

Powerful Extra - Long Story
of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's

"THE BOY WITH A SECRET!"

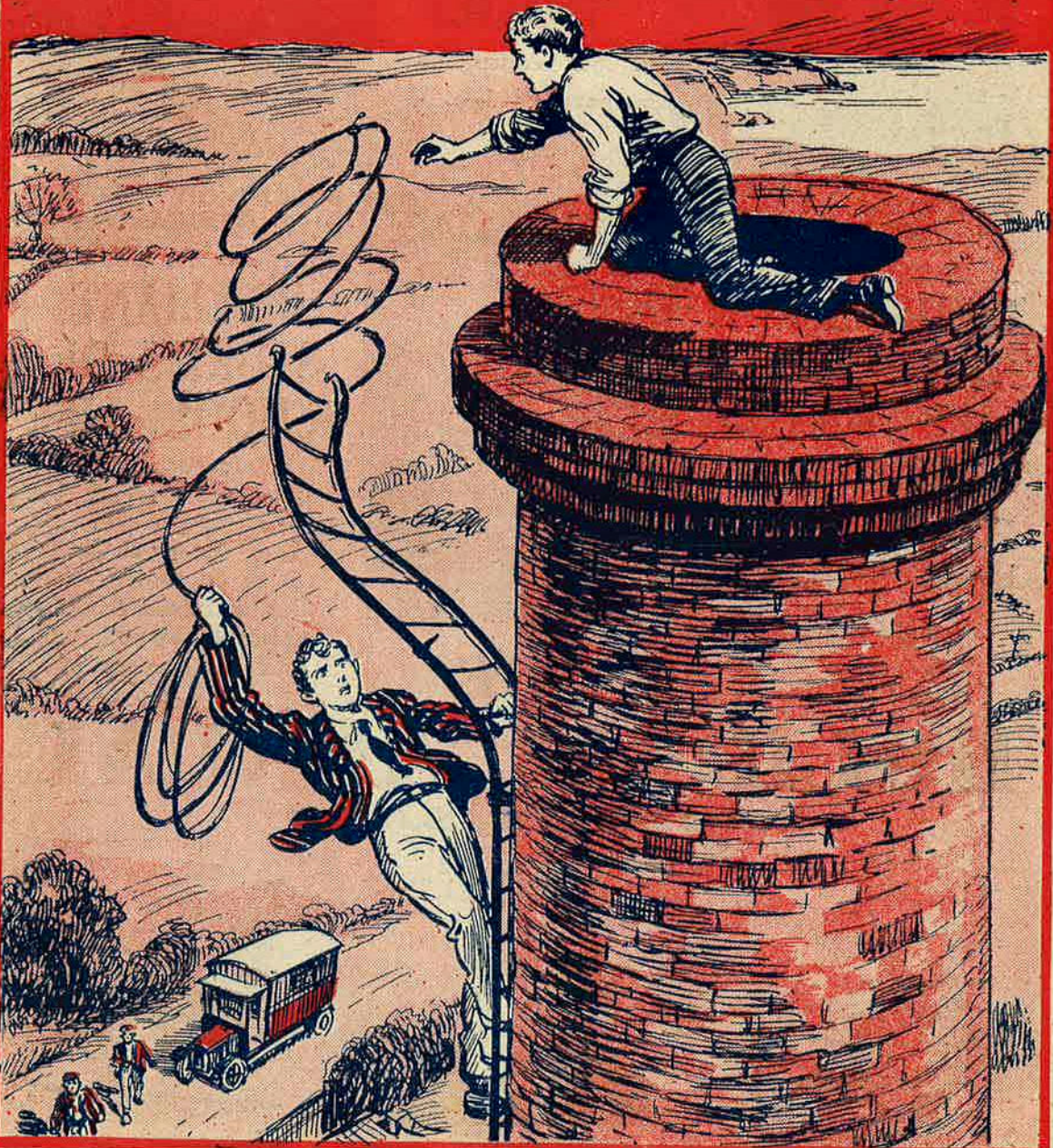
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TO SAVE HIS CHUM!

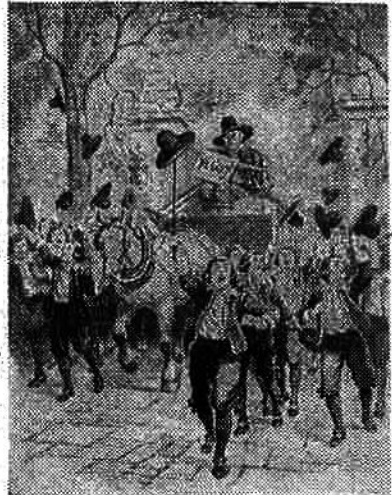
(A tense moment for Tom Merry in the extra-long complete story of the St. Jim's caravanners, inside.)

A BUMPER SIX SHILLINGSWORTH!



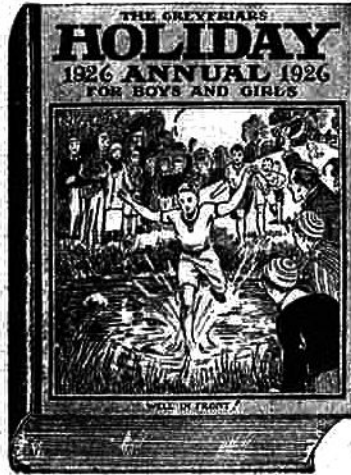
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ADVENTURE

THE BOY WITH A SECRET!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of
Tom Merry & Co., on the final stages of their
adventurous caravan tour.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I.

On the Trail!

"**J**OVE, I'm tired!"
"Same here!"
"What about camping for the night now?" asked Figgins wearily.
"I'm just about done to the world—can scarcely push the thumping pedals round."

"I'm about done, too," said Tom Merry. "But we may just miss catching up those rascals if we do halt. Let's stick it a bit longer, chaps. They can't be far ahead."

"We're bound to get them sooner or later!" growled Figgins. "Why not camp? The dashed caravan can't go on for ever and ever, blow it! The horse is bound to want a rest if the men don't. What do you say, Kerr, old chap?"

Kerr grunted. Like Tom Merry and Figgins, he was also tired out, though he did not mention the fact.

"I think Tommy's right, Figgy," he muttered a trifle breathlessly. "We ought to stick it a bit longer. That rotten caravan we're chasing will camp sooner or later right enough. But that's all the more reason why we should keep going if we want to catch the merchants up."

"The trouble is," said Tom, "that we're not at all sure those blighters are in front of us. They may easily have run off this rotten road on to the moor to camp. Let's stop and take our bearings, chaps."

"Right-ho!"

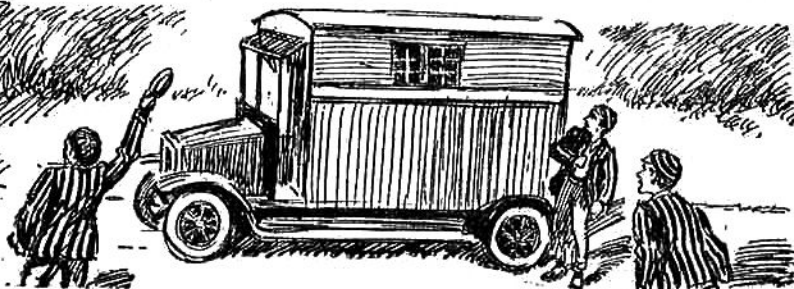
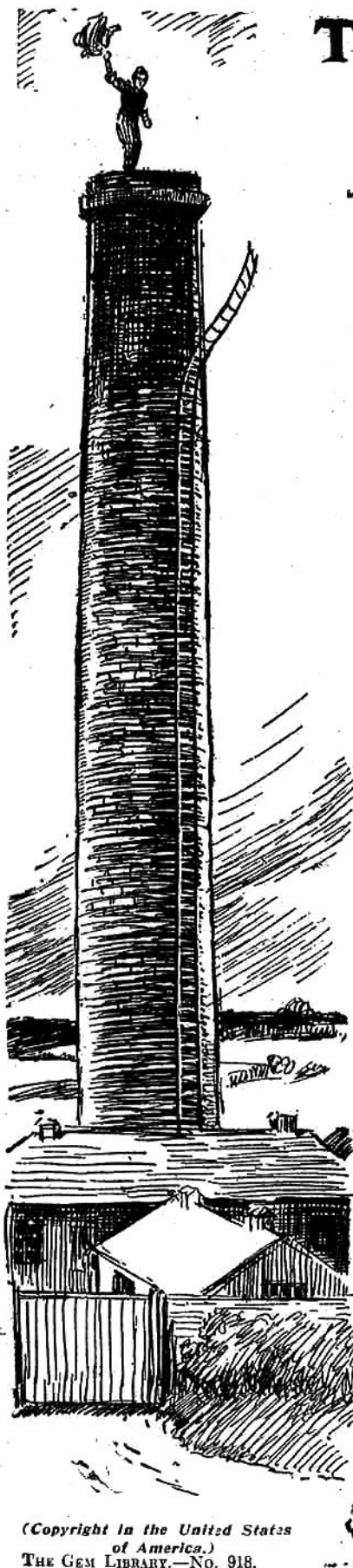
Only too glad to take a rest from pedalling, Figgins and Kerr followed Tom's example and dropped wearily from their bicycles, and the three St. Jim's juniors looked about them.

Over the wild Devonshire moorland the shadows were lengthening rapidly, and over the rocky edge of the horizon the Western sky was a mass of crimson and gold where the red sunset glowed in the darkening sky. For hours—it seemed to them like years—the juniors had been riding hard on the trail—the trail of Patchy and Snooky, the two rascally showmen who had kidnapped Nippy, the youthful driver of the St. Jim's motor-caravan. It had been an easy trail to follow, especially to Scouts like Tom Merry and his chums. The roads were still wet from the previous night's storm, and the wheel-marks of the yellow caravan had been simple to pick up and follow at the beginning. Later, however, on more frequented routes, those wheel-marks had very quickly been lost. But this fact had made little difference to the juniors.

Again and again they had picked up the trail. The dilapidated, old gipsy caravan with the one-eyed Patchy and the slinking Snooky were conspicuous enough objects, and few people who had seen it on the road had failed to remember them. From motorists, and cyclists, and carters, and policemen, the juniors had gleaned information, and from one clue to another the juniors followed up the trail, sticking to it grimly, only stopping to snatch a mouthful of food and drink now and again. And now the twilight of a glorious September evening found them plugging wearily over a rutty, lonely road over the de-olate waste of a Devonshire moor.

A few miles back a stone-breaker, plodding his homeward way, had claimed to have seen the yellow caravan pass him on this road—if road it could be called—and the tired juniors had followed on hopefully.

But that was nearly an hour ago, and no signs of the van they sought was



visible over the wild moorland. And as Tom pointed out rather gloomily, they were not at all sure that their quarry was in front, as the van might easily have turned off from the road to seek a camping-place for the night.

"And there's another thing," said Tom Merry, with a feeble grin, as the juniors looked about them and discussed the position. "I'm blessed if I know how we're going to handle two full-grown rascals like those when we do get up to them. It'll be a rough house for us."

"We'll have to rely on strategy," grinned Kerr. "Anyway, the point is to keep in touch with the beggars and watch our chance. Well, is it to be camp, or no camp?"

"Not a giddy sign of life anywhere," said Tom, looking about him keenly. "I vote we push on to that ridge in front there. We may see something on the road ahead from there. If we see nothing we'll give it up for to-night and camp. Come on."

The juniors mounted their machines, and pushed on with aching legs towards the distant ridge against the skyline ahead of them. Besides themselves their bikes were loaded with cycle-camping kit, and as the juniors had ridden hard they were feeling the strain now.

But they stuck it, and had almost reached the granite ridge when a shout reached their ears—a shout so sudden and unexpected that the juniors almost jumped on hearing it.

"Hi!"

"What the thump—"

"Hi, hi, hi! Hold on there!"

"Who on earth— Oh! I see!"

Tom Merry saw, then, three figures just off the rocky road ahead of them. They were standing by the side of a dusty motor-cycle and sidecar, and they were waving to the approaching juniors.

"Somebody stranded," said Tom Merry. "Motor-cycle broken down, I suppose. Well, I'm afraid we can't help 'em much."

"Perhaps they'll have seen something of the van we're after, anyway," grinned Figgins. "Let's see what they want."

"Seem familiar to me, somehow," said Kerr, staring at the figures ahead.

"I thought so, too," said Tom.

The three cyclists plugged on, eyeing the three motorists ahead rather fixedly. They soon reached them, and then the three St. Jim's juniors almost fell off their bikes as they saw the faces of the stranded motorists.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Tom blankly. "It—it's that rotter, Cutts—"

"And St. Leger—"

"And Gilmore!"

There was no doubt about it. The three youths with the motor-cycle combination were Cutts, St. Leger, and Gilmore, three members of the Fifth Form at St. Jim's.

To see such well-known and familiar faces at that hour on a wild Devonshire moor was certainly rather a surprising shock to Tom Merry and his chums.

It was also a shock to Cutts & Co. They had recognised the juniors now, and the three black sheep of the Fifth fairly blinked at their old enemies of the Lower School at St. Jim's.

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Gilmore. "Dashed if it isn't some of those Lower School kids, Cutts!"

The Fifth-Formers blinked at the juniors as if they had just dropped from the skies.

Tom Merry and his two chums blinked at them—and Cutts & Co. were certainly worth blinking at. In addition to the side-car wheel being badly buckled, and various other damages to their motor-bike and combination, Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger had also suffered damages. Cutts had a black eye and a cut lip. Gilmore had a black eye and a swollen nose. St. Leger had a cut cheek and a badly puffed eyebrow, and all three Fifth-Formers were dusty and torn and bruised in addition.

They looked far from the usual nutty and elegant Fifth-Formers they usually looked at St. Jim's.

"Yes, it's little us right enough, Cutts," grinned Tom Merry, looking the miserable-looking trio over curiously. "Fancy meeting you chaps here, though. Had a little smash-up?"

"Been trying your luck against a chunk of Devonshire granite?" grinned Figgins.

Cutts scowled, and clenched his fists. Cutts never was a very genial-tempered youth at any time—certainly never genial-tempered towards Tom Merry & Co. And the smash-up he had obviously met with had not improved his temper now.

"Never mind the smash-up, you grinning little fools!" he snarled. "Look here, what the thump are you kids doing round these parts?"

"Just a little cycling run—partly pleasure and partly business," explained Tom Merry. "Matter of fact, we're on the track of a caravan—a dirty yellow van about as ancient as the gee-gee that's pulling it. I suppose you fellows haven't seen—"

"A caravan!" repeated Gilmore sharply, glancing at his chums. "A dirty yellow one, with two brutes—one wearing a black patch over one eye? You mean that?"

Tom nodded eagerly.

"That's it! You fellows seen it?" he asked quickly.

Cutts gritted his teeth.

"Yes, we have seen it," he snarled, pointing to the damaged motor-bike. "If you kids want to thundering well know, it was into that dashed van we smashed less than ten minutes before you kids turned up."

"My hat!"

"Why, do you kids know the brutes?" demanded St. Leger, staring. "The dashed driver wouldn't give us room to pass, and Cutts smashed us up trying to get round it."

"Is that how you got those eyes and noses?" said Figgins, grinning.

"Cutts, like a fool, started rowing with the brutes," explained Gilmore savagely. "We got knocked about for it, too! You might have known, Cutts—"

"Oh, shut up and give it a rest!" snarled Cutts. "How was I to know there was another brute inside the van? The second brute proved too much for us. Anyway," added Cutts, looking the juniors' machines over with some satisfaction, "these kids couldn't have turned up at a better moment."

"Blessed if I can see what good they can do!" grunted Gilmore. "It's too late to get anyone out here to-night, even if these kids did go for help. The nearest garage is umpteen miles from here, you fool!"

"I know that," grinned Cutts unpleasantly. "But we're going to make good use of these kids—or rather, their bikes, at all events."

"Oh, are you?" said Tom Merry, noting the curious gleam in Cutts' eyes. "I think not, Cutts. We've got other business with these bikes, Cutts. We're going after that caravan now, and we'll send help to you fellows at the first place we come to. We've got to catch those men up, you see."

"Oh," said Gilmore, with a curious look. "How's that, kids? What are you after that caravan for?"

"I was wondering that," said St. Leger, nodding.

"Because they've kidnapped our driver," said Tom.

"They've got him in that van somewhere."

"Driver?" echoed Gilmore staring at the juniors' bikes and kit. "But you're cycle-camping, aren't you?"

"We're not," said Tom. "These bikes belong to Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. They were cycle-camping round about Plymsea, and we—that is, Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, Digby,

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"Run for it!" shouted Tom, desperately. He started away instantly, but his luck was out. Even as he turned, the old horse, startled by the furious shout, wheeled abruptly, sending the St. Jim's junior spinning backwards. (See page 7.)

and Lowther, Manners and myself stumbled across them at Plymsea when our caravan broke down."

"But what—"

"I'll explain," said Tom smiling.

He did, telling how, at the beginning of the tour, the juniors had been stranded without a driver, and had engaged Nippy, the waif of the travelling menagerie, as driver; and how Patchy and Snooky, the two showmen from the menagerie, had followed them all through Sussex, Hampshire, and biggest part of Devonshire in a desperate effort to get Nippy back from them.

"But why?" interrupted St. Leger. "Dash it all, why should they want the kid so badly?"

"That's what we would like to know," said Tom grimly.

"But they do want him, and they've gone to any length to get hold of him."

"And they've got him now."

"Yes; they trapped him at Plymsea—raided the camp and collared him. So Figgy, Kerr, and myself have followed at top speed, leaving Blake and the others to follow when they can get hold of a driver. Goodness knows when they will. Anyway, that's the story, and that's why we can't stop now."

"Phew!" said Gilmore. "But, hang it all, why can't you get the bobbies on the track of those merchants?"

"Because Nippy won't have the police brought into it," said Tom promptly. "Blessed if we know why. In fact, the whole business is queer. The kid's a good sort, but he won't tell of his business, and he won't explain what it all means. We've got to rescue him on our own if we can."

"Well, what a yarn!" said Cutts, with a nasty grin. "And you think we swallow that tale?"

"It's true, anyway," said Tom. "I know it sounds queer, but—"

Tom broke off abruptly. It struck him that he had already told more than he should have done, having regard

for Nippy's desire for secrecy over the affair. And while he paused Cutts chuckled and gave his chums a meaning look.

"So you're going to leave us in the lurch and follow these showmen brutes?" he remarked blandly.

"Of course!"

"That's where you're mistaken," grinned Cutts. "You see, we're quite stranded here. If you kids hadn't come along we should have had to stay out here all night without shelter. Now we needn't do so."

"Eh? What d'you mean?" said Tom, with a slight start.

"You see, we're going to borrow your bikes, kids," said Cutts chuckling. "We're going to ride back to that inn, some miles back, and put up there until morning. We'll leave you young asses to mind the bike and sidecar for us—see?"

