted to bruise their knuckles against something. But Patchy and Snooky were wise in their generation. Fourteen stout-hearted and hard-hitting young gentlemen were a tough proposition even for the burly Patchy and the foxy Snooky to tackle.

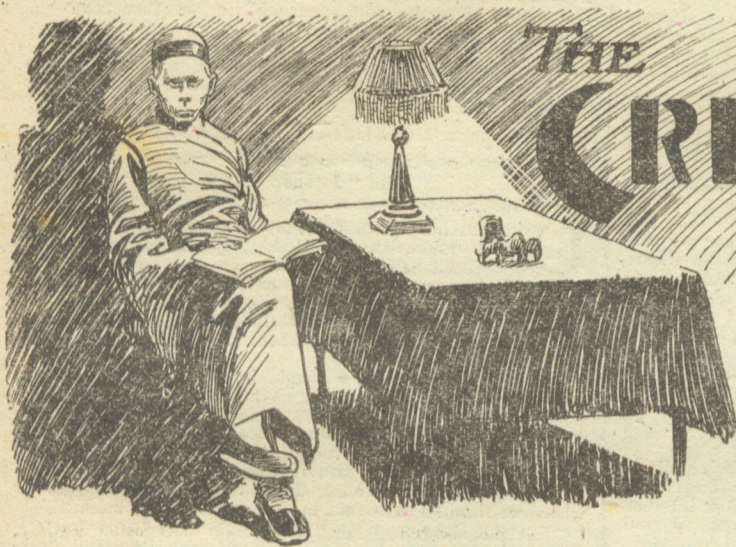
Patchy certainly looked like continuing the scrap, but at the critical moment the hired driver of the car—a beefy, grinning Hampshire man—hit him neatly under his left ear, and Patchy lost all interest in scuffling after that.

"Well—well, my only hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

He glowered at Gordon Gay, and Gordon Gay gave him a sickly grin.

(Continued on page 28.)

**THE ARCH-SCOUNDREL!** Rebel, thug, pirate—Prince Yen How has been everything in turn, and mad<sup>o</sup> a paying job of each one. But "Penny" Rudd is a foemen worthy of his steel and quite capable of upsetting his "profit account!"



A Sensational Story of Mystery and Intrigue.

BY

**LESTER BIDSTON.**

**Welbeck's Terrible Ordeal!**

**D**OWN Limehouse way, Grey Street is called Poppy Lane by those in the know. Narrow, black, and smelly with dirt, its frowsy shops and houses hold no attraction for the stranger. Nor, indeed, are strangers wanted there. Poppy Lane certainly has its callers; but they usually slouch along at night.

In a small upper room of an unsavoury feeding-house, about midway up Poppy Lane, a Chinaman sat reading a science magazine with absorbed interest. A glance over his shoulder would have amazed his brethren of Pennyfields—they would have marvelled that any sane being could be daft enough to waste time on such stodgy subjects as Western philosophy and Eastern psychomancy.

An electric reading-lamp flooded one small portion of the room with brilliant light. The bulb, cunningly shaded, its power trebled by polished reflectors, threw the reader and his table into almost blinding relief, yet left ceiling and walls shrouded in mystic shadows.

An intruder would have looked upon it as a chance setting. His first glance would instantly have focused on the impassive Oriental and the furniture that fronted him. He would have remained innocently unaware that the stage had been carefully set to force his eyes to that one particular, soul-destroying spot.

There was nothing alarming in the Chinese student, you must understand. Loosely robed in black silk from neck to foot, he harmonised most restfully with a chair and table fashioned in dull black ebony. Two alien spots alone broke the sombre colour scheme—the man's own pigmented face and a claw of jade that flashed vivid fire from the table-top.

Absorbed though the Oriental was, a gentle tap, tap on the door instantly roused him. Murmuring an invitation to enter, he stepped noiselessly back from the table, and at once became part of an inconspicuous background.

To the dour Englishman who strode into the room, with a knife-armed Chink acting watchdog on either side, the whole affair appeared stagey and rather silly. Unconsciously, his glance had fallen on the scintillating jade model, its flashing beauty riveting his mind for a moment; then, with an impatient gesture, he shook himself free of the yellow hands that held him, stepped closer to the table and sighted the figure beyond.