Cutts looked at his chums for their approval of his scheme. They approved it quickly enough, to judge by their grins. Though not quite such unscrupulous rotters as Cutts himself, Gilmore and St. Leger felt it was to be preferred to having to spend a night on the wind-swept waste of a Devonshire moor.

"Good wheeze, Cutts!" grinned Gilmore. "We'll leave the kids the fly tents and stuff, and they can make themselves comfortable—what?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Cutts with a nasty sneer.

"We owe these kids one or two old scores, and here's a chance to pay 'em a bit back. We shall need the tents in case they can't put us up at that dashed inn. They can take it in turns to have a snooze in the sidecar if they like, though."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath and stared at the grinning seniors. Though knowing the character of the three Fifth-Formers of old, Tom could scarcely believe them capable of such a shrewd and caddish trick.

"Look here, Cutts!" he snapped. "Don't talk rot! You

jolly well won't do anything of the sort. We're going on now, and we'll send help to you chaps."

"I think not," grinned Cutts, giving his chums a sudden glance. "Hand those bikes over—sharp, now!"

"That we jolly well won't!" snorted Figgins. "Come on, you chaps!"

He placed one leg over the saddle of his bike, and as he did so Cutts made a grab at him. Tom Merry saw then that Cutts & Co. were indeed in earnest, and he gave a sudden yell and sprang into the saddle.

"Look it, chaps!" he yelled.

CHAPTER 2.

Into the Frying-pan!

CRASH! Clatter, clatter! Crash!" George Figgins was the first to come crashing down. Cutts had, unfortunately, got a good grip of his saddle, and as Figgins started away he pulled desperately, and Figgins toppled over and went down.

The next instant the same thing happened to Tom Merry as Gilmore grabbed at him, and pulled him over before he had even reached the saddle.

Kerr had not even tried to mount, and as St. Leger grabbed at him the two of them went over the bike in a crashing scramble.

The next moment the three seniors, and three juniors, and the three bikes were mixed up in a scrambled heap.

Tom Merry and his chums fought desperately. They knew they were no match for the three seniors, but they fought hard, nevertheless, not thinking of the odds against them. It was not the first time, by any means, that the juniors and Fifth-Formers had been at grips, and never had the occasion been so desperate, from the juniors' point of view. On the shadowy moorland, with the last red glimmer of sunset fading over the distant rocky horizon, the two parties—enemies of old—fought for the mastery.

It was a hopeless struggle from the first. Despite every effort Tom Merry and his chums were overpowered in turn, and the grinning and breathless seniors triumphed at last. They held their victims fast on the ground while they regained their wind, and then at a word from Cutts, all three jumped up and leaped for the fallen bikes.

They had them up and were in the saddles before Tom Merry & Co. had regained their feet, and then they pedalled away desperately.

"After them!" howled Tom Merry.

He dashed in chase of the moving bikes, and his hand dropped on the back of Cutts' saddle, but Cutts sent a hand out and Tom went floundering backwards with a gasp.

Figgins and Kerr did not even get the chance to do that. They ran hard, but the speeding machines went faster, and the running, panting juniors gave it up at last.

"Bye-bye!" called Cutts mockingly over his shoulder. "We'll be back in the morning, kids. Look after the mo-bike, won't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts & Co. rode away laughing, and Tom Merry, Figgins, and Kerr stopped, panting, and looked at each other with feelings too deep for words. In the distance Cutts and his chums dismounted and the chums of the Lower School at St. Jim's watched them helplessly as they worked away with spanners, raising the saddles. Then they mounted again and vanished along the rutty road in the gathering gloom.

In a few minutes the hapless juniors were alone on the wild waste of moorland—alone, save for the damaged motor-combination, and with the dismal prospect of a night spent in the open, without food or shelter.

"Well!" gasped Tom Merry, blinking at his chums. "Well, I—I—I—"

That was all he could say then. It was bad enough in all conscience, to be stranded at that hour miles from humans or human habitation—as far as they knew—but the worst, from Tom's point of view, was the fact that they had been so close behind their quarry, that a few more minutes, perhaps, would have brought them up with the caravan they were after.

It certainly was hard lines, and no wonder Tom Merry was beyond speech. But when the juniors had regained their breath they discussed the position dismally.

"We can't stay here all the night. In any case, I don't mean to do so," said Tom grimly. "Oh, hang those cads! We'll pay them out for this some day."

"I feel like smashing their dashed mo-bike up," said Figgins, glowering at the cause of their troubles. "My hat! We might have guessed those cads would have tried some dirty game on us."

"We ought to have been wary," admitted Tom gloomily.

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"But it's no good grouching now. And it's no good damaging their dashed machine up either. They know us better than that, too."

"What's to be done?" said Kerr quietly. "I vote we walk on—maybe a cottage or something on the road farther along for all we know."

"We'll see what's beyond that ridge, anyway," said Tom. "Come on!"

The juniors tramped on silently along the rutty road, and up the rough slope towards the ridge. Darkness would soon be on them they realised, and they realised also that if they were to find shelter they would have to do so quickly.

"We mustn't stray far," warned Tom. "Keep to the road, I say. I've heard there are bogs and all sorts of dangerous places on these dashed moors."

"Oh dear!"

The juniors trudged on, tired as they were, and soon they reached the top of the ridge and glanced eagerly about them. Around them for miles lay the desolate moorland, with no house or building of any kind in sight, though the gathering darkness prevented them from seeing very far. The cool night breeze whispered in the gorse and bracken, and now and again the eerie call of a stray night-bird broke the silence. And then, just when the juniors had given up all hope, Tom Merry saw it—a gleam of light in the gathering gloom.

"That's a fire—a camp-fire!" said Tom emphatically. "Notice how it goes in and out?"

"Oh, good eggs!" breathed Figgins.

"We'll make sure what it is before we pronounce it as good," said Tom with a wry grin. "My hat! I wonder—"

"So do I," said Kerr, guessing what Tom was about to say. "I wonder if it can be the caravan?"

"Great pip!"

The thought raised the juniors' flagging spirits, and the next moment they were hurrying towards the pin-point of light, led by Tom Merry. It seemed to them more than likely that the caravan had halted for the night, and that the light they saw now was the light of a flickering camp-fire.

"If it is," muttered Tom, "I shall be jolly glad those cads treated us as they did, after all. We should probably have gone on and missed the brutes."

"Let's make sure before we crow," said Kerr, with a rueful laugh.

"Here you are, then," said Tom in answer.

And he pointed to the ground. On the rough, rocky ground showed the marks of wheels, obviously of recent marking.

"The yellow van for a pension!" said Tom triumphantly. "Come on!"

The juniors pressed on with renewed determination, though none of them knew what they would do when they did come up to the caravan. Patchy and Snooky were burly rascals, who were not likely to brook interference with their plans by three schoolboys.

They found themselves at length skirting a small copse of wind-swept firs, and through the stunted trees they glimpsed the fire. It was a camp-fire right enough, and then they saw the van.

"It's it!" breathed Figgins. "The yellow caravan. And there's Patchy and Snooky by the fire."

Figgins was right. The long trail was ended. The juniors, scouting cautiously through the spinney, came upon the scene quite suddenly. The dilapidated van stood there, in the shadows, the red gleam from the firelight glimmering on the dirty windows, and the equally dirty yellow paint. The shafts lay on the ground, and the ancient horse was cropping the sparse, coarse grass some yards away, under the trees. On the ground, close to the fire, the two rough-looking men were sprawling, smoking clay-pipes and talking together in low, gruff tones. And one of them had a black patch over one eye.

They were Patchy and Snooky right enough. In the shadows, under the trees, the juniors looked upon the scene, and knew that they had trailed their quarry to earth.

But what to do now they had done so was another matter altogether.

"No good rushing them," said Tom in a stealthy whisper. "They'd simply eat the three of us in one mouthful. No signs of poor old Nippy."

"In the van, I suppose," breathed Figgins. "What's to be done, Tommy?"

Tom said nothing for some moments. He also was wondering what was to be done. They had trailed the van many weary miles in order to rescue Nippy, and now they were face to face with the task of rescuing him it did not seem anything like so easy to accomplish.

If only Blake and the others were at hand, thought Tom. Tom spoke at last.

"You chaps think of anything?" he breathed.

"No," said Figgins.

"Nothing, worse luck," whispered Kerr. "Unless—"



"Help! Help!" "That's Tom Merry's voice!" said Blake. "Come on!" "Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "Huwwah!" The juniors dashed forward, and as they beheld the prisoners tied to the trees, they stopped dead in sheer, amazed alarm. "Buok up, you cripples!" called Tom Merry. "Out us loose, for goodness' sake!" (See page 10.)

"Unless what?"
 "Unless we can collar that horse," murmured Kerr. "It's hopeless to think of rushing them, of course. We can do nothing by scrapping—only get collared ourselves."

"That's so!"
 "Well, what about sneaking their gee-gee?" whispered Kerr. "Blake and the others may be along to-morrow. We must hope so, anyway. We've left signs enough along the roads for them. If we can hold these rascals up—prevent them clearing out in the morning—"

"You—you mean take their horse now?"
 "Yes. It's dark under the trees there. They won't see us, with a bit of luck. We'll clear out with the horse, and leave them stranded. Then if Blake and his lot come along to-morrow—"

"Oh, good!"
 Tom Merry saw the idea, and his eyes gleamed with new hope. If it succeeded it would certainly hold the rascals up until, Tom fondly hoped, Blake and the rest would be along with the motor-caravan.

"We'll try it, anyway," said Tom softly. "It's risky, though, of course. If they hear the clatter of the horse's hoofs—"

"We must chance that."

"We'll do it, then," breathed Tom. "Come on, quietly!"
 They stole through the trees, Tom drawing his pocket-knife as they went. Then, leaving his chums behind, Tom trod softly towards the ancient horse, his heart thumping unusually fast. He was not afraid of being seen—the men had their backs to him—but he was afraid of what the horse might do. The clatter of a hoof on the stony ground would bring sudden disaster to the adventure.

He reached the horse, and felt for the rope. He found it, and, with his eyes fixed on the figures by the fire, he started to hack it through.

It was through at last, and Tom grasped the rope close to the bit.

"Kim on, old boy!" he breathed. "And don't make a row, for goodness' sake!"

He dragged gently at the rope, and, as if the old horse understood, he moved away after Tom, stepping cautiously. In and out of the dark trees Tom led the animal, and still no alarm came from the men by the camp-fire.

"Oh, good!" breathed Kerr.
 Figgins and Kerr joined Tom softly as he emerged through the trees leading the old van horse. They came out into the open, the horse following docilely, scarcely making a sound. The sun had vanished completely now, and it was almost dark, but a golden moon was rising, promising a fine moonlight night.

"All serene now!" breathed Tom. "The beggars were half-asleep, luckily. Quiet yet, though, in case— Oh!"

Quite abruptly the worst happened, something more startling than the clatter of a hoof on a stone.

The ancient caravan horse suddenly and unexpectedly neighed.

It was a terrific blast that rang out on the silent night, and almost frightened the juniors out of their wits.

"Oh, great Scott! That's done it!" snapped Tom.

It had, there was no doubt about that. From the direction of the camp-fire sounded a sudden yell.

"Look out, Snooky! That blamed old hoss' strayed, durn it! Arter 'im!"

There was a crashing amid the furze and thickets, and Tom Merry gave a gasp of alarm.

"Better leave the old gee-gee!" panted Tom. "Oh, what rotten luck! Better run—"

"By hokey!"

It was a yell of startled fury from the edge of the coppice. In the dim half-light of the rising moon the figures of the three juniors and the horse were clear to the rascals as they plunged through the trees.

"Run for it!" finished Tom desperately.

He started away instantly, but Tom's luck was dead out that night. Even as he turned, the old horse, startled by the furious shout—a voice he probably knew well and feared more—wheeled abruptly, sending Tom reeling and spinning backwards.

Tom crashed to the ground and lay there, half stunned by the fall, almost beneath the horse's hoofs.

Happily, the horse did not move again. Amid a thudding of heavy feet Patchy and Snooky came dashing up, and in a flash the crafty-faced Snooky was pinning Tom down. And seeing what had happened to their chum, Figgy and Kerr came back with a rush to his aid.

There was nothing for it but to fight now, and the juniors did fight. But it was a brief fight. Tom was practically helpless, and against the burly Patchy, Figgy and Kerr stood no chance whatever.

Patchy got a grip at last, holding the struggling, wriggling juniors at arm's length.

"Bring the other young 'ound along, Snooky!" he panted savagely. "By hokey! Who'd 'a' thought o' this 'appenin'? Durned if they ain't the samo kids as we met at Plymsea! There's summat durned queer about this!"

"Queer!" hooted Snooky, suddenly catching a glimpse of Tom's face. "It's plain enough, Patchy, you fool! This 'ere's one o' them blamed kids as Nippy was with. They've bin tracking us all the time!"

Patchy muttered an oath and started to drag Figgins and Kerr back to the camp, ignoring the horse. Snooky wrenched Tom upright and followed, pulling the half-dazed junior along by the coat-collar roughly. It was useless to struggle—though Figgins and Kerr did not cease struggling until the fire was reached. There Patchy glowered at them savagely.

"You interferin' young brats!" he gritted. "It seems as we ain't done you, arter all. I thought you'd 'ave seen by this as we were in earnest and meant to get Nippy. What you want chippin' in like this for all the time—hey? What's Nippy to you young gents?"

Tom eyed the rascal steadily, though his head was whirling.

"Nippy's our pal now, if you want to know, you rascal!" he muttered. "You've got us now, and we'll have Nippy back sooner or later. Our friends will, if we don't!"

"We'll see about that!" snarled Patchy, his one sound eye glittering. "I don't want to 'arm you kids; but you've come 'ere, and now you can stay 'ere. Fasten 'em up to these 'ere trees, Snooky, and shove that hoss in the shafts."

"But—but—" "Stow your durned battin'!" snarled Patchy. "Can't you see as it ain't safe to stop 'ere longer, you fool. These blamed kids' pals aron't fur away, I'll reckon on that. We got to get away durned sharp. There's no sleep for us to-night—blow it! Look lively!"

Patchy's word was evidently law, and Snooky obeyed, with many growling oaths. From the van he fetched lengths of cord and rope, and in a trice Tom Merry, Figgins, and Kerr were tied to trees; and then the rascals ran the old horse between the shafts of the yellow caravan. And well within five minutes the men were ready to start.

With scarcely a glance at the bound and fuming juniors, they led the horse away, Patchy kicking the animal to hasten its flagging footsteps. The caravan rumbled away, and vanished, lurching and bounding over the rocky ground behind the clump of firs. The rumble of wheels and the hoarsely muttered cries of the two rascals died away at last, and the three juniors found themselves alone—with only the fire to keep them company.

Then the juniors looked at each other—looks of hopeless dismay.

"Well," groaned Tom Merry, "we're fairly in the soup now, chaps! We've jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire with a vengeance!"

And Tom's chums groaned in chorus and agreed with him there.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unlucky Meeting for Cutts & Co.!

"TALK about the rocky road to Dublin!" remarked Jack Blake. "This dashed moorland road beats it to a frazzle!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "How much farther does this moah stretch, dwivah?"

The solid young Devonshireman who was driving the St. Jim's motor-caravan grinned.

"A goodly few more moiles yet, sir," he said cheerfully. "It certainly is rather bumpy—especially for this heavy old contraption. I reckon you'm not thinking of camping yet?"

Blake shook his head emphatically. "No fear!" he said grimly. "According to that bobby at the last village that thumping van's only about an hour ahead of us, and our pals less than that. Tom Merry and the other two seem to be hot on the trail, and we're hot on their trail. It would be madness to call a halt and camp. We're going on, old chap."

"Right you'm be, sir!" The driver put on speed a little, and the lumbering Noah's Ark rumbled on faster, lurching and banging on the rough moorland road. With the driver on the driving seat Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus were seated, and in the van behind, some seated on lockers and some lounging in the benches, were the rest of the St. Jim's caravanning party—

not to mention Fatty Wynn, who, like Figgins and Kerr, had thrown in his lot with the caravanners.

Like Tom Merry, Figgins, and Kerr, the juniors who had been left behind at Plymsea with the van had had little difficulty in following the trail. They had tongues in their heads and they had not been afraid of using them. And from innkeepers and others they had picked up messages left for them by Tom Merry which had made the trailing easier still to follow.

And now they were rumbling over the rough moorland road with the comforting knowledge that their chums were less than an hour ahead of them. All of the juniors were tired of the incessant bumping and lurching, but not one of them thought of stopping to camp—unless one counted Baggly Trimble. Even as the driver put on speed his fat face appeared above the closed half of the door behind the driving-seat.

"Look here, you fellows," grumbled Trimble, "when the thump are we going to camp? My thumping bones are fairly rattling with this rotten road."

"Let 'em rattle!" said Blake cheerfully. "Blessed if I can hear 'em rattling, anyway! When I can we'll stop, Baggly."

"Yah! Beasts!" retorted Trimble wrathfully. "Look here, you fellows, I'm jolly hungry!"

"Good! Go on being hungry, Baggly! And take your fat chivvy away before I biff it with this empty petrol-can!"

"Shan't!" hooted Baggly. "Look here, I'm not jolly well standing it! I'm jolly well not going to be starved as well as shaken to pieces like this! If I'd known you intended to treat your guests like this I'd never have agreed to come on this—"

Bang!

"Yaroooooooh!"

Bump!

"Yoooooop!"

Blake had kept his word. He swung up the empty petrol-can, and it smote Baggly on his fat little nose, and Baggly went backwards into the van with a howl, a bump, and another howl.

"Can't have grouching on this trip!" remarked Blake, dropping the can to the floor again. "That's the way to treat would-be nutineers!"

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Twimble is really a fearful nuisance. However, I am wathah hungry myself, deah boy. Why not have the spiv-it-stove going, Blake? Just a cup of coffee and a biscuit—"

"Good wheeze!" agreed Blake heartily. "I'll get some of those slackers on the job."

And Blake was about to call into the caravan behind, when the driver gave a sudden exclamation.

"Lights ahead, sir," he remarked. "Looks like three bikes, too. I suppose it can't be your three friends, Master Blake?"

"My hat!"

Blake's eyes gleamed eagerly as he saw the glimmering lights on the moorland road ahead of them. They were twinkling, moving lights—obviously the lights of cycles. And cyclists on that rugged, lonely stretch of road were few and very far between.

It was deep dusk now, but the figures on the bikes could be dimly made out—also the fact that the bikes were laden with kit.

"It's Tommy and Figgy and Kerr right enough!" said Blake excitedly. "I can see the kit—cycle-camping kit. Jove! Have the beggars lost the trail and turned back?"

"Not likely, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus stoutly. "I wathah hope— Bai Jove, deah boy, it isn't our friends at all! One of them is wearin' a motabin'-coat and gauntlets."