"Look here, Mr. Yellowbird," he rasped sourly, "if you're the brave bucko that set these mongrels on me, you'd better think again. The moment I'm missed the Yard'll begin to pull Pennyfields to pieces. They'll have no doubt where I am—and don't you forget it, you—you mummy!"

The threats were completely ignored by the Chinaman. He stepped slowly forward, until he stood well within the circle of light.

"It gives me pleasure to greet you, Inspector Welbeck," he said, his smooth face void of expression, his eyes masked and slumbrous by drooping lids. "Because your name stands for justice amongst China's sons in London, I wished to discuss with you a matter of grave import."

Welbeck laughed cynically.

"So you detail a gang of thugs to crack my head by way of introduction, eh?" he asked harshly.

"That was an excess of zeal for which they will pay bitterly," the Chink said. "Now, inspector, I would speak to you of the affray that occurred not far from here last night."

"You mean the killing of Jules Vidoc?" Welbeck demanded. "What d'you know of that?"

Before answering, the black-robed Chinaman addressed his fellows in a strange dialect; and they, with excessive humility, shuffled from the room.

That pause gave Welbeck time to think. From the moment of leaving Forshaw's house, when a shrewdly applied length of lead piping put him to sleep, he had no recollection of anything happening until he was roused up in a squalid room, and was told the "Excellent" awaited him.

Well, the "Excellent" had proved a surprise

**WHAT HAS HAPPENED.**

**PENDENNIS RUDD**, better known as "Penny" Rudd, born and bred in China of English parents. Knows the habits of the Oriental from A to Z. Attached to the Peking Legation, and holds a watching brief for the British Government on matters affecting British residents in China.

**FAN SHAN**, a young Chinese, Penny's close friend and assistant.

**INSPECTOR WELBECK**, known as "Asiatic" Welbeck on account of his activities in the East End of London against Oriental criminals.

**PROFESSOR FORSHAW**, an authority on Eastern languages and customs.

**PRINCE YEN HOW**, chief of the notorious League of the Crimson Claw, a vast organisation whose aim is to overthrow the ruling powers in China. Possessed of amazing hypnotic powers and all the mystic trickery of the East, Yen How bids fair to becoming another Napoleon.

Penny Rudd and Fan Shan journey to England in search of Jules Vidoc, an eminent French detective, who, Rudd feels certain, has fallen foul of Prince Yen How. Penny learns that a murder has been committed in Limehouse, the victim ultimately proving to be Jules Vidoc. Papers of vital importance are taken by the police from the person of Vidoc and given to Professor Forshaw for translation. Rudd tells the Commissioner at Scotland Yard that he underestimates the cunning and resource of Yen How in leaving the professor unprotected with papers of such importance. In company with Inspector Welbeck, Rudd and Fan Shan visit the professor's house, only to find that, in some mysterious way, Forshaw had fallen under the power of Yen How, for the papers have been destroyed. Welbeck, waxing officious, takes the professor back to Scotland Yard, leaving Rudd and Fan Shan to follow at their leisure. Shortly afterwards these two leave the house, and find, to their amazement, the car that should have carried Welbeck and Forshaw to the Yard sprawled across the pavement, its driver huddled in a senseless heap over the steering-wheel, and no sign whatever of either Welbeck or Professor Forshaw!

(Now read on.)

packet. His queer room, his cultured English, the fact that his followers treated him as others would treat Royalty, all showed that he was no ordinary yellow denizen of Limehouse. And then, quite suddenly, the thought leapt into Welbeck's mind that this must be the great Prince Yen How—the yellow superman whom Penny Rudd feared and hunted.

The thought, tumbling into Welbeck's bemused head without the least warning, led him to an indiscretion for which he could have kicked himself a second later.

"What d'you know of Vidoc's killing, Yen How?" he demanded. "I've heard already that you wanted him out of the way. And, by George, sir—"

He stopped abruptly, aghast that his jolted senses should have trapped him into such a monumental blunder.

Yet the Chink remained impassive and inscrutable. Not by the tiniest quiver of eyelid did he betray either surprise or dismay. Only, when Welbeck suddenly cut his words, the long, supple fingers of the yellow hand reached out and began toying with the polished claw of jade.

"My friend, that you know me saves time and wearisome explanation," he said quietly. "Now, listen. Last night you imprisoned a certain Manchurian on the charge of knifing Vidoc." His glance lifted for a moment. "You imprisoned him wrongly, Welbeck. He was trying to save the Frenchman, actually fighting for him, not against him."

"Tell that to the Horse Marines!" Welbeck sneered. "I was on the spot, and what I saw I stick to."

Insensibly his glance followed the play of How's delicate fingers, and, for the first time, that which he had taken for a mere ornament became charged with sinister interest. "The Crimson Claw!" he whispered. "The badge of your crime league, Yen How?"

He heard the soft murmur of How's voice in reply, a low-pitched monotone that held no anger—only a great sadness. At first he felt inclined to laugh; then, knowing the cat-like cunning of the Oriental, he listened attentively to How's words, hoping for a blunder that might show him the connection between this yellow prince and the Manchu knife-man.

"The crime league, as you misname it, is for the good of my country, and means no hurt to yours," How was saying softly. "But enough of that, for I would plead with you to be just in your dealings with my Manchurian. Left to himself, he will make no defence, for that is the way of our race."

"And ingratitude is also the way of your race," Welbeck answered, wondering why he felt so unutterably lazy. "The fact that you plead for him proves that you fear any defence he might make. It's no good, How. We've got him, and he'll speak—when he really understands the alternative."

"Welbeck, take your eyes from the stone and attend to me, if you please."

The words seemed to come from a great distance, and, with something like dismay, Welbeck realised that he had been staring steadfastly at the stone for quite a minute.

His glance lifted heavily to How's face, to find the Chinaman's eyes wide open, their gaze unwinking and focused on his own. He was vaguely troubled. He wanted above all things to turn about, to hasten from this abominable room. He wished the fellow would cease his unending drawl; he hadn't the least idea what the "gas" was about, and yet he felt he had to give the beggar a chance to explain.

The stupidity of his reasoning brought him up with a jolt. Breaking How's arresting glare by turning his own eyes away, he dropped wearily into a chair.

"You'll do better by explaining all this at the Yard," he mumbled. "We're not unjust, you know, and— Oh, lemme get out of here, you thing, you unclean brute!"

Poor Welbeck! He thought he had spoken forcibly, yet his words had slurred to a halting drawl. His mind was fighting, battling against the clogging thing that encompassed him. But he was struggling without understanding, confronted by an impalpable danger and blindly nerving himself for the fight of his life.

"White man, you wrong me!" said How smoothly. "East knows not the ways of West—Chang erred in not keeping clear of the brawl. He was fighting for Vidoc. He was fighting for Vidoc—was he not?"

Welbeck was again staring into the limpid depths of How's smooth voice, wondering why he should hound the Manchurian for something that didn't really matter!

Besides, this yellow prince wasn't such a bad chap really. After all, he was only pleading for another man's life—and yet some inner consciousness sent a warning that struggled for expression in Welbeck's confused mind.

"Y' a great talker, f' a Chink!" he mumbled. "I've no grudge against your pal, but I'm going to hang him!"

"Welbeck, look at me!"

The command came sharply, and Welbeck obeyed.

"You are going back to Nash now," said How, slowly and distinctly. "You are going to say that, on thinking things over, you are certain the Manchu mistook you for

one of the creatures attacking Vidoc. You will stick to that tale, and, to explain your absence, you will say that Forshaw broke away, and that you have had a long chase after him. For the rest, you will forget Yen How—you will forget this—"

His voice faltered and trailed away to silence. His glance flickered, broke, and glared past the submissive detective. He was staring at the black curtain—staring stark, unbelieving fear!

### The "Joyshop" Clue!

USED as he was to Oriental cunning, this latest move had taken Penny Rudd completely by surprise. Welbeck had left the house, intent on crossing ten feet of pavement, and hurrying back to the Yard in the waiting car. And yet—it seemed almost incredible—here was the car drunkenly straddling the sidewalk, its driver hanging ominously over the wheel, its passengers nowhere to be seen.

Jumping the steps in a single bound, Pen's first glance warned him that the unlucky chauffeur had been felled by a terrible blow over the right temple. He was breathing heavily, uttering low moans as though conscious of pain, but quite insensible to his surroundings.

"Poor beggar!" Pen said indignantly. "He must have medical attention at once, Fan, though goodness knows where we'll find a sawbones in this wilderness of brick."

"Let me show you, sir," the maid suggested timidly. "There's one not far away—a minute's run—if you'll allow me to direct you."