"My hat! That's so, Gussy!" grunted Blake, wrinkling his brows as he peered into the dusk ahead. "Who the thump— Mum-my only Sunday topper! Don't you recognise 'em, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, jamming his eyeglass closer into his astonished eye. "It's—it's—"

"Cutts—by all that's wonderful!" gasped Blake. "It's Cutts and Gilmore and St. Leger—those cads!"

There was no doubt about it. The cyclists had now ridden into the headlights of the motor-caravan, and the juniors could see them clearly. Amazing as it seemed, the cyclists coming towards them were the three shady Fifth-Formers of St. Jim's.

The sight of them riding calmly along that desolate moorland almost took Blake's breath away.

"Well, this beats the band!" muttered Blake. "Here, we must stop the beggars! Perhaps—"

"Hi! Hi, stop! Hold on, Cutts! Hi, hi, hi!"

Blake broke off his remarks to yell to the cyclists. But the cyclists did not stop. The foremost—St. Leger—certainly did slow down, but as he did so Cutts gave a startled yell from behind;

"Go on, St. Leger, you idiot! Can't you see who it is? Go on! Don't stop!"

Joe Bates pulled up the motor-caravan, but the cyclists rode on, and swept past the standing van. Blake's eyes gleamed then. It was strange enough to find Cutts & Co. on that road at that hour. It was stranger still to find Cutts & Co. cycle-camping at all. They were slackers all through, and were not the fellows to go in for such strenuous work as cycle-camping, enjoyable as such a holiday was to ordinary open-air-loving fellows.

No. There was something wrong—Blake felt certain of that. It was less than an hour since Tom Merry, Kerr, and Figgins must have passed along that road on such cycles, and the coincidence struck Blake as exceedingly queer. He knew the characters of Cutts & Co. only too well.

Cutts' yell to his chums to "go on" quite settled the matter for Blake. His suspicions were completely aroused now, and as questioning faces appeared at the door behind them, Blake gave a shout.

"It's Cutts and his pals—they've got our pals' bikes, I believe!" he yelled.

"Great pip!" gasped Lowther. "What the thump

"Never mind questions now!" snapped Blake. "Driver, turn her round—after the cads!"

"Right you'm be, sir!"

Joe Bates grabbed at the controls, and with a rumble, a bump, and a terrific lurch that caused crockery and pots and pans to rattle and crash within the van, the heavy vehicle backed off the road, then it leaped forward, swung round, and went thundering after the three cyclists.

"Go it!" snapped Blake. Joe Bates, the driver, "went it," getting every ounce he could out of the old engine of the caravan.

It was an exciting chase, but very brief. All the juniors now had grasped the situation, astonishing and unexpected as it was. They knew Cutts & Co., and all of them believed that Blake's suspicion was more than likely to be true.

In well under a hundred yards the thundering caravan had caught up to within a few yards of the cyclists, and Blake gave a yell.

"Stop, Cutts, you rotter! Stop, or we'll run you down!"

Cutts' answer was to turn his machine off the road on to the rough gorse and heather covered moorland. St. Leger and Gilmore went after him, and the three rattled and bounded over the ratty, bumpy ground.

But Joe Bates had expected such a manoeuvre, and he turned the van after them at once, heedless of the lurching of the heavy vehicle and of the crashes inside.

Cutts realised it was hopeless then, and he slowed down and dropped off his machine, panting and furious. His chums did likewise, and then the van was upon them amid a jarring of hastily applied brakes.

"Collar them, chaps!" roared Blake.

He was the first down, and after him swarmed the rest of the caravaners.

"Here, hold on!" yelled Cutts, panting and furious. "Hands off, you little fiends! What's this mean?"

The juniors neither kept their hands off nor answered the question then. They swarmed round the three Fifth-Formers, and the next moment Cutts, St. Leger, and Gilmore were hitting out furiously.

But there were seven juniors—not counting Trimble, who remained in the van—and they were all over Cutts & Co.

The Fifth-Formers fought hard, but it was useless. And when Joe Bates felt called upon to chip in, and jumped down to help, Cutts & Co. gave in.

"What's this game mean, you little sweeps?" bluffed Cutts savagely. "Let us go, hang you! You'll be sorry for this, kids! How dare you attack us like this! We're cycle-camping, and—"

"Perhaps you are, and perhaps you're not," gasped Blake. "Now, Wynn, old chap, is one of these bikes yours?"

"That it jolly well is!" said Fatty Wynn, picking up the bike St. Leger had used. "Here it is, and here's my name on the tab of the saddle-bag."

Blake grinned.

"I thought as much!" he said grimly. "The cads must have met Tom Merry and the other two and pinched their bikes from them."

"I tell you—" Cutts was beginning savagely, when St. Leger stopped him.

"What's the good of bluffing, Cutts?" he growled. "We're done, and we might as well own up. Look here, kids," he went on, in a pleading tone, "if we tell you where to find your chums, will you promise to take us on with you to the nearest inn or house?"

"We'll decide that when we've found our pals," said Blake. "You've pinched these bikes, and left our pals stranded, I bet!"

"Well, we were desperate!" groaned St. Leger. "Our dashed mo'-bike and sidecar broke down—we had a smash-up—and we weren't going to stay out on the moors all night."

"So you left our chums to do that instead!" said Blake bitingly. "Tie the beauties up and shove 'em in the van, chaps!"

"Look here—" Cutts was beginning again savagely; but Gilmore stopped him this time.

"It's no good, Cutts!" he gritted. "The kids have got us, and it's no good putting their backs up more. If they're decent they'll take us along with them—and our motor-bike, too. Hang it all, St. Jim's fellows should back each other up, vac or no vac."

Blake grinned. Gilmore's ingenious suggestion struck him as funny, in the circumstances.

"We'll settle that when we see Merry," he said. "Into the van with them, chaps! If they want to get off lightly it's up to them to show us where they've left our pals. If we don't find them—well, Cutts and his giddy pals will feel sorry for themselves!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cutts saw the folly of resisting further, and in a few moments all three of the fuming seniors were tied up and slung into the van. Then the juniors boarded it, and Joe Bates started his engine again. The caravan bumped up on to the road again and rumbled on its way.

Blake's last warning words had made even Cutts see that their best course was to play up to the juniors, and he said nothing when St. Leger took his stand behind the driving-seat, on the look-out for the spot where they had left Tom Merry & Co. and the smashed motor-combination.

The distant ridge of granite, dimly seen and forbidding against the darkening sky, loomed ahead at last, and suddenly St. Leger called a halt and pointed across the roadway.

"Here we are," he said. "The bike's in the hollow there, but—but I can see nothing of those kids!"



VICTOR RAILTON, M.A.

Form master of the Sixth Form and House master of the School House. A thoroughly good fellow and one admirably suited to the position he holds. Does his work well and understands all the boys under his charge. Always kind and considerate towards them. Does not pry into their affairs, but is always willing to help them when occasion demands. Highly respected by all at St. Jim's—a direct contrast to Mr. Ratcliff of the New House.

Blake & Co. saw nothing, either, and their faces were grim as they jumped from the van and ran over to the bike. They eyed it, and looked about them in sudden dismay.

"Must have gone on," he breathed, in deep disappointment. "St. Leger, you rotter—"

"They've moved on, I expect—gone on to look for a cottage, perhaps," said St. Leger, scowling. "We can't help that. They aren't likely to wander off the road, anyway. They're fools if they have done!"

That much seemed plain also to the juniors. It seemed unlikely that the juniors would risk getting lost by wandering over the moors. It seemed obvious they had gone on along the rugged road in search of shelter for the night.

Accordingly, Blake gave the word, and the van rumbled on up the rugged slope. It topped the ridge, and the moorland, desolate and still, spread out before them, with no habitation in sight to cheer them.

Then Arthur Augustus saw the light—as Tom Merry had done earlier on. And after a brief consultation Blake decided to explore it.

Leaving the prisoners locked up in the van, and with Bates and Trimble in charge, the rest started out towards the dimly flickering pin-point of light. The moonlight was much stronger now, and it was an easy matter to find one's way, rough and full of pitfalls as the ground was. And the explorers reached the spinney of fir-trees at last, and beheld the camp-fire, dying low now.

Then, as the juniors crashed on through the undergrowth towards it, a shout reached their ears—a shout that made their hearts leap with joy:

"Help! Help!"

"Tom Merry's voice!" said Blake. "Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwwah!"

The juniors dashed through the sparse trees, and as they beheld the three prisoners tied to the trees they stopped dead in sheer amazed alarm.

"Bai Jove! What—what—"

"Buck up, you cripples!" called Tom Merry, his voice trembling with joy at sight of the rescuers. "Don't stand there, you dummies! Can't you see we're prisoners—cut us loose, for goodness' sake!"

Blake hesitated no longer, and dashed towards the bound juniors, tearing his pocket-knife out as he ran. In next to no time the bonds had been slashed through, and the astounded rescue party were listening breathlessly to the story of their adventures.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Blake at last. "And you didn't see anything of Nippy?"

Tom Merry shook his head glumly.

"Nothing, though I thought once I heard shouting from the van," he said grimly. "Anyway, they've got a good start again, but we'll have them yet."

"You mean to go on to-night on the trail, Tommy?"

"Of course!" snapped Tom, rubbing his stiff and aching limbs vigorously. "But—but we'll deal with those Fifth Form cads first, my pippins. What a stroke of luck that you spotted them."

"Yaas, wathah! They deserve a weally good waggin' for this wotten twick, Tom Mewwy."

"And they're going to get it," said Tom, his eyes gleaming angrily. "We'll teach the cads how to behave on the open road. We heard their call for aid, and we stopped willingly, anxious to do what we could. They played us a rotten, dirty trick in return, and we'll make 'em sit up for it. Come on!"

The juniors tramped back to the waiting caravan, and it was Tom Merry who unlocked the door and looked in.

"Hallo!" said St. Leger in great relief. "So—so they found you, Merry? I say, cut us loose, Merry."

"Not likely," said Tom. "You rotten cads! Soft-soaping us won't help you, my pippins. Out with 'em, chaps!"

"Look—look here, Merry!" stammered Gilmore in alarm. "No larks now. Help us out of this hole, there's a good chap. You could easily fasten our mo-bike behind the van and tow it along, and you could drop us off at the nearest inn."

"We could, yes," assented Tom Merry. "But we aren't going to, old chap. Even such mighty men as Fifth-Formers must learn lessons, you know. We're going to teach you how to behave to fellow-travellers on the road. We're going to leave you as we found you, and as you were going to leave us. Out you get!"

The three Fifth-Formers, alarmed now, and savage, refused to get out of the van, and the juniors were obliged to help them, which they did quickly enough. Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger were yanked out, and they fell sprawling and bumping on the hard road, uttering wild yells of pain and fury.

Then Monty Lowther dropped from the van, carrying a basin in which he was stirring a conglomeration of flour and

water, and jam, and oil. This he ladled out in spoonfuls over the heads and faces of the yelling Fifth-Formers.

Then, leaving the hapless seniors seated at the roadside, fairly howling in wrath and dismay, the juniors boarded the van again. The three bikes had already been slung and roped on to the roof, and the caravan rumbled on, and the dim figures of the hapless Fifth-Formers vanished behind in the gathering darkness.

"That's that!" said Tom Merry with satisfaction. "I fancy Cutts & Co. will be rather angry with us when we meet again at St. Jim's after the vac."

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"But it served them right, every bit of it," said Tom grimly. "A night in the open like that won't harm them, in fact, it will do them good. What about supper, you chaps? And after supper some of us had better turn in for a bit of sleep. Goodness knows when we'll be able to camp again. Anyway, I don't mean to halt until we've caught up with those brutes, and rescued poor old Nippy."

"Hear, hear!"

All the juniors were agreed upon that, excepting, perhaps, Baggy Trimble, who did not count. And soon hungry appetites were making short work of supper as the caravan adventurers rumbled on over the Devonshire moor in the deepening darkness in chase once more of the yellow caravan with its rascally kidnapers and their prisoner.

CHAPTER 4.

A Dash to Escape!

"**E**RE you are, Nippy. 'Ere's a bit of breakfast, kid." The growling voice of Patchy and the tramp of heavy feet on the floor of the van wakened Nippy abruptly.

How long he had been sleeping he did not know, nor could he make out where he was for the moment. Then it all came back to him with a rush—his capture in the encampment at Plymsea, that wild dash through the stormy night, and on all through the following day, bound and helpless in the rumbling, stuffy and evil-smelling caravan. Then the halt on the moors, a brief halt cut short abruptly by sounds of struggling and voices—familiar voices to the imprisoned boy.

But the hoped-for rescue had not materialised. If it had been his schoolboy chums who had attempted to rescue him, they had failed, as Nippy realised with a heavy heart as he heard his enemies putting the horse in at frantic haste. Then on again through the deepening darkness, and Nippy now realised that he must have fallen asleep on the bunk where he had slung himself wearily down.

He blinked out at the burly figure of Patchy now, and slipped out on the floor of the van with difficulty, for his hands were tied behind him.

"Where are we now, Patchy?" he asked quietly.

"In a safe place, young 'un," grinned Patchy, placing a mug of steaming tea and a plate of buttered bread on a locker. "And 'ere we're staying for a goodly while, Nippy. It'll take more'n even your clever young pals to track you down 'ere, either."

Nippy drew a deep breath.

"I suppose it was those fellows who tried to rescue me last night?" he muttered.

Patchy nodded, his face changing to a scowl.

"Yes, it was," he grunted. "I don't mind telling you that, Nippy. But they wasn't sharp enough. They was cleverer than I took 'em for to track us down like that, though. Anyway, they're safe enough now for a bit."

He grinned evilly, and Nippy went a trifle white.

"Where—where are they?" he said quickly. "You—you—"

"No, we 'aven't 'armed 'em, kid," grinned Patchy. "Only roped the interferin' young 'ounds to trees, and left 'em there. No 'arm in that. Their pals will find them, I reckon, if nobody else does."

"Their—their pals?"

"There were three of them," grinned Patchy. "I reckon they'll be feelin' a bit tired and 'ungry by this. They asked for it, though."

"You—you rotter!" breathed Nippy. "How long are you going to keep me prisoner, Patchy, and what game are you playing?"

Patchy grinned again, and seated himself on the locker.

"We're keeping you, Nippy, until we've done a bit of business with the old military chap wot's advertising for you," he said coolly.

"Oh!"

Nippy started violently, and a look of fear came into his clear eyes.

"Advertising for me?" he repeated, almost below his breath. "What—what do you mean, Patchy?"

"I reckoned as you didn't know that, Nippy," grinned



Suddenly Monty Lowther leaped forward, grabbing Baggy Trimble by the collar, and jerking him backwards over the tree trunk. "Yarooooh!" roared Baggy. The fountain pen flew in one direction, the pad in another. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. (See page 18)

Patchy with a knowing leer. "Snooky an' me, an' everyone else at the menagerie, knowed as you was a young toff when you joined the show larst December, it was plain as plain. But we didn't know who you was until that night as you left the show."

"You—you know now?" muttered Nippy in dismay.

"Yus. It was the night you runned away from the show. Snooky an' me was clearing out this old van, an' we found an old newspaper, dated September larst it was. It had a picture in it, Nippy—a picture of you, me lad. And there was a description of you, too, and there was summut about a sub-substanshul reward bein' offered for information about you, Nippy."

"Oh!" said Nippy bitterly. "So—so that's what you're after, you brutes!"

"Old 'ard, Nippy!" growled the man threateningly. "You always was a kid with plenty of lip, and you got many a good 'iding for it, too. Mind your eye now, Nippy."

Nippy ignored the threat.

"You say there was a—a reward?" he breathed, "Who—who was offering it, Patchy?"

Patchy grinned again.

"Don't you worry about no reward, Nippy," he said. "Me and my mate are arter summut bigger than that there reward. You see, afore we started this game we made inquiries, and we found as you, Nippy, was a wealthy kid, with pots of dibs comin' to you when you growed up. We also learned as your guardian—the military bloke as is advertising for you—is rich, too. 'E can afford to pay more'n jest a bit of reward for you—what?"

"You—you scoundrels!" breathed Nippy. He understood now. "And—and what did the paper say?"

"Only what I've said," grinned Patchy. "And hinfornation was to be given either to this here colonel chap or to the police, Nippy. But we ain't fellers as likes 'aving dealings with the cops, Nippy, no more'n you do, hey?"

Patchy grinned, and eyed Nippy hard. Nippy said nothing.

"You could 'ave put the cops on us many a time this last week or two, Nippy," grinned Patchy. "But you didn't.

You was afraid to. What you done, Nippy, to make you afraid of the cops?"

Still Nippy did not reply.

"It beats me 'oller," said Patchy, eyeing the boy curiously. "You 'aving all that cash a-comin' to you, and won't give yourself up, nor 'ave the police on the job. And when you gets to Plymsea you disguises yourself with a false moustache and eyebrows," grinned Patchy. "You 'ad 'em on when we collared you. 'Cos why? 'Cos that colonel bloke lives there. 'Is address is the Grange, Plymsea. You was afraid of bein' spotted by someone as you knows there, hey?"

Nippy remained silent. It was true enough. He had the false moustache and eyebrows in his pocket now. They were needed no longer, he had imagined.

"There's a lot about this 'ere affair as beats me," went on Patchy reflectively. "'Owver, we've got you now, Nippy, and we means to 'old tight to you till your nunky—I suppose 'e's that—fixes up that bit of business with us. But it ain't time yet. We're going arter a day or so to a place as is nice and lonely, where nobody can poke their bloom'n' noses in. Now jest you get your breakfast, Nippy."

He got to his feet. Nippy spoke then.

"Look here!" he said eagerly. "Let me see that—that paper, Patchy."

"I ain't got it now," said Patchy. "I lost it when we was in Hampshire, kid. 'Owver, I 'ave the old bloke's name and address dotted down, don't you worry."

He took out his clasp-knife and cut the boy's hands free. "You can roam about 'ere as you likes, Nippy," he grinned. "But you won't get away, and don't you try it on, my lad! I'm goin' to turn in for a snooze now, and Snooky's outside, an' will look arter you."

With that Patchy rolled into the other bunk, and closed his single eye. Nippy eyed his rascally face for a moment, and then he started on the buttered bread and tea. He was hungry, and he ate with a good appetite. But he soon finished what there was, and then he stepped to the door of the dingy caravan and looked out.

It was a glorious September morning, with a sharp nip
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in the air, and it was obviously very early yet, for the sun was low. But as Nippy looked out drowsily he gave a start of surprise.

Instead of the rolling, rocky moorland, his eyes beheld bricks and mortar. He found himself looking out into a yard—flanked on three sides with high brick buildings. Dilapidated and tumbledown, with windows blocked up with weather-beaten boarding. At one spot a huge, high chimney reared its dirty brick structure skywards. On the fourth side was nothing but a high brick wall, the top broken and moss-grown in places, and a high pair of massive gates, closed now, and through which the caravan had obviously entered the big yard. Great balks of timber had been reared against the gates, obviously to keep them closed, and obviously placed there by his captors.

Then Nippy saw Snooky seated on a big stone, smoking, some yards away, and he groaned.

Nippy's first thought on being released was of escape, and he had looked out eagerly, hoping for a chance to do so. But he saw that escape was hopeless now. It would take more than his strength to remove those heavy balks of timber, and the wall looked unscalable. Moreover, there was Snooky, evidently on guard. Nippy realised why Patchy had released him now. Escape was hopeless. The place was evidently a deserted factory of some sort, long ago abandoned to ruin, and possibly miles from any habitation.

Nippy stepped down the steps of the caravan and walked into the yard, glancing about him curiously, and thankful for the exercise for his cramped and aching limbs. Snooky looked at him and scowled, but said nothing. Nippy did not speak to him. Brute as Patchy undoubtedly was, there were times when Nippy looked upon him as human, and felt he could stand him. But he never could stand the sulky, crazy and slinking Snooky at any price.

Backwards and forwards about the rubble-strewn yard the captive strolled, delighting in the fresh early-morning air after the stuffiness and smell of the caravan. Snooky watched him without speaking once. But Nippy was not idle. His brain was working—working on the problem of escape.

The high wall was out of the question, but those heavy balks of timber struck Nippy as being a chance—a faint chance. If he could only manage to scramble up one of them and reach the top gates—

Nippy glanced at them again and again, trying to nerve himself for the effort. Failure, he knew, would only make matters worse for him. They would secure him, and not give him the chance again.

He must watch his chance, and make no mistake.

He saw it presently. Snooky knocked out his pipe on the stone and started to fill it again, his eyes off the boy for the moment. And then Nippy resolved suddenly to try it.

CHAPTER 5.

In Deadly Peril!

WITH a sudden rush, he dived for the heaviest balk and swung himself upon it. There was a fierce yell of alarm from Snooky as he leaped up, the pipe flying from his hands and splintering on the stone.

"Look out! Hi! Look out, Patchy! The young 'ound's tryin' it on!"

Nippy gasped, and started frantically to clamber up the balk. But it was an awkward task, and his sheer eagerness caused his undoing.

The heavy balk, unsecurely fixed against the gate, suddenly twisted round and slid down, sending the youth slithering down again, clasping frantically at the rough wood to save himself.

But his weight tore his hands away and he fell heavily, and just then Snooky dashed up with a furious oath.

But Nippy was too quick for him. Bruised and shaken as he was, he twisted swiftly, neatly avoided a frantic clutch, and, leaping to his feet, he darted away in a flash.

What made Nippy do what he did next he never knew. Before him he glimpsed the great needle of bricks lifting its three hundred feet of height skywards, and he made for the stack with a rush.

He clutched the lowest of the linked thread of ladders, and next instant he was swarming upwards, with the thud of heavy feet and furious oaths in his ears.

"Come back!" roared Snooky, stopping at the bottom of the stack, and shaking a gnarled fist upwards.

"By hokey!" roared Patchy, running up. "The—the daring young 'ound! Hi! Nippy, you dorned young fool! Come down! By hokey! The blamed kid'll be smashed up!"

In startled, dumbfounded alarm now, the two rascals watched breathlessly and angrily as the youth ignored

their cries and went steadily upwards. As a matter of fact, Nippy's action, though hasty, and certainly reckless and daring, was not so mad as it seemed. At the back of his mind was a dim idea that if he could only keep out of the rascals' way for a time he might attract attention—and rescue. He remembered Patchy's remark that only three of his schoolboy friends had been captured, and it gave him hope. Tom Merry & Co. might, even now, be hot on the trail; for Nippy knew they would follow—knew they would never desert him.

With the one hope uppermost that the ruined works were within easy sight of village or road, Nippy went swarming upwards. Nippy had often seen steeplejacks at work, and had often longed to emulate their daring tasks. And now here was a chance—and one with reason for such an adventure behind it.

Up and up went the plucky youth. The excitement of the first part of the climb had nothing but pleasure in it. He realised the feeling it gave of exhilaration to see the ground receding beneath him more and more. It was jolly fine, he felt.

But at eighty or more feet up the thrill began to have a different effect upon him. He stopped climbing and looked about him, his heart leaping to his throat as he did so.

As he feared, the works were desolate and lonely, with no sign of a habitation for miles. But a winding ribbon of road caught his eye and cheered him up a little, though not a sign of life was upon it. He realised it was early yet, however.

It was only a glimpse he got, for, to his own disgust, he simply dare not look again. He caught himself trembling violently as he realised what a fall from that height would mean, and his breath was coming in great gasps now. It was not so easy, after all. The sight of the buildings, a terrible distance down, and of the rubble-strewn earth far below, made him suddenly sick and giddy.

He clung on to the rusty rungs desperately with closed eyes. But he did not think of going down. He was grimly resolved not to be captured again. Yet he could not remain as he was. He realised that only too well. He must either go down or up. And he determined desperately it should be upwards, though the thought of having to return down that horrible ladder made him tremble again.

The feeling passed, however, and he started up again, his teeth clenched, his eyes staring at the iron rungs and the brickwork in front of him.

Once his hand slipped, and a thrill of horrible fear shot through him, but after a wait with closed eyes he recovered his nerve and went on again. After that he just hurried, refusing to look to right or left or downwards—refusing to think of danger.

He was near the top now. He sensed it, and ventured to look up. Yes, only a few more yards now. Then—though he strove hard not to do so—something—curiosity, perhaps—forced him to take one look outwards and downwards.

The sight almost made him yell out. A sense of faintness came over him, and he clung desperately to the cold iron with moist hands, trembling.

It was awful. The distant village looked like dots almost below him, and the ribbon of road a mere line. Below him directly the factory buildings looked like small dug-outs in the earth.

Once again Nippy recovered his nerve—the thought that the worst part—he devoutly hoped the climb-up was the worst—was nearly ended.

He went on, his eyes fixed upon the tapering brim now. And then, quite suddenly, with safety almost within his grasp, Nippy got the fright of his life.

He had reached the last ladder now, and even as his weight was upon it it bowed outwards, giving to his weight.

Nippy felt himself swaying outwards, and sheer horror took possession of him, and he shrieked with fear—shrieked through suddenly palsied lips at the top of his voice.

As the iron ladder swayed outwards—the rusted bolts had rotted through—he clutched desperately at the edge of the chimney which was just above his head, and his clawing fingers gripped—and held.

It was a mere crack in the weather-worn coping, but sheer terror gave the boy added strength, and his fingers held—held, though the strain was terrific.

For what seemed an age he hung on, and then, slowly and surely, he pulled the iron ladder in towards the stack and himself with it. Then, scarcely conscious that he did so, he dragged himself up the remaining rungs, clinging on with might and main, and the next thing he knew he was lying face downwards on the stone skirting, with feet hanging over the rim.

He lay there motionless, his heart thumping violently, his mouth and lips dry, his forehead beaded with perspiration. He felt as if every ounce of energy had left him.

But his heart quietened gradually, and the feeling of

faintness left him. He heard from below a faint shouting, and remembered Patchy and Snooky, who, during that last terrible part of the climb, had remained watching, silently and fearfully. He scrambled up to his knees and looked about him, steeling himself against the blind feeling of terror at what he saw.

He could see his surroundings more leisurely and clearly now, and what he saw gave him little hope. The houses of the distant village looked mere dots, and the road for miles appeared to be deserted. Beyond the village seemed a waste of ground—evidently moorland. In the other direction fields and hedges and trees stretched until they ended abruptly against a streak of what seemed like glimmering silver. It was the sea, he knew—the Channel—shimmering under the morning sunlight.

Then Nippy remembered his purpose in venturing on that daring enterprise, and his eyes fixed upon the ribbon of road. Not a soul could he see anywhere; but he knew it was very early yet, and he did not despair. Sooner or later life would appear in the fields or on the road, he felt

he knew they would be passed, and the chance would be passed.

But the caravan did not pass. A sudden faint noise reached his ear—the prolonged honk, honk, honk! of a motor-horn. It told Nippy that his signal had been seen at last.

Nippy ceased to signal then from sheer faintness, and he returned to his former position on top of the stack. His nerve was better when he was lying down. He heard from below a sudden furious shouting that told him that Patchy and Snooky had also heard that faint honking. Nippy glanced down now, and almost grinned at what he saw.

About the yard below, looking like dots, were Patchy and Snooky, running about frantically as they made preparations to fly. He watched them backing the horse into the shafts of the van, and he watched—with one eye on the approaching caravan—as they rushed down the timber balks from the great doors and swung them open. The next moment the horse caravan, with the two men running alongside, flogging the hapless horse, rumbled and lurched away from the deserted factory that had sheltered it. It



St Jim's Jingles!



No. 2.—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arise, and sing the praise, my muse,

Of the renowned Augustus,
Whose socks and ties, of vivid hues,

Into the shade will thrust us.
We cannot venture to compete
With such a stylish fellow,
In looking smart and spruce and neat—

Plain blue for us, or yellow!

His waistcoat is a work of art,
His trousers are perfection;
His "toppers" shiny, silk and smart,

Command our close inspection.
His collar is of stainless white,
Like driven snow in winter;
His laundry bill's a "whopper," quite,
For Gussy is no stinter.

"The apparel oft proclaims the man,"
Old Shakespeare's works inform us;

Find Gussy's equal, if you can—
His wardrobe is enormous.
A gross of hats, a score of suits,
Is Lowther's estimation;
And several dozen pairs of boots—
(A slight exaggeration!)

Augustus is of noble birth,
Descended from the peerage;
But lords no longer rule the earth
In this most quaint and queer age.

All grades are here—De Veres
and Browns,



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

A blend of lords and laymen;
Fellows whose sires wear ducal crowns,
Or else are brewers' draymen!

But Gussy, though of noble blood,
Bequeathed by generations,
Is not a duffer or a dud
At schoolboy recreations.
He wields the willow in a way
Which stamps him a first-rater;
There's not a game he cannot play,
And he's a skilful skater.

Good luck to Gussy! May he thrive
Like his illustrious "fathah"!
His schoolboy chums are all alive
To his good points—"Yaas, wathah!"

Although he's just a trifle vain,
And just a shade too fussy,
Few are the chaps in this domain
So popular as Gussy!

**ANOTHER ST. JIM'S CELEBRITY—FATTY WYNN—
IN VERSE NEXT WEEK!**

certain. But his main hope was of the schoolboy caravanners—Tom Merry & Co. And it was on the lumbering, but familiar, caravan that Nippy's hopes were fixed. And that hope materialised sooner than Nippy had dared to hope.

It was a mere dot when Nippy saw it first—a moving dot on the ribbon of road, and Nippy watched it, fascinated. It came nearer and nearer, and Nippy's heart leaped as slowly it grew and took form before his staring eyes.

It was a caravan right enough—the caravan, Nippy was certain. He watched it approaching, tiny still as yet, and then Nippy took his nerve in both hands and stood upright. Swiftly he peeled off his coat, and started to wave it frantically. He shouted, though knowing no shout of his could be heard from that distance.

The van was clearly visible now. He could pick out three figures on the driving-seat. It was almost abreast, less than half a mile away seemingly. And Nippy, rising to his feet, waved his jacket frantically and with desperate energy.

It was only a matter of seconds now. If the occupants of the caravan failed to see his signals in the next few seconds

crossed a line of rusted, broken rails, and taking a cart-track, went along it, bounding and lurching at a good speed.

"Oh, good!" breathed Nippy, almost with a chuckle. "Good-bye, Patchy and Snooky, my pippins! I've beaten you, after all. The game—Oh!"

Nippy broke off abruptly, and his face suddenly went white. His eyes had fallen on the last ladder, which, since he had released it in that moment of sheer terror, had swung outwards again. And it still swung outwards—far out of his reach, even had he dared to hope to use it.

The sight of it brought his position home to Nippy for the first time.

Help was in sight; rescue was at hand. But how could anyone help him? How could anyone, much less a few juniors, bridge that gulf which separated him from safety?

He was stranded—hopelessly stranded, and in deadly peril still on the top of the chimney. Help was at hand certainly, but it was help that could never aid him. He was doomed to remain there for hours, perhaps for days, until he lost consciousness, and either starved or ended it by falling.

CHAPTER 6.
Tom Merry Does It!

IT was Tom Merry & Co. right enough. They came rumbly along the rutty, rocky road, Joe Bates getting every ounce of power out of the old engine of the motor-caravan. And as they roared along the road the eyes of the caravanners and of the driver were fixed breathlessly on the tiny figure outlined against the morning sky at the top of the factory stack.

A breakdown of the engine had delayed them for an hour or more, but Joe Bates had managed to effect a repair at last, and they had rolled on again, eager to catch up with the fleeing horse caravan.

Dawn had found them still roaring onwards, with the seemingly tireless Devonshire youth still at the wheel. Tom Merry, Blske, and D'Arcy had joined him there after a brief spell of slumber. And in the van Baggy Trimble had been kicked into activity and obliged to cook an early breakfast. And just when the caravanners were beginning to wonder if the rascals had escaped them, Joe Bates had pointed out that curious, moving figure on the chimney stack.

It drew the attention of all at once. It was obviously too large in comparison with the chimney-top to be a bird, and, moreover, the strange movements were obviously human. And as they drew closer they grasped the fact that it was indeed a human being, and that whoever it was, he was waving for aid.

That fact once grasped, all speed had been put on, and now, after Bates had sounded his horn vigorously and continuously as a return-signal, something else had roused the juniors' excitement to fever pitch.

Quite suddenly, from the gates of the factory, if factory it was, a vehicle had abruptly emerged, and gone rolling and pitching over the ground to the south.

It was a horse caravan, and at sight of it Tom Merry had given a yell of triumph. It was their quarry at last, and the caravanners did not need to be told whose was the gesticulating, waving figure on the chimney-stack.

It was Nippy without a doubt.

He had evidently taken refuge on the chimney-top—knowing Nippy's reckless character they did not doubt that—and now at sight of the motor-caravan Patchy and Snooky were making all speed to escape, leaving Nippy behind.

At a word from Tom, Bates turned the caravan abruptly from the road without waiting to reach the track leading to the factory gates.

"Let the rascals go!" said Tom grimly. "We can catch the brutes if we want to. Our job is to rescue Nippy."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, blinking up through his monocle in some distress. "Bai Jove! I weally don't like the look of things, deah boys. Nippy has got up there somehow, but he will find it wathah wotten comin' down. Yaas, wathah!"

All the juniors felt that, too, and they eyed the tiny figure above them in some trepidation. The caravan jolted to a standstill at last at the very gates of the factory, and it was only then that the juniors grasped Nippy's terrible position clearly.

As Tom Merry leaped to the ground, followed by the rest of the excited caravanners, he looked upwards, and he saw at once the broken ladder, swaying outwards at the extreme top of the stack, outlined against the sky.

His face went white at sight of it. He had wondered why Nippy had made no attempt to come down on their approach. He understood now.

"Good heavens!" he breathed. "Nippy's done! The ladder's broken away from the stack!"

"Bai Jove! How awful, deah boys!"

The juniors stared upwards with white, tense faces.

"Only a steeplejack can save the kid!" said Joe Bates. "A steeplejack with nerve could do it with a rope. He could climb up and chuck up the rope, and the kid, if he has nerve enough, can fasten it to the ladder and tie it fast to the stack."

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry.

He stared upwards, a daring idea in his mind. Without a word he suddenly turned and darted into the caravan. He reappeared next moment with a coil of rope slung over his left shoulder.

"Tom," began Lowther, aghast—"Tom, you don't mean

But Tom did not wait. He was climbing the stack the next moment, his cheery face set doggedly now. He had made up his mind to rescue Nippy, and he was determined to try at all events.

The sheer unexpectedness of his actions held his chums motionless for a moment, and then they ran towards the stack.

"Don't, Tom!" called Manners, in alarm. "Don't! It's madness!"

"Come back, Merry!"

It was an alarmed chorus, but Tom ignored it, and went

steadily upwards. Up, up, up he went, steadily and calmly and unhurried. Once or twice he paused, experiencing the horrible thrills and fears that Nippy had experienced earlier on. But each time he went on again, watched by the breathless caravanners below.

Nippy's voice came down to him faintly now. The waif was lying on the stone skirting, staring downwards over the edge, horrified at the thought of bringing another into danger.

"Go back, Merry!" he called frantically. "You can do nothing. Go back!"

Tom ignored the cry; indeed, he scarcely heard it. All his mind and faculties were fixed upon the task he had set himself. He had, like Nippy, learned the folly of looking down, and he went climbing steadily, eyes staring at the ladder and the brickwork before him.

Below him the juniors were silent now, watching breathlessly.

But Tom made no false step or mistake. An active outdoor life and plenty of exercise had given him nerves of steel. The temptation to look down was terrible, but he set his teeth and resolutely refused to give in to it.

He reached the sprung ladder at last.

Stopping, he looked up at Nippy's white, set face. "All serene, Nippy," he said coolly. "I'm going to chuck this rope up. Catch it, and fasten it somewhere. Then rope it round the top of the ladder and pull it in, and make it secure against the chimney."

Nippy nodded and stood up. He knew it was useless to tell Tom to throw up the effort. Indeed, he could not do so. The hope of rescue was too good to turn away.

He waited, steeling himself to keep cool and collected. Tom Merry clung with one hand to the ladder he was on, and, unslung the rope quietly, he took aim, and flung the coil upwards, retaining one end in his hand.

Nippy caught the coil at the first throw and hung on.

"Good!" called Tom.

He waited while Nippy searched about the wide top of the stack. Suddenly he saw what he wanted—a large iron ring mortared to the brickwork just inside the black mouth of the shaft.

He had the rope secured in a few seconds, and to lasso the swinging ladder was a comparatively simple matter. He pulled it in, and fastened it, passing the rope through the rungs and securing it to the ring again.

It was done at last, and Nippy nodded down at Tom. Curiously enough Tom's presence had given him a strange feeling of security now. He found himself looking round at the countryside with scarcely a tremor. He had quite recovered the mastery of his nerves.

"All right, Nippy!" called Tom.

"Right as rain!"

"Then down we go," said Tom. "Take it easy and don't look down whatever you do. It's safe as houses then."

Nippy grinned and nodded, and that grin told Tom he was nerved for the task. Tom nodded in his turn and started to descend.

He waited to see Nippy negotiate the broken ladder, and he breathed deeply in great relief as the youth got down in safety. Then he went on again, slowly, unhurriedly. The first fifty yards or so tried the mettle of both juniors to the uttermost, but before they were half-way down they were both revelling in the thrills that had given them agonies of fear on the way up.

When at last Tom Merry touched ground the silence that had reigned during the whole of the perilous adventure was shattered by a yell.

"Hurrah!"

"Good man, Tommy! Hurrah!"

In almost delirious relief the caravanners cheered rescued and rescuer as both reached the ground at last. The spell of horrified apprehension was broken, and the juniors gave full vent to their feelings in wild cheering.