"Good f'you, miss," Pen agreed willingly. "Better still, show us the way to the district police-station. They'll loan us a man as guide to the Yard, and have this fellow properly attended to." He eased the crumpled figure into his arms. "Now, Fan, he'll lie more comfy on the back seat. Carefully, lad! Don't jolt him."

The moment the man was settled down the young Chinaman dropped flat on the sidewalk and commenced groping beneath the car.

"Kicked something—moment ago," he called, his voice muffled and indistinct. "Here we are, Pen. Look!"

Wriggling backwards, he scrambled to his feet and exhibited a crushed bowler hat, one side so badly smashed that the crown had broken adrift from the curly rim.

"In Welbeck's—leconise 'im glease spot on top," Fan squeaked, lapsing into the quaint English he favoured in moments of stress.

"Nothing wrong with your eyes," Pen conceded. "Well, this bashed relic is only another proof that there's been a rough house. Yen How has again struck—as he always does—ruthlessly and swiftly." He glanced sourly about the shrouded, deserted street. "It's hopeless to look for them here. Anyway, the chap inside's our first duty."

Fortunately, the car had suffered no real injury, and, directed by the girl, the district station was reached in a few minutes. Here quick explanations were given to the inspector in charge, the injured chauffeur was left in his care, and a constable obtained to act as guide.

At that late hour scant regard was paid to speed limits; but, recklessly though Pen rushed the car, he found Nash impatiently waiting his arrival, and inclined to doubt the story phoned by the Hampstead station.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded harshly, as Pen and Fan entered his room. "Welbeck and Forshaw missing—my own man injured! Come, sir, your story, quickly!"

In terse, unemotional words, Pen told of Welbeck's irritation, his abrupt departure, and its startling sequel. He told also of his own work on Forshaw's writing-pad, and showed the reward it had brought him.

"But what does it all mean?" Sir William asked irritably, when all the tale was told. "Why, for instance, if this unknown had such a hold on Professor Forshaw, should he first be left to undergo Welbeck's questionings, then stolen afterwards? And why, above all, should Welbeck and Forshaw be taken, and you two left unharmed to bring me the tale?"

For an appreciable time Pen sat in thoughtful silence.

"I'll tell you how the thing strikes me, Sir William," he said at last. "Yen How's main object must have been the destruction of the papers, and, that once attained, it became a matter of indifference to him what happened to Forshaw. Under some excuse he got into the professor's room, found that the incriminating records had already been translated, and forthwith forced the professor's mind under his own control."

"You mean by hypnotism?" Nash frowned. "Remember, sir, Forshaw was no weakling; indeed, he was a singularly brilliant thinker."

"And Yen How, Sir William, is armed with a knowledge of mind-control that is, as yet, beyond the understanding of



the Western world," Pen replied quietly. "Next, sir, I believe Forshaw was left in his flat specially to decoy Welbeck into a trap, and that we were the unexpected flaw in a cleverly constructed plan."

"You mean—"

"That How could never have looked for us in Welbeck's company," Pen smiled. "I imagine he'd given his gang orders to 'get' Welbeck and Forshaw. They'd get 'em, and ignore side-issues, especially as we were not with Welbeck when he left the house."

"Humph!" Nash mused. "Your theory's ingenious, but I'll get Mr. How, if he remains in England another hour." He turned his attention to the telephone which stood at his elbow. "Mr. Belton, please. Er—yes, Belton; Nash speaking. In a moment you'll take down a description of a Chinaman named Yen How, believed to have arrived in London yesterday, using an unknown alias. You'll send out an 'all stations' message, and get in touch with the railway-stations. He can't have got far. Detain on suspicion; no actual arrest. Also order search for Welbeck and Professor Forshaw, believed kidnapped from latter's house within the last hour." He accepted the paper Pen passed to him. "Yen How's description: Height, five-eleven; clean shaven; hair, blue-black; features more Western than Mongol; almond-shaped eyes of striking brilliancy. Splashed brown birthmark on back of left hand. Got that? Good! Go right ahead."

He never once raised his voice, remaining as cool and matter-of-fact as a business man dictating a dreary business letter.

Yet Pen knew that he was throwing a net over England. Within five minutes the private telegraph that links Scotland Yard with all the police-stations of London would be setting twenty thousand men on the alert for the missing Chinaman. The great railway-stations would be picketed, and under the hour Pen's description of Yen How would be spreading to every port and hamlet in the country.