"All serene, Nippy?" said Tom, turning and gripping Nippy's hand.

"Quite—thanks to you, Merry," said Nippy, with a feeble grin. "I—I—"

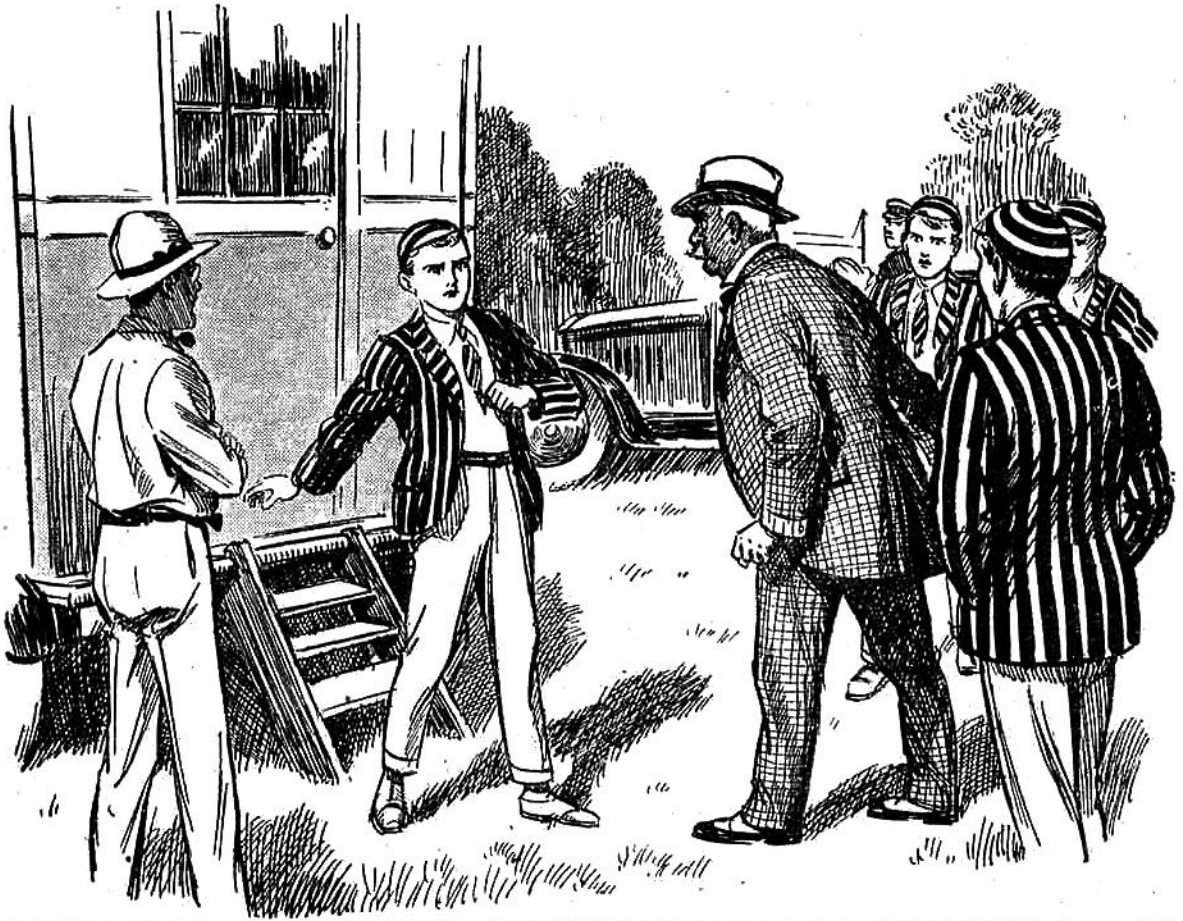
He broke off and would have fallen had not Tom jumped to hold him. Now the strain was over, even Nippy's control deserted him. He was white and limp, and almost fainting with strain and exhaustion.

"Get him in the van," said Tom.

"I'll be all right presently!" grinned Nippy, licking his dry lips. "It—it gave me a bit of a turn when that ladder gave way. It was nearly all up with me. I've not quite got over it yet."

But he soon did get over it, and soon he was telling his adventure to the eager listeners on the trail. Then Tom told him in turn of their adventures on the trail.

"Well, it's over now!" grinned Tom as he finished. "And the sooner we get clear of this old show the better. We're a happy family once more, and we'll see those brutes don't get you again, Nippy."



Colonel Brockways stumped over to the van, and Tom Merry planted himself between the steps and the rather domineering old officer. "You shall not go in, sir!" said Tom Merry firmly. "If you use force we shall prevent you by force!" "Wha-a-at?" hooted the colonel. (See page 18.)

Nippy's face shadowed.

"Look here," he said quietly. "You chaps must have had enough of me; this sort of thing is spoiling your holiday. I'm clearing out now. I know those rascals will not give in even after this. And I'm not bringing any more trouble on you fellows."

"Utah wubbish!"

"Rot!"

"Hear, hear!"

"My dear man," grinned Tom, "you're a fixture with us for the rest of this tour, old top. Great pip! Why, these little adventures were just giving the spice to the tour! I'm blessed if I don't hope we shall see more of those cheery rascals."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"But—but—" stammered Nippy, looking across at Joe Bates, who was tinkering with his engine, making ready to start again. "You've got a driver now—you don't want two."

"We certainly don't," grinned Tom. "But you're staying as our guest for the remainder of the trip. You've played up well, Nippy, and goodness knows what we should have done without you. If you do go, we shall drag you back by the scruff of your neck. We'll dashed well kidnap you like those Johnnies did."

"Yaas, wathah! You're stoppin', Nippy, deah boy."

Despite Nippy's protests—half-hearted protests they were, really—the juniors emphatically insisted upon that; indeed, they simply would not hear them. And when the caravan started again at last, Nippy was once again a member of the caravanners—as a honoured guest now—and his face was cheery and bright. And the faces of Tom Merry & Co. were cheery and bright also.

"We'll take it easy once we get clear of this part," said Tom, as he swung himself up into the driving-seat with Nippy and Joe Bates. "We're making for the sea again, and then along the coast for Cornwall. So cheerio, Nippy. Now you can let her rip, Bates."

Bates let in the clutch and let her rip. The caravan made its rocky way over the broken rails, and on down the rutty

track to the road, and then it went speeding and rumbling southwards. On the driving-seat were three cheery faces, and from within the van sounded cheery voices and laughter. The clouds had rolled away, the danger was past, and Tom Merry & Co went on their way rejoicing. But though his face was as cheery as any, Nippy could not help his thoughts going to Patchy and Snooky, and their caravan, long ago out of sight. And he knew that those resolute rascals were not done with yet. They had already risked much, and gone far in their determined plot, and they were not likely to give in so easily.

CHAPTER 7.

Baggy in the Limelight!

"HALLO, what's that fat ass up to?"

Lowther stopped with a grin as he asked that question, motioning his chums to stop also.

The rest of the juniors grinned also and stopped. Tom Merry, Manners, Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Figgins and Kerr and Nippy stopped behind Lowther and stood gazing across the green carpeted clearing at Baggy Trimble.

All of them carried towels, and wet costumes over their shoulders, and all of them looked cheery, and fresh, and had obviously been bathing.

Three days had passed since the juniors had rescued Nippy at the factory, and during those days the caravanners had spent a jolly time, taking it easy along the glorious Devon coast, bathing and lounging, and fishing, and exploring to their hearts' content. And nothing unusual or exciting had occurred to mar their cheery holiday-making. They had seen nothing of the yellow caravan and its dingy, rascally crew, and they had dismissed them from their minds—or the juniors had, at all events.

Now the caravanners were camped, in a pleasant glade, fringed about with trees, in a sheltered hollow in the cliffs with a clear view of the rolling, shimmering Channel before

them. Leaving Fatty Wynn, and Baggy Trimble, and Joe Bates to prepare breakfast, they started out that morning for a bathe, and now they were returning with good appetites for breakfast.

Then they saw Baggy.

They were surprised to see Baggy in that clearing some little distance from the camp—especially as they had imagined him to be busy preparing breakfast. And they were still more surprised at the task Baggy was engaged upon.

Baggy was seated on the fallen trunk of a tree. On his fat knees was a writing-pad, and in his fat hand was a fountain-pen. At his feet was a folded newspaper that had evidently fallen from his hand.

"He's writing a letter!" grinned Manners. "Good old dutiful Baggy. It's something new, anyway."

"It's rather queer, though," murmured Lowther. "Why should the fat ass come alone out here just to write a dashed letter? He could do that in the van."

"That's my writin'-pad the fat wottah is usin', bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus warmly.

"And I fancy that's my fountain-pen!" grinned Tom Merry.

"And I expect he's collared someone's envelope and someone else's stamp!" grinned Lowther. "Isn't he the limit? Watch me make him jump. Quiet!"

Lowther trod softly across the turf towards Baggy, who was blissfully unconscious of the nearness of his fellow caravanners as he nibbled away at the fountain-pen—or, rather, Tom's fountain-pen, a reflective frown on his fat brow. Nearer and nearer crept Lowther, approaching the fat youth from behind. He was only a yard behind him now, and then suddenly Lowther leaped, grabbing Baggy by the neck, and bringing him backwards over the back of the trunk.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Baggy.

He yelled again—in pain this time—as he thudded on the grass, sprawling and roaring. The fountain-pen flew one way, and the writing-pad another.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors showed themselves, laughing at the wrathful expression on Baggy's features.

"Yah! Beasts!" he howled furiously. "Oh, you rotten beast, Lowther! Grooooh! You've made me jolly well bite my tongue off nearly!"

"What a pity it was only nearly!" said Lowther. "If only you had actually bitten it off, we should have had a bit of peace from your giddy chattering before us."

"Beasts!"

"But what's the game, Baggy?" grinned Monty. "There's a time for everything, and a place for everything, you know. It's time now for breakfast, and your giddy place is the camp kitchen, old top."

"Yah!" snorted Trimble. "I—"

He broke off suddenly, examining the letter he had been writing hastily into his pocket. Then he stopped to snatch up the folded newspaper.

Lowther was before him, however. He picked up the paper, and glanced at it. He did it carelessly, simply to pull Baggy's leg in his usual humorous manner. But the effect on Baggy was startling, to say the least of it.

"Here!" he howled in great alarm. "Gimme my paper, you beast, Lowther! Oh dear! Make him gimme my paper back, Tom Merry!"

Without waiting for Tom to oblige, Baggy made a rush at Lowther, and snatched desperately at the paper. Lowther—curious now—jumped aside lightly, and looked at the paper. Then he started.

"Hallo! What the tump are you doing with a dirty old newspaper like this, Baggybus?" he inquired. "The 'Daily Mail,' eh? Why, it's dated nearly a year ago, and—What's this?"

Lowther's eye had caught a glimpse of a photograph on the paper—a photograph with a notice underneath, and which with the notice, was encircled roughly with a blue-pencil ring.

Keeping the almost frantic Baggy at arm's length, Lowther fairly blinked at the photograph.

It was that of a youth—and the face was familiar to Lowther—very familiar. It was the face of Nippy from Nowhere—the face of their caravan companion. Almost unconsciously Lowther scanned the notice underneath, and as he did so, the look of amazement on his face deepened. Then without a word he passed it over to Tom Merry.

"Look at that, Tom," he said, with a glance at Nippy, who, like the others, was grinning, but somewhat mystified. "Will you gimme my paper?" almost shrieked Trimble.

But nobody heeded Trimble—only as he made a grab at the paper in Tom's hand, Lowther hauled him back.

"No you don't!" said Lowther grimly. "Well, Tommy?" Tom Merry looked at the paper and jumped. He read the announcement underneath slowly. It read as follows:

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 918.

"Missing since September 15th, the above boy. Age 16 (looks 18) About 5ft. 9in.; complexion tanned; hair very light, almost reddish, and curly; eyes light blue; oval face; upright carriage; very self-possessed; cheery disposition; slight scar on right wrist; clothing marked 'D. B.,' makers Peter Wilkenson.

"Information regarding the above should be given to the police, or to Messrs. Cragg & Turner, Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, or to Colonel Brockways, the Grange, Plymsea, Devonshire, and a substantial reward will be paid to anyone first giving information that will lead to the whereabouts of the boy being discovered."

"Phew!" breathed Tom Merry, sudden light breaking in upon him. He hesitated a moment, and then he passed the paper over to Nippy. "Look at that, Nippy," he said. "Have you seen it?"

Nippy took the paper curiously. Then, as Lowther and Merry had done, he jumped at sight of the photograph. He read the announcement underneath slowly, and as he did so, the colour ebbed away from his face.

"No," he said quietly. "I—I hadn't seen that before."

There was silence. The other juniors were looking on wonderingly. Nippy broke it.

"I suppose it's no good my denying that it is me," he said quietly. "In fact, I don't intend to deny it. You fellows can see it if you want to."

He passed the paper over to Blake. Blake read it and in silence it passed from hand to hand.

"Well?" asked Nippy, as though he expected comment.

"I'm hanged if I know what to say, Nippy," said Tom. "It's you, of course. I suspected something of the sort—we all did. I—I suppose that was why you finked going to Plymsea? I suppose you were afraid of someone recognising you there—the colonel mentioned in that notice?"

Nippy nodded.

"Colonel Brockways is my guardian—my uncle. My name is Donald Brockways. It's no good my trying to hide that fact, anyway. But—but how did this chap get hold of this?" he ended, glancing at the trembling Baggy.

"Yes, we should like to know that!" snapped Blake, grasping Baggy by the collar. "Now, you fat clam—out with it! What do you know about this—this business?"

"Grooooh! Leggo!" roared Baggy, in great alarm. "I—I say, I know nothing about it—nothing at all. I—I found it at Puddleham—I mean just now—just this very minute. I haven't even read it, you beasts!"

"That's a thumping fib!" said Lowther. "Here, what about that letter he was just writing, chaps?"

As he spoke, Lowther snatched at the letter which was sticking from the fat junior's blazer pocket. Trimble howled wrathfully, and struggled to snatch it back. Again Lowther was too quick for him. He took the letter—still wet with ink—and glanced at it. In dealings with Trimble, Lowther, at all events, felt little compunction in regard to reading it. His face set grimly as he scanned the sprawling handwriting, for the letter ran as follows:

"Dear Sir,—In answer to your advertisement, if you will send on the substantial reward to me at the above address I will tell you where you can find the fellow whose's missing in the 'Daily Mail.'

"Yours truly,

"BAGLEY TRIMBLE."

The letter was addressed to "Colonel Brockways, The Grange, Plymsea," and Baggy had given his home address.

Lowther blinked at the extraordinary letter, scarcely knowing whether to laugh outright. He strove, for Nippy's sake, to keep a straight face, and then he passed the precious letter over to Tom Merry.

"Look at that," he said. "Just look at it!"

Tom's face was a picture as he read the remarkable "answer."

"Well, the fat clam!" he breathed. "The rotten little worm to attempt to give Nippy away like that! You—you rotter, Baggy!"

"I—I say, you fellows!" stammered Baggy. "It was only a—a joke; I never meant to send it—honour bright! I wouldn't. I—I like Nippy too much! As for the reward, I don't believe that beastly old colonel would ever pay it. I wouldn't trust him, anyway. He's an awful beast, you know—bad-tempered, and all that. He chased me with a stick, and— Oh dear! I mean to say, I've never seen him, of course—never even heard of him. And as for— Yaroooooh! Wharrer you at, Merry?"

Trimble roared as Tom Merry grasped him and shook him angrily.

"You little worm!" he snorted angrily. "Get me a cricket-stump, one of you. We'll have the truth out of the little cad yet!"

Blake soon found a stump, and handed it to Tom. Baggy eyed it in great alarm.

"I—I say, you chaps," he groaned, "it—it's all right! I'll tell you everything—honour bright! I—I don't think

I'll bother about that reward, after all. In fact, I know the old beast wouldn't pay it. It's all right, Nippy—I won't give you away!"

"That you jolly well won't!" snorted Tom Merry. "Now, you fat clam, we want to know what you know about this affair—sharp! And if we catch you in another fib you'll get this stick—hard! This is a serious matter, you fat idiot!"

"Oh dear!"

Baggy groaned. He saw that there was no help for it now. Tom Merry's grim face—and the stick—told him that.

"I—I say, keep that stick away, Tom Merry!" he gasped.

"It's all right—I've kept it dark!"

"Where did you find this paper, you fat rascal?"

"Ow! I found it in that camp—that day those villains raided the camp at Puddleham, in Hampshire. Patchy and Snooky must have dropped it."

"Oh!" said Tom, in surprise. "And have you done nothing up to now in the matter?"

"Ow! Y-e-es!" stammered Baggy. "I—I wrote a letter just like this to that beastly old colonel!"

"You—you did?" breathed Nippy, his eyes glinting.

"Yes. But I made a mistake—it's all right!" gasped Baggy quickly. "I made a mistake. I shoved the letter in the wrong envelope—I shoved it in the envelope addressed to me, and the blessed thing came back to me!"

There was a chuckle at that. It was just the sort of mistake the blundering Baggy was likely to make.

"And you've done nothing else?" said Tom.

"Ow! Yes. I got no chance to send the letter again, as we were on the move again. But when we got to Plymsea—"

"Yes—yes?"

"I went to see Colonel Brockways," groaned Baggy.

"You did?" shouted Tom.

"Ow! Yes. But it's all right. You—you see, I made another mistake. I went across the fields, and found myself in a garden. There—there was tea laid out on the lawn, and—and I was awfully hungry, you know!"

"And you pitched into the tea, of course?"

"Yes. There was nobody about, and I thought I was safe. Then the old beast turned up and chased me with a stick. He tumbled over me—fairly came a cropper; served him jolly well right, too!"

"You—you mean Colonel Brockways?"

"Ow! Yes—of course. Then I went on into the village, and called at the Grange. I was shown into the library, and—and then that old beast came in again!"

"What?"

"It was the same house!" groaned Baggy. "I'd just gone round from the back to the front door, though I didn't know it. And that old beast went for me with his stick again as soon as he spotted me. He chased me out of the house and down the drive!"

"Well—well—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could not help it this time—they roared at Baggy's dismal account of his chapter of "accidents."

"So—so it's all right, ain't it?" asked Baggy anxiously, keeping a careful eye on the stick. "I haven't seen the old beast since. I daren't go to see him after that, of course! And I've had no chance to do anything since."

"Until now," said Tom, becoming grim again and nodding to the letter.

"Ow! It—it was only a lark!" gasped Baggy.

"Lark be hanged!" snapped Tom. "It's a jolly good job we happened along just now, you fellows. And we'll see the fat rascal doesn't try it on again. As for this paper—you'd better take it, Nippy. I don't want to nose into your business, old chap, but—but—"

He paused; and there was a silence—an awkward silence.

CHAPTER 8.

A Visitor!

ALL the juniors, looked at Nippy curiously—very curiously. Nippy flushed; he saw that he was expected to say something. He set his lips hard at last.

"I know what you chaps are thinking," he said, in a low voice. "You're thinking that I ought to say something—to explain. Well, I've decided to explain. I owe it to you chaps. You've all been jolly decent to me, and it's time I told you the meaning of all this rotten business."

"You've no need to—unless you really wish it," said Tom Merry quietly. "We've accepted you without question long ago. And we need no explanations now. We know you're not the chap to have done anything really wrong, and we're satisfied to take your word for it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm going to explain, all the same," said Nippy. "And when I've explained, all I ask you fellows is to keep it secret and give me a chance to clear out. Well, you've seen that notice in the paper. It's true. As I told you just now, it refers to me right enough. My name is Donald Brockways; Colonel Brockway is my guardian and uncle. I ran away from the Grange, at Plymsea, last September. I've been touring the country with that menagerie and show ever since—until I met you fellows."

Nippy paused.

"I was mad, I suppose, when I ran away," he resumed. "But I'll tell you why. My uncle was very strict with me—made me stick to grinding out lessons, without games or anything other fellows enjoy. At least, I supposed it was my uncle who insisted on that. But my uncle was in India. He left me in charge of a tutor—a brute, he was. He gave him full power over me. The brute used it—made my life a misery. He hated me, and I hated him. It came to an end one day last September."

Again Nippy paused, and his face paled.

"It happened over my dog," he went on thickly. "A fine little terrier he was; I bought him myself. Well, this tutor chap—Carker, his name was—kicked old Spot—kicked the little beggar across the room!"

Nippy's eyes gleamed.

"I wasn't standing that," he said. "I went for the brute. He wasn't much of a chap. I hit him harder than I know. I knocked him down, and as he fell he struck his head on the fender. And—well," went on Nippy, in a low voice, "he didn't get up again. I—I thought he was killed then, even!"

"Phew!"

"You can understand how I felt," breathed Nippy. "I called for help, and they carried him to his room and phoned for a doctor. He came, and I knew then that it was serious. The rest of that day was awful! At night, just before going to bed, I asked a maid how he was. She said he wasn't expected to recover—the wound was deep. I—I lost my head then; I was terrified! In the night I left my room and bolted!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's the story," said Nippy, looking rather apprehensively at the juniors. "I was a coward to run away like that—I must have been mad! But—but I lost my head. And afterwards I daren't return. I daren't even look at a paper. I tramped on and on, and in Hampshire I dropped across the menagerie, and got a job in it. I was always fond of animals, and I enjoyed the work. Nobody seemed to bother after me, anyway. My uncle was in India then, remember, and there was nobody else who would. But those brutes Patchy and Snooky were always knocking me about at the show, and I got fed-up with it. I left the show, and then—well, I dropped in with you fellows. That's the story, anyway. You—you can understand now why I have been so afraid of the—the police," he added thickly. "I—I don't believe Carker could have been—been killed. But—but I couldn't go back—I daren't make sure; I was afraid of hearing the worst!"

The juniors nodded silently. They understood that. They also understood many things about Nippy now—his queer fits of depression and gloom; his secrecy and reserve.

"So—so that's it," breathed Tom Merry. "But Patchy and Snooky—why are they after you? It can't be for the reward mentioned in that paper, surely?"

Nippy shook his head.

"They're after something bigger than that," he said, his eyes gleaming. "Patchy practically gave the game away to me the other day. I believe their game is to keep me, hoping to screw plenty of money out of my uncle."

"Hold you to—to ransom?" gasped Blake.

"Just that, I fancy so, anyway. You see, there's money coming to me when I'm of age—a big sum, I believe. And my uncle is wealthy, too. They've made inquiries and got to know that somehow. Anyway, I didn't know they were advertising for me until the other day. I didn't even know my uncle had returned from India. Well, that's my yarn. I know I ought not to have run away—I see that now. But I lost my head. You fellows will despise me for it I know. That's one reason why I could not bring myself to tell you anything. But I've told you now; and now I shall clear out, and you'll be glad to get rid of me, I expect."

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, Nippy!" said Arthur Augustus quickly. "Poor old chap. We all make mistakes, dear boy. What you've told us makes no difference to us. What do you fellows say?"

"Rather not!" was the prompt and emphatic reply.

"No fear," said Tom Merry, his brow clearing. "You certainly won't be allowed to clear out, old chap. You ought not to have bolted like that. But it's what many impulsive chaps would have done. And what you did in

knocking that fellow down was what most decent chaps would have done, too. The rest was a pure accident. Don't think we despise you. We're backing you up over this."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Nippy's eyes shone as he looked at the eager, friendly faces of the caravanners. Tom Merry clapped him on the back.

"Buck up!" he said. "Things may not be as bad as you think. But we'll talk this over later. We've something more important on now. That's breakfast. Come and get it, old chap. As for this fat ass—"

He gave Trimble a glare that almost withered that youth up.

"I—I say, you fellows," mumbled Baggy. "It's all right now. I won't try to give Nippy away."

"You'd better not!" snapped Tom. "If you dare to do anything more, or breathe a word of this to a soul, we'll—well—smash you!"

"And boil you in oil!" added Blake. "So mind your eye, Baggy. You'll have us to deal with if you do."

The juniors tramped on to the camp. Joe Bates and Fatty Wynn eyed them in some surprise.

"Buck up, you chaps," grumbled Fatty. "Breakfast has been ready ages! Pile in!"

The caravanners piled in—only Nippy eating little. On the soft, warm turf they reclined, tucking into rashers of bacon, and eggs, while, at intervals, Tom Merry acquainted Fatty Wynn with Nippy's story. After breakfast most of the caravanners reclined luxuriously on the warm grass, discussing the future.

"We'll stay here to-day, I vote," said Tom lazily. "And we'll push on again in the morning, you chaps. We've plenty of time. By to-morrow we should be in Cornwall."

"Good egg!"

"This is a ripping place for camping," resumed Tom, staving out with satisfaction over the blue, shimmering sea. "But we've got to keep on the move, and—Hullo! Who the blump is this?"

The soft purring of a motor had reached Tom's ears. He turned in time to see a fine car turn off from the coast road on to the grass, and come bumping over to the school-boys' camp.

In the morning sunlight, the metal-work on the car glittered and sparkled—it was undoubtedly an expensive car. In the driving-seat sat a smart, liveried driver. At his side sat an elderly gentleman, with a brick-red face and fierce, white moustache and bushy white eyebrows, and hair.

Baggy Trimble leaped to his feet on sighting the elderly gentleman, with a gasp of alarm.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "I say, you chaps, it's Nippy's uncle—Colonel Brockways! Oh dear! He'll nearly kill me. Don't tell him I'm here. Oh crumbs!"

For an instant Baggy gazed at the approaching car, and then he bolted for the caravan. He vanished inside, and the door slammed, and the key clicked in the lock.

"Colonel Brockways—oh, great pip!" gasped Tom Merry, looking round him quickly. "Where's Nippy?"

"In the caravan," said Fierries. "Baggy's locked the door on them both."

"Oh, good!" breathed Tom.

The car ran up sweetly over the sward, and hummed to a stop. The juniors got to their feet, Arthur Augustus removing his Panama hat. The elderly gentleman got out of the car without waiting for the driver, and stumped over to the alarmed juniors.

"So," said the old gentleman, staring about him eagerly, almost desperately. "I have tracked you down at last, boys."

The boys said nothing.

"You are the caravanners who were camped near Plymsea some days ago?" rapped out Colonel Brockways.

"Yes, sir!"

"Where is your driver?"

Tom knew to whom the old gentleman referred. But he pointed deliberately to Joe Bates, who was cleaning up the caravan engine.

"There is our driver, sir!"

The colonel gave a snort.

"I do not mean that fellow," he said, eyeing Tom Merry sharply. "I mean the boy—the driver you had when you first came to Plymsea. A boy with reddish hair, and blue eyes. Where is he, boy? I demand to know where he is!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"I—I have told you that chap over there is our driver, sir," he said, playing for time to think.

"Don't try to avoid the issue, boy!" snapped the colonel, his fierce eyes glittering. "You are deliberately refusing to answer my question. I mean the boy who was your driver before you took that fellow on."

He pointed to the closed door of the van.

"When I came along in the car," he said. "I distinctly saw someone rush into that van yonder. Who was it?"

"It was one of our fellows," said Tom. "He saw you coming, and he bolted. When we were in Plymsea he paid a visit to your house, I understand, sir. He helped himself

to your tea on the lawn, and you chased him with a stick. He is afraid of what you will do to him, and he bolted to avoid you."

"Oh!" ejaculated the colonel, his face going redder. "I remember the young rascal—a disgusting fat youth?"

"Yes, sir!"

"The young rascal!" snorted Colonel Brockways. "I will certainly lay my stick about him when I do catch him. That is far from my reason for this visit, however. The matter I have come about is vitally important. I demand to see inside that van, boys!"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom firmly. "But we refuse to allow you to do that!"

"What?"

"We refuse you permission to enter that van," said Tom clearly.

Colonel Brockways glowered at him.

He spoke at last.

"Listen to me, boy," he said thickly. "The boy I am in search of—the boy whom I believe you are deliberately sheltering, is my nephew, Donald Brockways. He ran away from home many months ago. I was in India at the time. When I returned home I at once started the search for him. I have engaged detectives, and have advertised extensively—to no avail. It was only some days ago that I heard news of him."

The old gentleman paused, and mopped his crimson face. Tom Merry set his lips. His thought then was that Baggy Trimble had "split" after all—had communicated the secret somehow to the old gentleman.

He was wrong there.

"Some days ago a man—formerly a footman in my employ, but now working for Farmer Bales, the farmer on whose land you camped—came to me. He stated that he had recognised in your driver the missing boy. He had not been quite certain, however. Then, later, he had seen my nephew again—disguised in a false moustache and in other ways. The reason for the disguise became plain to him then. He knew it was as he had suspected. He came to me with the information, hoping to claim the reward I had offered."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

He saw what had happened now. One of the men who had helped them—had helped them to get their stranded caravan out of the pond after the accident—was obviously the man the colonel referred to.

"It was too late then, however," puffed the colonel savagely almost. "When I rushed down to your camp you had gone. I have since been trying to trace you, and only now have I succeeded. My nephew must be discovered and brought home. He has been a constant source of anxiety and distress to me. The reports I had received of him while in India were bad. But now I know—" He broke off, and then went on abruptly: "There is no need for me to explain that, however. I demand that you produce the boy, or tell me where I can find him."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom. "But I cannot help you."

"You—you refuse to allow me admission to that van, boy?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall force my way in!" snapped the elderly gentleman angrily, his face crimsoning again with wrath. "I am not accustomed to being flouted and denied by school-boys. I shall enter the van without your permission."

He stumped over to the van. Tom ran after him and planted himself between the steps and the rather domineering old officer.

"You shall not go in, sir!" snapped Tom, who was ignorant that Trimble had locked the door. "If you use force we shall prevent you by force."

"Wha-at?"

"You have no right to force an entry, nor to attempt to do so," said Tom curtly. "This van is our property at present. You won't enter without our permission. It will be your own fault if anything unpleasant happens."

"Johnson!" hooted the colonel, waving to his driver. "Come here at once! I order you to remove this young jackanapes and allow me to enter this van!"

Johnson came over; he came over slowly, very slowly. He obviously did not relish the task.

"I've warned you, sir!" snapped Tom, his jaw setting.

"Back up, you chaps!"

The juniors "backed up"—they joined Tom in front of the van in a determined crowd. The colonel blinked at them, his face more crimson and heated than ever.

"You—you mean to—to prevent us by force?" he hooted.

"Exactly! Try it on and you'll see, sir!" said Tom quietly, but grimly.

The colonel glowered, but he made no movement.

"Very well!" he stuttered at last. "Very well, boys! I will not place myself in the wrong by forcing an entry. As a magistrate myself I—I will not do so. But—but—"

He glowered at the locked door.

"But you have not finished with me!" he muttered. "I



Splash! Tom Merry went down—shooting through the air clean as a whistle, and was soon forging to the aid of Nippy. There came another form sweeping downwards as Blake joined Tom in the water, and yet another as Figgins dived in. (See page 22.)

will go now; but I will come again; and next time I will bring the police with me. My nephew must be found, and his reckless and long-continued absence put an end to."

He stared at the door again, and then he went round to the little window at the side of the van. Standing on tiptoe he tried to gain a view of the inside. Then, unable to do so, he glowered again at the juniors and stamped back to his car. He mounted into it, spoke to the driver, and then the car glided away.

The juniors watched it reach the road and go speeding along the coast road. It vanished round a rocky bluff; and then the caravan door opened, and Trimble blinked out. Behind Trimble was the white-faced and agitated Nippy.

"Has—has he gone?" gasped Trimble.

"Yes." Tom looked at Nippy. "You saw him?"

Nippy nodded.

"What did he say?" he breathed.

Tom told him, helped by the others.

"That settles it!" said Nippy in a low voice. "He knows now. He won't rest until he has claimed me again. I—I'd better leave you fellows. I won't get you into trouble, anyway."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Nippy!" said Tom flatly. "I've said we're backing you up, and I mean it. But we can't stay here longer—that's plain. Get a move on, chaps! We're moving on again. I—I suppose it's no good us trying to persuade you to see your uncle, Nippy?"

"No—absolutely no!"

"Then we'll go!" snapped Tom. "Hi! Bates!"

He shouted to the caravan driver, and the next moment all was bustle and excitement in the St. Jim's caravanners' camp as preparations were made to depart. In less than an hour all was ready, and the caravan was speeding westward in the early September sunshine.

CHAPTER 9.

Shocks for Arthur Augustus!

"BAI JOVE!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped.

He stopped abruptly, and his exclamation was one of great alarm and astonishment.

Arthur Augustus was alone, strolling leisurely and some-

what moodily along the rugged, granite cliffs of the Cornish coast.

Since that morning there had been no rest for the St. Jim's caravan. All that day it had thundered on, with only a stop for dinner, now skirting the frowning coastline, now branching inland—only to take to the coast again. But by evening Tom Merry had decided they had gone far enough—far enough from pursuit, he believed. Certainly the huge caravan was not a vehicle that could lose itself so easily. But, as Tom said, they could not go on for ever, and they had to take the risk of being followed.

That evening they had camped—with deep thankfulness—in a pleasant, grassy dip, with frowning ramparts of granite behind them and the glimmering waters of the Atlantic before them. The scenery was grand, and the awe-inspiring masses of granite appealed to the juniors' sense of majesty and mystery. A quarter of a mile away, along the coast, westward, showed the red roofs of a fishing village, with fishing-boats drawn up on the beach. For two days now the St. Jim's caravanners had been camped in that spot, reveling in bathing and boating and fishing, with occasional games of cricket on the sweet-smelling turf behind the frowning cliffs. They had visited the village several times, too, and had hired a small boat for their own use from a friendly fisherman for the time they would stay there.

The juniors intended to stay there some time, though all felt that sooner or later the caravan would be tracked down—if Nippy's uncle was the grim, resolute old gentleman Nippy claimed him to be.

But they were risking it. And now, on this bright sunny morning, with the broad Atlantic rolling on the golden sands of the beach below him, Arthur Augustus was strolling along, and from the look of wrath and gloom on his aristocratic features, he was seemingly unconscious of the sunny morning or the magnificent scenery.

As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus had had his lofty dignity disturbed—a serious matter to Arthur Augustus. Monty Lowther had caused the upheaval—as usual. He had dropped a small pebble down the back of Gussy's neck, leading Gussy to suppose that it was an oyster.

That had started the trouble, and the laughter of the rest of the party had aggravated it. And after Arthur Augustus

had attempted—and failed—to administer a fearful thrashing to all concerned, he had gone off in a huff for a stroll, leaving his chums to go for their morning bathe without his noble presence.

Arthur Augustus had wandered much farther than he had intended to, engrossed as he was in musing on his wrongs and nursing his wounded dignity. And he was just on the point of turning back, when he stopped with that exclamation of astonishment and alarm.

For scarcely a dozen yards in front of him two heads had suddenly appeared over the rugged cliff-edge. They were instantly followed by the bodies of two men—two rough-looking men—one of whom wore a black patch over one eye.

They stepped up on to the short, sun-baked turf of the cliff-top, and they jumped at sight of Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus jumped also. He had recognised the two men, and was filled with sudden amazement and alarm.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped. "Patchy and Snooky!"

He blinked at the sinister figures, aghast; and the two rascals blinked at him. It was Patchy who recovered himself first—unfortunately for Arthur Augustus. He leaped forward and grasped the junior roughly by the arm.

"By hokey!" he gasped. "By hokey, Snooky, it's one of 'em—one of them young himps! And the rest can't be fur away, mate. I told you I was right—I told you we was on the right track. I told you it was worth night and day travellin', as we done. By hokey!"

"Old 'im tight, Patchy!" hissed Snooky, with a grin.

"Oh, bai Jove!" panted the junior, struggling helplessly in the burly rascal's grasp. "Welsease me, you awful wuffians!"

"Bring 'im along!" muttered Snooky, glancing about him anxiously. "Is pals can't be fur away. Bring 'im down below!"

Patchy nodded. He lifted Arthur Augustus as though he was a child and carried him to the edge of the cliff where they had appeared.

Arthur Augustus saw then that a gap in the rocks led down to a series of rugged steps down to the beach. He ceased to struggle, fearful that by so doing he would cause both of them to go hurtling downwards to the pebbly beach.

The feet of the men crunched in the shingle at last. But Patchy did not lower the junior. He went on, both of them glancing about them carefully, and both keeping under the shadow of the beetling cliffs.

They stopped suddenly.

Before them loomed the dark mouth of a huge cavern—or so it seemed—high and lofty and wide, with a smooth beach sloping up to it. On the sands—Arthur Augustus found himself blinking at them—were tracks of wheels, recent tracks. And then in utter amazement he saw it—the caravan at rest in the cavern. Near it, tethered to the rocky wall, was the horse.

Arthur Augustus could scarcely believe his eyes. The sight of a horse and caravan in that place was certainly astonishing.

Patchy dropped the junior.

"Shove 'im in the van, Snooky!" he growled, looking about him anxiously. "You're sure this 'ere place is safe enough?"

"Safe as any place," grinned Snooky. "I was raised in these parts, and I knows this 'ere cave as well as I knows Pengully village yonder. We jest got in in good time. When the tide comes in it'll wipe out them wheel and hoof-marks. We jest goes out as we came in—along the beach and up that there slope where the cliff sinks back. An' there's a nice little underground stream o' fresh water back o' this 'ere cave. See, it runs out there. An' we got plenty o' grub. What more d'you want, mate?"

Patchy was still doubtful, eyeing D'Arcy now.

"What about this 'ere kid?" he growled. "They'll miss 'im, and come searching for 'im, maybe."

Snooky grinned, and pointed with his pipe across the blue bay, at a small group of islets, rocky and desolate, about a mile or more out, white-ringed with foam.