It was all very wonderful, yet Pen doubted and Fan smiled. They knew How's abysmal cunning of old, and felt positive that a tame arrest by some chance policeman would never be his lot. Rather did their thoughts revert to the scrap of paper torn from Forshaw's pad, and the possibility that it might be the winning thread in all this tangled skein.

"If only we had Chang's surname it'd give us a line," Pen mused, staring morosely at the powdered sheet. "But Changs are ten a penny in China, so that's a dead end."

"That 'kiss of' somewhere is worth your august attention," Fan suggested. "It's all mixed up in my mind with our trip in Yunnan last year." His nose wrinkled in an effort of thought. "Now, what happened special in Yunnan, Penny Ludd?"

Pen grinned. "We were booted out of a tea-house in Mentz," he began; then suddenly his eyes narrowed. "My hat! Why, Fan, the place was called the 'Kiss of Joy,' and it was run by a brute named Chang Fu." He whistled shrilly. "D'you hear, Sir William? If Forshaw's translation is correct, it's any old odds that Chang Fu has been sent over to Europe by the Crimson Claw to prepare the ground for Yen How's big boost."

"I'm more interested in finding Welbeck than your Crimson Claw," Nash answered. "Yet, strangely enough, your words have reminded that Welbeck himself has more than once reported suspicious gatherings in a Limehouse chop-shop called the 'Joy Kiss,' or 'Joyshop.' We've had the idea it's a gambling-den, and would have raided it very shortly, in any case. As it is, the raid goes through to-night!"

But Pen was on his feet in an instant.

"If our suspicions are right, sir, that Kiss of Joy shop is the spot-light round which How's agents cling," he said quickly. "The moment your fellows step into the place every Chinaman becomes tongue-tied, and the most you can do is to have them fined for gambling. Give Fan and me a chance, sir. We can go into the shop as natives—perhaps even hear news of your inspector, or get a leading line on How's real game."

"I think not, Rudd," Nash answered. "Your Chinese

gang has been attacking all along the line. It's time we had a turn."

"Allee same, silly game," Fan squealed disrespectfully. "I'm no good Hon' Kon' or Shanghai—'im no good here."

"What's he driving at, Rudd?" Nash asked irritably.

"The police in those parts tried raids and drew blanks," Pen explained. "Shan expects, rightly, I think, that they'll do the same in this Limehouse Joyshop. That's why I ask you to give us a chance. We know their tongue, their ways, their thoughts, and we know Yen How and something of his methods."

Nash shook his head gravely.

"You'd never get into the place," he said.

"We'd have a jolly good try," Pen answered. "Remember, sir, a single incautious word might put us on Welbeck's track."

"Um! And a single slip might put you where they put Vidoc," Nash replied.

"Our own fault, if we make the slip," Pen smiled.

"You p'laps stopec your men, 'cos they might get hurt?" Fan asked slyly.

"I do not!" the Commissioner snapped. But the suggestion put him on his mettle, as Fan had hoped it would. "Well, frankly, I don't like you playing a lone hand, and I'll call the raid off. But"—he paused expressively—"I'll give you one hour's start, in deference to



Without the least warning the spectacled Chinaman lashed a boot at Pen's shin and tried to slam the door. But Pen was too quick for him. With a neat uppercut he caught the fellow squarely on the jaw and sent him toppling backwards. (See page 26.)

Lord Rawson's wishes. I'll have my men surround the place, but they'll hold their hands for one hour—no more."

Pen grimaced. He realised that the Commissioner meant to spread the net and be ready for his haul, in the event of these overseas visitors blundering. It was hardly complimentary, but it was better than his first blunt refusal, and had to be accepted.

"You've a make-up room, sir?" Pen asked briefly.

"Big enough to disguise a town," the Commissioner smiled, pressing the button of a bell.

### The Sign of the Poppy.

AT eleven o'clock that same night two Canton coolies slithered along the ill-lit Castor Street, and turned into the unsavoury by-way locally known as Poppy Lane.