"See them there islands?" he said. "There's one of 'em got a cave jest like this 'un. We'll take the kid over there, if we can get a boat. And we'll take Nippy there, too, when we've got 'im. And look 'ere, mate," he added, dropping his voice. "This kid's a young nob, anyone can see that. We should make a good thing out of 'im, too."

"Arf a minute," said Patchy, his eyes suddenly gleaming.

He grabbed D'Arcy again, and despite that junior's struggles and protests he went roughly through the junior's pockets. From the blazer-pocket he found a letter. It was obviously the sort of thing he was looking for.

The letter had been written the night before by Arthur Augustus, ready to be posted, and it was addressed to Gussy's father, Lord Eastwood.

"Lord Eastwood, Eastwood House," read Patchy. "By
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hokey!" he went on excitedly. "Who's this, kid—who's Lord Eastwood?"

"My patah, bai Jove!" said Gussy indignantly. "Hand oval my lettah at once, you vascals!"

"We wants this address, kid," grinned Patchy. "Durn it, Snooky, this is a bit o' luck, and no error! Son of a bloomin' lord, hey? 'Ere, shove the kid in the van, Snooky. We'll be off and spy out the land, mate. This looks like bein' a sure snip. An' if we don't get Nippy—well, we got this kid."

"I knowed he were somebody," grinned Snooky.

He grabbed the hapless junior and hauled him to the van. He took up a length of rope, and knotted the boy's hands behind him. Then, locking the van door, he rejoined his accomplice. Together the rascals emerged from the cavern, and climbed the rocky steps to the cliff-top.

They walked on, taking the way Arthur Augustus had approached from, sinking in the shelter of boulders and thickets, eyes and ears open.

Patchy called a halt at last, and listened. Up to them from the beach below sounded faint, cheery voices and laughter. Stepping to the edge of the cliff, the two rascals peered over. Below, some distance out, in a little cove formed by a razor-like jutting arm of rock, were several black heads and glistening arms and shoulders of swimmers. It was Tom Merry & Co., still revelling in their morning swim.

The two stared down, and then suddenly Snooky caught his companion's arm in a fierce grip, and pointed to the inner side of the promontory. A solitary swimmer was there. He had just rounded the jutting needle of rock, and was ploughing his way inwards with strong strokes. The sunlight showed up his head, turning the wet, reddish-coloured hair to glistening gold, and shone on the white arm that rose and fell, glistening and sparkling.

"Nippy!" breathed Patchy. "It's Nippy! If only—"

"Look!" gritted Snooky, pointing to the beach below. "A boat. It—it's a chance we won't p'raps get again, Patchy!"

"They—they'll see us, though!"

"What if they does? We'll get 'im first. And they can't see us arter we got about 'arf way down, you fool!"

Patchy stared, and then he nodded.

"Come on, mate!"

The two men wasted no further time. They had already seen the way the juniors had descended to the beach—another rocky, natural pathway leading downwards, scarcely twenty feet from where they stood. A moment later they were clattering down to the beach. They could still see the swimmers, but on reaching a point half-way down the jutting and low-lying breakwater of granite hid them from view.

But the boat was drawn up on the golden sands on the inner side. It was the boat the juniors had hired for their stay, though the two did not know that, nor would they have cared had they known it. They reached it, and ran it down to the water's edge with a rush, and leaped aboard as it danced away. Patchy grabbed the oars, and as the tide swung the boat back, he shoved it off again.

The next instant they were safely afloat, and Patchy was bending to the oars. The boat danced away, pulled by brawny arms towards the swimmer, now scarcely twenty yards from the beach.

Nippy's objective was obviously the boat, and he had not yet glimpsed the rascals who had gained it before him. And when he did so it was too late.

Hearing the click and creak of oars, he rolled over and looked ahead. As he did so he gasped, and wheeled abruptly. The next instant he was ploughing back like a hungry pike, fear in his heart.

He had recognised the rascals in a flash, but though the sight of them astounded him, he kept his head, and put all he knew into the effort to escape them.

But it was useless. He was overtaken in a very few yards, and rough, strong arms hauled him, dripping and wriggling, into the boat.

"Got 'im!" gasped Snooky. "No good struggling, Nippy."

Nippy saw that, but stopping struggling, he raised his voice in a desperate shout:

"Help! Help, you fellows!"

But that last desperate effort had taken all his wind, and the shout was feeble. It certainly did not carry beyond the promontory to his chums, swimming and larking there, blissfully ignorant of what was happening to their chum. And the boat danced away, Nippy now helpless in the grasp of Snooky, who clapped a dirty hand over his mouth, stifling further attempts at calling for help. The jutting promontory vanished suddenly from sight as the boat rounded another jutting mass of rock, and Nippy groaned as he realised that once again his enemies had triumphed.

CHAPTER 10.

Missing!

"No trace of them?"

"None!"

Tom Merry spoke in a low, hopeless tone. The morning had passed, and dinner-time had come and gone. At the end of the swim that morning Tom Merry & Co. had missed Nippy, but they had not been alarmed, believing he had gone back to the camp on his own for some reason unknown. When they landed back at the camp, and found he had not been there, they were even then not at all alarmed. It was only towards dinner-time that they had become alarmed, not only for Nippy, but for Arthur Augustus as well.

But they had also found the boat missing from the beach, and far from alarming them, this discovery raised their hopes. One of the missing boys had obviously taken the boat—they imagined so, at all events.

Yet all this was very strange and alarming. All were agreed upon that. Gussy often got on the high horse, but he always got off it again quite soon. Gussy quickly forgave. But Gussy would never have deserted the camp for so long on his own.

And then there was Nippy. Nippy had been swimming—was wearing a bathing costume. They had found his clothing still on the beach, untouched. It was in the camp now.

It was of Nippy that the juniors were worrying most of all.

Had something happened to him—something terrible? Had he swum too far out, and been overtaken by cramp, though the water was warm enough, goodness knows, as Merry pointed out hopefully.

He was missing. There was no getting away from that fact. And as the hours passed, and he did not turn up, the juniors' alarm grew with every minute that passed. After noon Tom Merry organised two search-parties, and they went out and returned empty-handed. The tide was in now, and only certain parts of the beach could be searched.

Tom had then started out again with his party, and Blake had started out with his, each taking opposite directions. They now met, late in the afternoon, to report no news whatever.

"No trace at all," groaned Tom again. "It beats everything. That both of them should disappear like this is jolly queer. And I'll admit I'm badly scared about old Nippy. If—something has happened in the sea—"

Tom dare not put his thoughts into words. The juniors eyed each other with white, anxious faces. Their only ray of hope was in the strange absence of their boat from the beach. They little dreamed what that meant.

A sudden soft footstep on the turf caused Tom Merry to wheel abruptly and eagerly. His chums wheeled round on hearing it just as eagerly and hopefully. But it was neither Nippy nor D'Arcy.

The caravanners stared at the person who was approaching the camp across the grass with quick, military strides. It was none other than Colonel Brockways.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "It—it's Nippy's uncle!"

"Tracked us down again, by Jingo!" breathed Tom.

There was no doubt of that.

The colonel reached the juniors. As before, his glance went quickly round him searching, they knew, for the boy he was in search of. His grim face showed his bitter disappointment as he spoke to the juniors.

"So once again I have discovered you," he said, looking from face to face. "I promised that you should see me again, my boys. I might have known you would bolt after my visit. It told me, however, that I was on the right track—that I was not making a mistake. Where is my nephew?"

The juniors did not reply. This time they could not have told that; they wished now that they could.

"I said the other day," said the colonel, in a curiously subdued tone, "that I would bring the police with me the next time. I have changed my mind in regard to that. I do not desire the interference of the police for the boy's own sake. It would mean publicity—which I certainly do not desire. I have come to-day to appeal to you—to ask you to help me to find the foolish boy. I am convinced that, though he does not appear to be with you, that you are aware of his whereabouts."

"It may be," went on Colonel Brockways quietly, "that you are under a mistaken idea as to why I wish the boy to be found. I have no desire whatever to punish him for his escapade—far from it. I am fond of the boy—fonder than Donald himself dreams. I have not been to him as I should have been; I will admit that. Doubtless he has confided in you? I can see from your expressions that he has. I have neglected him in the past—unintentionally. My mistake was in trusting a certain individual—his tutor—whom I had known for years, and—unfortunately—in whom I had every confidence. I have since learned that he was a bullying

scoundrel. He misused the power I gave him, and in my absence made the boy's life unbearable."

He paused again, still eyeing the juniors steadily.

"I have since learned this. I have learned why he ran away. He did what I should have done in like circumstances had I been his age—or older, for that matter. I do not attach any blame whatever to him for that. He struck his tutor, and the rascal deserved it. I have learned all this from the servants, and I believe it. That man, Carker, is gone now. I instantly dismissed him. If Donald will return to my home, he will never have cause to regret it. I ask you boys to help a lonely old man to find the only person who was, and is, his highest hope and comfort. Come, come! You will not allow the foolish, reckless boy to ruin his life—and embitter mine. Will you help me?"

The juniors looked at each other. They were astonished—and they were dismayed and disturbed. Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming with a new light now, however. If, as the colonel stated—and he could not doubt it—Carker had gone, had been dismissed, then obviously he had not been seriously harmed. And that meant that Nippy's terrible fears had been groundless—his wild, reckless running away had all been for nothing. He had nothing to fear. And, moreover, there was no doubting the old gentleman's sincerity and agitation. He was deeply attached to the runaway. Nippy could only find happiness such as he had not experienced before, awaiting him if he did return home.

Tom made up his mind in a moment.

"You have been right, sir," he stammered, flushing crimson. "Nippy—I mean your nephew—has been with us. He was in the van when you visited us that day. He was with us here this morning. But—but there has been a terrible misunderstanding. Your nephew ran away because he imagined he had—had seriously injured that man—his tutor. They had told him there was no hope for him. He lost his head and ran away. He did not know that you had advertised—he never knew what happened after he had bolted. He joined a travelling menagerie, and he has been haunted ever since by the fear of what he had done. And—and I am sure he was ignorant of the fact that you were at all fond of him. I am quite sure, sir, that had he known, he would never, whatever his fears and temptation, have bolted as he did and remained silent so long."

The colonel nodded—a new light in his eyes now. "And I never guessed that—never dreamed of that!" he muttered almost to himself. "I felt it was thoughtless—ungrateful of the boy. I was bitter at the thought that he did not care how he hurt me—what anxiety he caused me. But—but—"

He gripped Tom Merry's arm fiercely. "You will take me to him now, boy?" he demanded huskily. "Tell me where to find him?"

Tom Merry paled abruptly. How could he do that now? Nippy had vanished. How could he tell the old man now—with new hopes in his heart, hopes of finding his nephew at long last—how could he break the news that Nippy was missing, and of their terrible fears?

Tom did so after a moment's hesitation, however. He felt it was the only, and certainly the wisest, thing to be done. But he laid great stress on the fact of the boat being missing—their own one hope.

The colonel paled under his deep bronzed skin as he heard what Tom had to tell. But only his eyes showed his feelings.

"There is certainly hope," he muttered. "The boat—Donald always was reckless, daring; he may have gone off in the boat on some wild expedition on his own—possibly exploring one of those islets yonder. But we must search—we must get boats and aid at once. My car is here. I will bring fishermen and aid from the village—help of some sort."

He stayed to say no more, and hurried away along the cliff towards the road, making for his car. The cliff swung inwards at this point, almost joining the road. He had almost reached the road, and the car was in view, when quite suddenly the salt-laden air was shattered by shouts—cries for help.

"Help! Help! Tom Merry—Blake— Help!"

The colonel stopped abruptly, his startled glance going towards the sounds. It was a boy's voice, and his heart leaped within him as he recognised it—the voice he had not heard for years. Then he saw the owner of the voice—a boy with glinting, reddish hair, clad only in a bathing costume. He was running, racing along the cliff-edge, and behind him, thudding along with hoarse shouts of fury, were two men, hot in pursuit.

"G-good gad!" gasped the colonel.

CHAPTER 11.

All Serene!

COLONEL BROCKWAYS stared dumbfounded at the racing, thudding figures across the dip in the cliffs. What it could mean he hadn't the faintest idea, but he had recognised the missing boy, and his heart leaped with joy. He stood where he had stopped, too

petrified to move for a brief moment. And as he stood there he saw Nippy stumble, and go crashing down.

He was up again in a flash, however, but in that time the men were upon him. He went down again, struggling and fighting like a wild cat in the grip of one of the burly ruffians.

"G-good gad!" breathed the colonel again. "What—what—"

Another brief instant Colonel Brockways stared at the startling scene, and then he gave a deep grunt, and started off running as he had not done for years and years.

"You scoundrels!" he roared.

The rascals saw him then—saw the old gentleman thudding towards them with brandishing fists, and Patchy muttered an oath, for the men were Patchy and Snooky right enough. In a flash Snooky had left the group, and he jumped out to meet the old colonel, his eyes glittering nastily, menacingly.

"Old 'ard!" he shouted. "'Ere, 'old 'ard, you old fool! Don't you—"

He broke off with an oath as the colonel's fist met his teeth, and next moment the two were struggling—dangerously near the cliff edge.

Nippy had seen his uncle now, and the sight gave him a shock of dismay. But as he saw the old gentleman struggling with his brutal opponent, Nippy's eyes blazed and he fought as he had never fought in his life before—kicking, scratching, punching like one possessed, fearful every moment of serious harm coming to his guardian—the man he had thought he disliked, the man he had believed cared nothing what happened to him. A queer feeling had taken possession of the boy now—an agonised fear for his uncle's safety. He knew now, as he had never known before what he meant to the old man, and what the old gentleman meant to him.

It was blood calling to blood. Nippy, with a queer lump in his throat, and fear in his heart, fought like a fiend to get free—to be free to aid the old gentleman. Patchy was yelling savagely, dodging and lurching to avoid the boy's bare feet, and punching fists, but doggedly retaining his cruel, vice-like grip on the boy's bruised arm.

All Nippy's desperate efforts, however, were unavailing to prevent the catastrophe that came about.

A sudden, terrified yell came from Snooky. Nippy twisted his head and could have shrieked at what he saw.

The colonel and his opponent had separated. From the way Snooky was standing it was plain he had sent the old soldier to the ground. And he was rolling towards the edge of the cliff.

Nippy was just in time to glimpse this. He saw Snooky make a frantic clutch to save the old gentleman—a clutch that failed.

The next instant Colonel Brockways was gone. He rolled over the brink and vanished. A sharp, hoarse cry came up to the horrified three. Nippy's heart almost stopped beating. Then came a splash from below.

"Let me go!" panted Nippy.

He leaped to his feet, and Patchy made no effort to stay him. In a flash the boy was at the edge, staring downwards with affrighted eyes. A shout came from along the cliffs, but none of the horror-stricken three heard it. Only a moment Nippy stared, seeing first nothing but the foam-flecked waves washing the base of the cliffs, then a hand, a head and shoulders.

A cry came upwards, and Nippy waited no longer.

He put up his hands, swayed outwards, and dived. Straight and swift as a plummet he went downwards, striking the water below with scarcely a splash.

It was not a great dive. The cliffs were not high at the point. And by great, good fortune the water was deep at that spot.

"By hokey!" panted Patchy.

With the terrified Snooky at his elbow the rascal stared downwards. He saw Nippy suddenly appear. His bare arm cleaved the water as he cut towards the almost submerged head of his uncle as the latter struggled dazedly for life. Patchy was so engrossed that he was scarcely conscious of thudding feet, shouts in youthful voices.

But a sudden push made him wheel round with a growl, and he found Tom Merry at his elbow.

"Out of the way, you rascal!" shouted Tom.

He reached the edge, and peered quickly over, seeing the struggling forms at once. His face cleared in deep thankfulness.

"Go down by the path, you fellows—sharp!" he snapped. "I'm going down."

And Tom went down, shooting through the air clean as a whistle, and cleaving the broken water like a dart. He was up in a flash again, forging to the aid of Nippy.

There came another form sweeping downwards and another splash as Blake joined Tom in the water, and then another as Figgins dived in.

"Oh, good!" gasped Tom, thankful that his chums had obeyed for once. "Help me, you chaps."

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The rest was easy—surprisingly easy to swimmers like Merry, Blake, and Figgins. Their clothes were a terrible drag, certainly, but they reached the side of Nippy in a flash almost, and were helping to support the scarcely conscious old gentleman.

The tide was at its highest now. There was scarcely any drag towards the cliffs, and, keeping well out, the rescuers swam, each of them lending a hand where they could.

"All right now. Don't try to struggle, uncle," panted Nippy, taking a swift glance over the gently lapping waves. "We're almost on the beach."

They were. With thrills of thankfulness the rescuers saw that now. Where the cliffs dipped inwards was a stretch of sand untouched by the tide, and here the rest of the anxious caravanners were waiting.

They one and all dashed into the water to help the half-drowned four ashore. Only Nippy was able to stand; the others sank to the sands, utterly spent and exhausted.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" breathed Nippy, stooping over his uncle. "Help me to take him to the camp."

"I'll be all right in a moment, Donald!" gasped the colonel, striving to rise.

But it was several minutes before he was fit to be helped along the sands to the cliff path; but the top was reached at last, Tom Merry, Figgins, and Blake having soon recovered. There was no sign of Patchy and Snooky. They had obviously bolted, but as the group reached the top the figure of Arthur Augustus appeared, running along the cliffs, breathless and bruised and dishevelled.

He stared at the group in consternation.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped, in dumbfounded astonishment. "Oh, bai Jove! What has happened, deah boys? You—you managed to get cleah of the wascals, then, Nippy?"

"Yes," gasped Nippy. "I didn't dare to wait to cut you free, Gussy. I thought I'd better not risk it—had better fetch help at once. You—"

"I found the knife, deah boy, walled oval, and managed to gwasp it, and cut the wope wound my wrists, as you did. It was a stwoke of luck those wuffians left it in the van. But—"

"We can explain everything afterwards, Gussy," said Nippy. He glanced at his uncle, and his face showed his hopeless dismay and apprehension. Tom Merry quickly realised how he was feeling.

"It's all serene, Nippy, old man—all right now," he said. "Just take your uncle along to the caravan. You'll find everything is all serene now."

It was a jolly party that sat down to tea that afternoon in the caravanners' camp. And the brightest face among the party belonged to Nippy, or, rather, Donald Brockways, as we now know him. The colonel had explained, and Nippy had explained, and forgiveness had been given freely on both sides. Only thankfulness and joy at the reunion was apparent in the faces of uncle and nephew now. And there was joy on the faces of Tom Merry & Co.—joy that they had helped to bring such a happy state of affairs about.

The juniors did not see anything more of Patchy and Snooky, and they did not desire to do so. It would have been very difficult for them to have got permission to see the rascals had they wanted to, for that same evening a posse of police took charge of those venturesome gentlemen, and for some months after that Patchy and Snooky went into retirement—at the Government's expense.

The colonel stayed that night with the juniors, insisting upon roughing it with them. And the next day he went back to Plymsea, a happy man now, but without Nippy. For Nippy, happy in the promise of a new life—a promise that he should go to a public school to share in the sports and life with other boys of his station and age—had accepted the juniors' insistent desire to accompany them for the rest of the tour, and the colonel, reluctantly but smilingly, had given his permission.

For the remainder of that eventful tour Nippy was the honoured guest. And a jolly time, exploring the rocky coast of Cornwall and enjoying every moment of the time, with no clouds to darken the horizon, the caravanners spent.

But all things come to an end at last; and when at last the caravanners, bronzed and fit, parted from Nippy at the end of the tour, it was with the promise and hopes of meeting him again some day on such another tour.

Tom Merry & Co. arrived back in the classic shades of St. Jim's at the end of the vacation, taking with them pleasant memories of that eventful caravanning tour, and of the boy who had shared with them the joys and trials of their holiday—the boy with a secret.

THE END.

(Don't miss "BAGGY TRIMBLE'S CHUM!"—the first of another splendid series of magnificent yarns by Martin Clifford, which will appear in next week's issue of the GEM.)

NINE LIVES! The outcast Prince Yen How might plot and scheme the destruction of his hated enemy, Penny Rudd, but no matter what the odds, Penny invariably turns up like the proverbial "bad ha'penny!"



THE CRIMSON CLAW!

A Full-of-Thrills Mystery-Story featuring "Penny" Rudd and his Chinese chum, Fan Shen.

By
LESTER BIDSTON.

Chinese Cunning!

"THE Chang we knew in Mentz was a man of action," Penny Rudd sneered. "This Chang of London is a cur whose honour is strangled by fear. So we will follow the Master, and tell him that Chang is dead—of fright."

"Chang's duty is to trust none," that worthy shrugged; but that the shot had gone home, his next words proved. "You speak of Yen How. Why is he not here if, as you say, he was expecting me?"

In silence Pen passed a newspaper across the table; and Chang, with difficulty, spelt out the latest rumours about the missing scientists.

"It is over, and I had no hand in it," he whispered. "The Son of Heaven wins! Perhaps he still has use for old Chang. Else, why are you here?"

"You might have asked that before," Pen snapped. But he wasted no time now that the old ruffian accepted them for what they were not.

"He has use for you, and a warning," he continued earnestly. "The warning is that you take not the road agreed, but that you come with us by one that is safer and quicker."

"To where?" Chang asked.

"To the place that the eight stolen ones are even now making for," Pen ventured, greatly daring. "Under the Master's influence they go eight different ways, and we by a nin—by a nuth."

Somehow Pen's tongue had faltered, and his eyes showed that the yellow face opposite had receded a vast distance. It was only for a moment, a queer sudden turn that frightened Pen one second and made him smile the next.

He glanced aside to see if his chum had noticed anything. With a shock of fear he saw Fan trying to lift a cup of tea to his lips—trying and mumbling weakly as the liquid slopped over his trousers!

"Look here, Chang," he muttered. "If you're trying any fancy—fancy stunts—" He stopped, stupidly wondering what he was seeking to say.

He felt Fan pawing weakly at his arm. It filtered to his dulled mind that his pal was making tremendous efforts to convey some urgent warning.

"Tea bang—the tea's doped!" At last he caught the hoarse, slurred words, and realised with chilled dismay that Chang had been playing with them from the very start.

And Chang had won! The tea? They had been forced to take it, or throw up the game right away. Chang, craftily counting on this truth, had fixed the "plant" with Wong and slyly maintained his doubts until the dope could take effect.

Mortified beyond endurance by Chang's supreme cunning, Pen's fist clenched and he aimed a shrewd blow at the leering face that bent towards him; at least, he intended to hit the face, but merely succeeded in sweeping half the crockery from the table.

Then, as all but the immediate surroundings became blurred and misty, a second yellow face seemed to float unsteadily before his dimming sight.

With a sprinkling of fear he recognised the hateful features of Prince Yen How—"Son of Heaven," and the greatest scoundrel unhung!

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 SHEN, 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. Possessed of amazing hypnotic powers and all the mystic trickery of the East, Yen How bias fair to becoming another Napoleon.

Yen How aims to dominate China, but without modern machinery and European science to aid him he realises that he can do nothing. With consummate daring the outcast prince comes to England and proceeds to kidnap ten of the most famous European scientists. Penny Rudd and Fan Shen follow hard on his heels. By a clever impersonation How manages to be present at a meeting of the scientists, and without loss of time he brings his peculiar hypnotic gift into play. All England is startled shortly afterwards by the alarming news that the ten scientists have disappeared. Penny Rudd, disguised as a Chinese student, in company with Fan Shen, visit the Joyshop, a known rendezvous of the Crimson Claw. Professing to be members of the Crimson Claw, their scheme is to "pump" Chang Fu, the proprietor of the place, as to Yen How's whereabouts.

(Now read on.)

Thirty Minutes to Live!

PEN awakened in an evil-smelling place that was pitch black and most abominably noisy. The hammering grind throbbing in his head made thought an agony, and the total darkness created the terrible fear that he was blind. Horrible memories of a tale of Chinese torture flooded his unwilling mind. He wondered if his eyes had been touched with white-hot wire.

Then came a dismal groan and the welcome, if plaintive lisp of Fan Shen.

"O-er! Is that 'n Penny Ludd moving? If so, p'laps 'm tell one I'll Chinkoo where 'm is."

The "zipp" of a match answered him. In the faint glow he saw his chum sitting up, and gained a fleeting glimpse of the greasy tunnel in which they were imprisoned.

But Pen was staring at a great column of steel that revolved three feet overhead. Despite their situation, he was lighthearted with joy that his sight was right, even grinning at Fan's almost comical dismay.

"Buck up, Fan!" he counselled. "We're down in the crankshaft of some blessed ship, though why your yellow brethren haven't given us the 'happy despatch' is an unsolved mystery."

"P'laps Chang no like kill—feel sorry for?" Fan suggested hopefully.

"Perhaps not," Pen granted. "He's a bigger brute than his master, unless his Hajjar reputation libels him. Besides, I've an idea Yen How himself crossed to our table just as Chang's drugged tea bowled me over. I'm not banking on a picnic from either of them, Fanny."

In the darkness Pen heard his chum utter a whistle of doubt.

"But surely Yen would have left London the moment he'd stolen the fellows he wanted?" Fan protested.

Pen laughed bitterly.

"Trust Yen How for never doing the obvious," he said. "Whilst Scotland Yard was cabling warnings all over Europe, the sly beggar was lying low in Poppy Lane—about the last place to look for him, considering what had already happened there." He sighed lugubriously. "But I'd like to know what's going to happen here, old fruit!"

"What's all that banging, Penny?" Fan asked, after a moment of silence. "Thud—thud! Listen to 'm?"

"I've been listening!" Pen growled. "That 'thud,' me lad, is the sound of heavy seas breaking on this tub. We're out in the open, and making jolly old dirty weather of it." He struggled cautiously to his knees—the highest he dare venture—and struck another match. "Have a squint round, Fan, I've three matches left, but not a solitary hope of getting out until it suits our gaoler-bird. We'll make sure, though."

Not even Pen's three matches were required to prove how hopelessly they were trapped. The place was merely a casing round the propeller shaft, deep down in the bowels of the ship. For outlet, it boasted only one tiny door—of metal—immovably fastened from the outside.

"'M no good," Fan quickly decided. "We allee thapped, so lest quietly till they come and 'lease us, Penny Ludd."

Neither voiced the thought that How possibly never meant to release them, though each had it in mind during the weary hours that followed. They dozed, listlessly discussed How's amazing coup, and grew to know and hate the sounds of that singularly unpleasant prison.

Then, when they had almost abandoned hope of ever again seeing daylight, the metallic clank of a dropped thole-pin sounded from the door and the wavering beam of an electric torch explored the tunnel.

"You'm spy-pigs been happy, eh?" a voice sneered. "Me no want let you flee, but you got come out f'ill minute—now."

Behind the hand that held the torch they could dimly see the cruel, harsh features of Chang Fu—a sight that made Fan languidly insolent.

"You take 'n pie-face away, ole Chang," he murmured. "We'm velly comfy, tank you! Go 'way!"

"You no come. Me fillee shaft with hot steam!" Chang snarled. "You getamov' now, or—" The alternative was sniggered, but the silence was more than suggestive.

"No good kickin'; we'll only give the beast the chance he wants," Pen warned, in a whisper. "Follow on, Fan, an' go easy with the back-chat 'til we can make it effective."

That happy moment was not yet, for Chang was accompanied by four villainous-looking yellow brutes, who tied the prisoners' arms behind them the moment they scrambled from the tunnel; then, on Chang's order, the two helpless youths were hustled along dark alleyways and up flights of narrow stairs until they came out on the open deck. It was nearing nightfall, but a glimpse proved that they were aboard a large ocean-going yacht.

"My goodness, some wireless strength. Fan!" Pen whispered, his eyes on the double sausage aerials that stretched between curiously high masts.

The remark brought him an open-handed slap on the cheek from Chang. In reply, Pen back-heeled like a kicking mule, and the squeal of agony that followed was music in his ear.

"Some day, Chang Fu," he said, turning and facing the yellow brute—"some day I'll pay you all the interest of a lifetime for that insult—you son of a long line of pigs!"

Now, that was about the most offensive remark that Pen could possibly have mouthed, for the one clean spot in a

rogue Chink's heart is a lofty regard for his departed ancestors. Chang's lips drew back in a cur's snarl, and in the uncertain light Pen saw the gleam of steel in the yellow hand. He was nerving himself for the worst when a voice called quietly from an adjacent deck cabin.

"Did I give you permission to misuse these youths, Chang Fu?" the challenge came. "Did I not say that I would deal with them? Did I not—dog!"

The voice belonged to Prince Yen How, and the last word shot out with a venomous snarl that had a salutary effect on Chang. Even as Pen turned to face the prince, Chang's knife tinkled on deck, and the unhappy bully dropped humbly to his knees.

"The insult was great, lord, and—" he began falteringly.

"My orders alone are great," How interrupted coldly. "Bring the youths hither!"

Despite the intense repulsion that Pen felt for How, he was bound to admit that the outcast lama looked wonderfully impressive on this storm-tossed, darkling deck. Somehow, he seemed immeasurably above his fellows—a star outshining a host of tawdry lanterns.

Coldly calculating in every thought, evil in every imaginable way, his dark, brilliant eyes glanced lofty scorn ere he stepped back into the cabin. And in that moment Pen realised the magnitude of his task—realised that How had arrogated to himself the position of a god, and that millions of ignorant humans literally accepted him as such.

As soon as they entered the cabin, How curtly ordered Chang to release the prisoners and to leave them. Then, for an appreciable time, he stared reflectively at the pair.

As though he read their thoughts, his lips were touched by a smile, cold as winter sunshine.

"Fear not my eyes to-night," he said quietly. "That gift I use sparingly. In your case it is no longer needful." He glanced mockingly at Fan. "Shen, I trust you did the throat of policeman Welbeck no great harm?"

"To my dying hour I'll regret it was Welbeck's—not yours!" Fan answered defiantly.

"Your regrets will soon cease!" How promised coldly. "And you, Chinese Rudd—I'd have sworn I sent a bullet straight through your foolish heart!"

"Yen How swears many falsities. His ways are crooked as the spires of a temple!" Pen replied cuttingly. "For instance, he appears to have spared our lives. Yet he spares nothing, unless it helps his evil schemes!"

"Your doubt is justified!" How jibed. "I have not spared your lives. I've merely postponed your execution!"

"Reproved men sometimes live long!" Pen laughed, deliberately trying to break How's icy reserve.

And he succeeded. Beneath that calm exterior he knew the Chinese overlord must be hiding a veritable volcano of hate. That he was right How's sudden angry glare proved, even as his tongue took delight in showing how futile all their efforts had been.

"Your reprieve has but made your fate the more certain," he sneered. "Had I ordered your deaths in London, your police would have had a clear line on my movements. Instead, I had you smuggled aboard this vessel, hid you until England lies four hundred miles behind us, and now take pleasure in the knowledge that your little hour is ended!"

"Then we'll die happy, knowing the 'Son of Heaven' has failed!" Fan laughed, quick to follow Pen's lead. "The London police have cabled a list of the stolen men to every country in Europe."

"Nay; to every town and village," Pen boasted. "By now every traveller by rail, road, or steamer runs the gauntlet of eyes keenly trained, and never one of How's stolen ten can get through to China."

"As the truth will torment your last hour, I'll prove how vain that hope is," How smiled; adding quietly: "You've heard of the wireless yacht Radiola, owned by the Italian inventor Enrico?"

"We have," Pen admitted. "We've also heard that Enrico is one of the missing ten." His eyes suddenly opened in understanding. "This is the Radiola—you've stolen it!"

"You wrong me, for I am the honoured guest of Signor Enrico," How mocked. "But come! I will prove the stupidity of your London police, my rash young friends."

A call brought Chang and his gang to the cabin doorway, and the lads had no option but to follow where How led. That road was along the deck to a companion-way placed amidships. It was but a step, yet Pen noticed several sullen-looking white deckhands sitting about in curiously restless attitudes.

How's short journey ended at the door of a surprisingly roomy saloon, in which a dozen men sat contentedly feeding. It needed no introduction to tell Pen that he was in the presence of the missing scientists, though how they had come aboard with all London hunting them was an amazing mystery.

"Pray continue your meal, gentlemen!" How murmured. "I have but brought two more guests to join you." Stepping to the head of the table, he rested a hand lightly on the shoulder of a thin, sallow-faced, and elderly savant. "It is permitted to sit near you, Enrico? These soiled youths charge me with kidnapping you, and I would have you tell them the facts."

"Ah, that strange newspaper story again!" Enrico smiled. "I thought my wireless message to London, explaining that I came straight to the yacht after Foo's dinner, would have killed the silly yarn for ever." He glanced at How, with a strained smile. "It was certainly a surprise when you had those big cases opened on deck this afternoon and out popped these nine good men."

Pen and Fan exchanged stares of blank astonishment. It all seemed so amazingly simple after that one illuminating sentence from Signor Enrico.

"Well, I'll be kicked!" Pen gasped. "D'ye understand, Fan? These poor hounded beggars simply waltzed straight off to some Limehouse den after leaving the Oriental, and were packed up like so many yards of goods."

"They were hoisted aboard the Radiola within two hours of leaving the hotel," How smilingly admitted. "By then Enrico had walked openly aboard; the yacht sailed an hour after you drank Chang's tea. And here we are!"

"And the nine 'case' men," Fan asked, industriously wolfing everything within reach, "are they satisfied?"

"Oh, quite!" How murmured. He called to one sitting lower down the table. "Are you satisfied to be on this trip, Elson Storr?"

packed their poor muddled heads with fool ideas. You've got them very definitely under your thumb, though I fail to grasp why you've taken the trouble to make it plain to us."

Before How could reply the door swung open, and a burly Manchurian stood framed in the opening—a signal for Chang and his bullies to close silently in on their prisoners.

"The Dragon's signal lights have shown, Excellent!" the newcomer announced in Chinese, his words timing exactly with an abrupt cutting of engine-throb and the slower stoppage of whirling propeller.

"And there, Rudd, is your answer!" How said, his voice loud in the eerie silence. "It has amused me to prove how completely you have failed in your duel against the Claw. The Dragon—an ex-German airship, and now my property—



Gripping the handle of the knife firmly between his teeth, Penny Rudd slowly sawed through the ropes which held Fan a prisoner. By the tremors that shot up Fan's leg, Penny guessed that his pal was not enjoying the operation.

"Of course, prince!" the Englishman answered dully. "The opportunity of opening aero trade routes over China is one I cannot afford to miss."

"And you, Leon Tabasco?" How asked silkily. "My Malaguite—it will open up a new era for Chinese trading," the explosives inventor answered serenely.

"It will—but not for trading, you ass!" Pen yelled. He turned angry eyes on Storr. "Your wife's in hysterics over you, sir. D'you know she's asked Scotland Yard to track you down?"

"So I believe," Storr replied calmly. "But she'll have had my message by now—saying I'll be home early next year."

Rather hopelessly Pen looked at Enrico. "What about your crew?" he asked. "Do they take kindly to this yellow horde How's overrun your yacht with?"

"It was unfortunate the prince had to shoot two for the sake of discipline," Enrico muttered vaguely. "The others are contented, I believe."

"You're satisfied now, Rudd?" How murmured sardonically.

"I'm satisfied you're the world's super-ghoul!" Pen replied hotly. "You've robbed every man here of his free-will, and

takes us overland to China, and you—you stay with the Radiola!"

"You're scuttling her!" Pen yelled, aghast, with the understanding of How's fiendish intention.

Horrified, he jumped to his feet, fired with a wild longing to warn the crew; but in that instant a rope dropped over his head, and he was pulled ignominiously back into the chair.

Despite the cruel punishment he received he struggled madly for several seconds, conscious that Fan was similarly engaged, but swiftly realising the uselessness of their efforts.

They kicked until their legs were securely swathed in that never-ending rope. They yelled until Chang ruthlessly stuffed table-napkins half-way down their throats. When all else failed they glared contempt at How's bland smile, and received back-handed face slaps that nearly drove them frantic.

Beyond that momentary exhibition of childish hatred How completely ignored them. Turning to the mind-subdued scientists—who had stared at the swift tussle in uncomfortable bewilderment—he curtly ordered them to the deck, and signed his men to accompany them.

In the doorway he turned and stared sardonically at his victims.



"RATTY!"

THIS is not a reference to a disgruntled reader—far from it. It's an abbreviation of Mr. Ratchiff's name. Ratty seems to go down jolly well in Wrexham, for a loyal chum from that quarter writes to me asking for another "Ratty" yarn. We'll see what can be done. The unpopular New House master at St. Jim's is certainly a strong character, and Mr. Martin Clifford knows just how to handle him. Hang on for a bit, "Ivor" of Wrexham, as I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. Clifford will be delighted to oblige you. My correspondent thinks the new adventure serial, "The Crimson Claw," the "goods." Evidently he is a discerning reader, for this masterpiece is going well with all the GEM public.

AMATEUR MAGAZINES!

Once more this subject crops up. This time a loyal chum from Gourcock is keen to start an Amateur Annual. He seems to have his head screwed on right, and seeks the support of interested Companion Paper readers. Those who wish to know more about this new magazine are requested to write for full particulars to R. MacMurray, 19, Royal Street, Gourcock, Scotland. Good luck, my Scottish chum!

OLD COPIES!

Charles Brenner, an enthusiastic reader of the Companion

Papers, wishes to dispose of some old copies of the GEM, "Magnet," and "Popular." As so many readers lately have been inquiring after back numbers of these papers, perhaps my correspondent's address will be useful to them. Here it is—Charles Brenner, 65, Broomsleigh Street, West Hampstead, London, N.W. 6.

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