Even in daylight they would have passed as the ordinary birds-of-passage who come and go round London dockland. Each wore a greasy, crumpled suit of thin jeans, a cotton rag loosely knotted round his neck, a dark skull-cap that partially hid greased black hair. Swarthy skin served to heighten the glitter of beady, piercing eyes, and when they spoke it was in the dialect of Canton, with an occasional slip into the labial English that brands the uneducated Oriental. Though the night air was thinly raw they

disdained topcoats. The true coolie makes no change in his attire, whatever the weather, and Penny Rudd and his assistant preferred to shiver rather than make so glaring a blunder.

Never varying their unhurried slouch by a fractional second, they penetrated deeper and deeper into Poppy Lane, eventually passing the darkened front of an unsavoury feeding-house, and pausing only when the black shadows of closed shops enveloped them further on.

"That'll be the 'Joyshop.' Not a light showing, of course," Pen whispered. "You noticed the narrow entry beside it, Fan? That'll be the 'open sesame' for night-birds the Commissioners warned us of."

Fan's fingers tightened on Pen's wrist.

"Lillee night-bird come now," he breathed.

His sharp eyes had picked the prowler out from the shadows a moment before Pen sighted him. Now, as they watched, they saw the slipper-clad figure pause in the mouth of the alley-way, glance cautiously back to be sure none followed, and, like a wraith, melt into the blackness that lay behind him.

Giving the fellow a minute's grace, they crept without sound to the alley's mouth and slipped within its dark entrance. In an instant they were blinded by absolute darkness, but, each gliding one hand along a clammy wall, they groped a slow road until Pen's fingers met and explored a rickety, bolted door.

A cautioning squeeze on Fan's arm, and their blind journey was resumed. Six feet beyond the door they went to earth. In other words, they squatted flat on the cold stone, and waited, motionless.

Within five minutes their icy vigil was rewarded. A gentle slither of slippered feet echoed on to their strained hearing, and warned of another visitor to the apparently sleeping Joyshop.

Enduring the nerve-racking ordeal of the slowly approaching steps without moving a hair's breadth, their ears told that the unseen had found the door and reached his journey's end. Two double knuckle-taps, sharp as the strike of a ship's bell, sounded from the door, then the click of a lock, a pause, and again the "piff" of a metal socket dropping into place.

"Not a word exchanged," Pen breathed in Fan's ear. "Evidently an agreed sign, and regular callers only admitted."

"What do now, Penny?" Fan asked softly.

"Take a chance, old dear," Pen replied. "We've the idea Chang Fu's running this place as a rendezvous for How's gang. My word! I wonder now if—"

"If what?" Fan demanded.

"If Chang Fu was the fellow Welbeck captured?" Pen whispered. "Anyway, he's the bright spot I'm banking on, and asking for."

Making sure that no unwelcome newcomer was approaching, they reached the door in three swift strides, and Pen gave the signal knocks with confident touch. Almost instantly came the sound of turning key, the sigh of oiled hinges, and they were looking up into the face of a plump, spectacled Chinaman.

"Chang Fu, you take me!" Pen ordered boldly. "This miserable servant got big message from Excellency One."

Using the sibilant southern tongue with easy assurance, Pen slipped a shoe along the stone step. The words, as he had hoped, were hardly understood by the guardian, for China speaks a dozen dialects that are practically separate languages. But his listener caught and knew the name of Chang Fu, else Pen was wrong in reckoning the sudden start as due to fear. When he answered it was in jerky, clipped English.

"Chang Fu not—" He broke abruptly. "I'm sleep; go bed lon' go. You lun off. Comee shop to-morrow."

Without the least warning he lashed a boot at Pen's shin, and tried to slam the door. But Pen, taking the kick as though he liked it, lifted a hard fist in one swift uppercut. It caught the fellow neatly on the jaw, and sounded like the thud of a spade on wet clay. It proved a lightning-like knock-out, and Pen caught the sagging figure and plumped a firm hand over the opening mouth. Fan, prepared, dived like a striking hawk, imprisoned the plunging feet, and helped draw the sense-jolted doorkeeper into the blackness of the entry.

From beneath his armpit—the coolie's favourite pocket—Fan instantly snatched a length of thin cord. Knowing his job, he needed no instructions. Running a noose round the fellow's ankles, he drew it tight, turned a double circle that reached to the knees, and kicked the bound legs from under their dazed owner. Pen fell forward in sympathy, and, in two swift moves, arms were bent beneath knees, and hands tied with inflexible rigidity.

"Your gun, pal," Pen whispered, careful to use no tell-tale name.

The terrified man felt a ring of cold metal boring into his neck, and Pen felt clammy flesh quiver beneath his hands.

"Li'l frightened man-child," Pen jibed viciously. "Keep quiet, an' 'im lib. Cly out, an' 'im die. Savvy?"

The skin under his hand was now quivering through clear funk, but the ponderous head nodded vigorously.

"Allee lite," Pen said. "Now bite on this fo' suppee."

"This" was a springed and corded gag, the final touch that made the Joyshop's guardian less harmful than a touched chicken.

Dragging him well up the alley, he was left to ponder his manifold sins, and listen to two nightmare assailants pass through the doorway that had formed his life's job.

Sidling through the swiftly-won opening, the intruders stepped into a low-roofed, scantily-furnished room that was sketchily lit by a single, uncovered gas-jet.

"First job, re-bolt the door," Pen whispered. "If any more night-birds come prowling along around, it's a full house and no admittance. They dare not make a row, anyway, praise be."

Fan sniffed.

"Smell bhang, Pen?" he said softly.

"Naturally, old son," Pen grinned. "They don't call Grey Street Poppy Lane without reason, I don't suppose." He stood quietly thoughtful for a moment. "Now, remember, Fan, we're not skulkers who have stolen a way in. We've been passed O.K. by his nibs outside. We've just strolled along for our daily dose of poison, same as all the dinkum night-birds within."

Fan nodded sagely.

"Only we keep our ears skinned and our eyes open," he suggested.

"And our mouths shut, else we'll get more than ears skinned," Pen answered. "Now, come on, porpoise."

Aping the lazy slither peculiar to low-grade Chinks, they crossed the room, trod a long, narrow passage in single file, and opened another door without making the blunder of knocking.

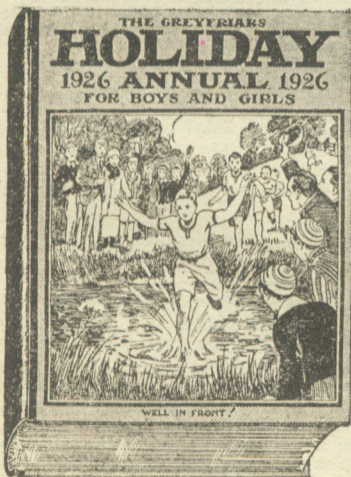
With incurious, drooping eyes that yet missed nothing, they stepped straight into a setting that might have been a thousand miles from England. It was one familiar enough to eyes accustomed to scenes of up-country China, a sordid sight of sagging figures smoking drowsily or sleeping heavily in an atmosphere scented to sickliness.

At one table near the smelly hot stove, a pigmented rat sat with glowing spirit-lamp and heated metal cup. As the newcomers sidled noiselessly across the room he pushed two tiny-bowled pipes across his table, and sat listlessly waiting for that which always happened in this noisome den.

Pen, knowing the ritual of such places, quietly slipped five yuan to the attendant—the extra tip gaining him the drop of heated oil that made his charged pipe yet more potent, and one that secured a similar "benefit" to his silent pal. They had to give the tip and to accept the lighted pipes—that was expected. They even had to take one swift and horribly distasteful puff, for the frequenters of "poppy" houses never fail in their crying need for that first heavenly draw. But the hot smoke was expelled before ever it reached their throats; then, glancing lazily about with filmed eyes, they sauntered to a corner that seemed to offer seclusion from the slothful crowd.

Behind his tell-nothing face, Fan was smiling at the cute way in which his chief calmly secured seats near the door that separated this sordid place from the private portion

## ON SALE



SEPTEMBER 1st.

of the house. The "joy"-room; as their own unchallenged entrance proved, was free to a selected public, and would do nought to help in their quest; but, upstairs, strange business might be afoot, and upstairs they were determined to go.

They had to wait, of course; wait, whilst the slow inhalations of yen-hok sank the assembled company deeper and deeper into the dream-world of the drugged. By allowing their pipes to grow cold they kept moderately clear heads, though the poisonous air of the overheated place had a noticeable effect on them.

So, when Pen heard the name of Chang Fu whispered from an adjacent table, he actually thought the fumes of hok were wreathing impish phantasies in his brain. Then he realised that the shrouded corner was partially screened from the speaker, and that he had no idea of the distance his thin squeak could carry.

For a time the voice mingled with other and deeper whispers, so that Pen was unable to distinguish a single word; but, with hearing tensed to maximum, his head sagged forward as if in drugged sleep, and again he picked out that high treble. This time also he identified the speaker as a broad-shouldered hunchback of repulsive ugliness.

"Fear not! Chang blundered, but will hug the death rather than betray the 'Claw,'" the fellow boasted in Chinese. "And well he deserves it, if only for allowing that police devil to steal the great word-plan from him." He giggled evilly. "Oh, stare not, lily-livered ones! The plans have gone to the gods in ashes, and our august lord even now attends to those who touched them!"

"Will he kill them, Lin Lim?" an elderly, pock-marked scamp asked eagerly.

"Nonono! The Great One takes men's brains, not their puny lives," Lim cackled boastfully. "He makes them as children; he uses them as devils!"

"Only the venerable gods can do that," came the doubting answer.

"Heugh! Is not our lord a venerable god? Is he not about to show this upstart Western world the might we owned even before they could walk upright?"

There was unutterable scorn in the questions, but the resultant silence showed this whole-hearted champion that his listeners still doubted. That angered him; so much so, that he cast aside the last pretence of caution and jumped to his feet in a royal rage.

"Folshaw!" he shrielled, his wicked little eyes searching the smoky murkiness of the room. "Folshaw, pale pig, come here!"

Then, to the amazement of Pen and Fan, a figure stirred in an opposite corner that was crowded by a sleepy, drugged crowd. It was Forshaw himself who answered the call, and he approached Lin Lim like a nervous, submissive lamb.

Through the narrow slits of dropped eyelids, Pen saw that his yellow chum was getting restive; but with an almost imperceptible "Hist!" he breathed caution.

"Folshaw, on your knees, ole dolt!" Lim ordered. "You stop allee same till to-morrow?"

"If you say I must," Forshaw sighed.

"And why mus' you?" Lim demanded.

"The master told me to obey you in all things," Forshaw sighed vacantly.

"You believe now?" Lim grinned in boastful triumph to his fellows. Without waiting an answer, he turned again to his victim. "You kisse my feet, Mis' Folshaw, then lun away to your kennel!"



Fan shot a leg upwards in a spectacular high kick, and brought the toe of his shoe in hard contact with Lim's descending wrist. The knife flew from the jolted hand. (See this page.)

In that instant Pen blundered most disastrously. The abominable degradation of which Professor Forshaw was happily unconscious, deprived Pen of the cold, calculating reasoning that usually ruled him. With two panther-like strides he was between white man and yellow, then the slap of his open hand on Lim's cheek came sharp as the crack of a pistol to every being in the room.

"You misshapen toad!" Pen yelled in Chinese. "Is it thus you betray the secrets of your master? Down on your own knees, dog, and pray that I keep your boasting folly to mine own self!"

Belatedly he was bluffing that he also belonged to the Crimson Claw. He saw Lim shake his loose sleeve, saw a cruel-looking knife slip down into his hand. But he also saw the hunchback hesitate, the snarling anger of his face frozen by the threat in Pen's words.

"Who are you?" he hissed, his eyes venomously frightened. "What have you to do with the great one and his secrets? I know you not! Who are you?"

"Ask him we serve," Pen answered mysteriously, deliberately contemptuous. He bent over Forshaw and spoke to him quietly. "Rise to your feet, sir. This scum will do you no further harm!"

Knowing that Forshaw was perhaps the finest Oriental scholar in England, he continued to speak in Chinese. He never realised his blunder until Lim's sneering treble shrielled in his ear.

"Again I ask—who are you?" the hunchback snarled. "If you served the master, as you say, you'd know he ordered this 'foreign devil' to forget his use of our tongue! Fool, I'll answer the master, but I'll answer alone!"

The knife flashed in hand as his arm flung upward. Pen, bending over Forshaw, could never have avoided the terrible steel, but for Fan's swift and surprising action. With a single spring he reached Lim's side, shot a leg upwards in a spectacular high kick, and brought the toe of his shoe in hard contact with Lim's descending wrist.

*(Pen and Fan Shan are in a tight corner, but they've been in a worse one many times during their adventurous career. See how they handle this ticklish situation in next week's grand instalment, boys.)*

