

THE BEST SCHOOL, SPORT, AND ADVENTURE STORIES INSIDE!

The GEM 2^D

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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



A CRITICAL MOMENT FOR D'ARCY'S RESCUERS!

(A Dramatic Incident from the Grand, Long Complete School Story of the World-Famous Tom Merry & Co
entitled: "IMPOSTOR AND HERO!" contained in this issue.)



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

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

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

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

My Dear Chums,—Next week's issue of the "Gem" is specially noteworthy. Make sure of your copies by ordering in advance, for the new number will contain a record budget of good things. First and foremost we have a real treat in the magnificent complete yarn of St. Jim's. This is a splendid summer-time tale, and it brings into the limelight our old friend, George Alfred Grundy, the amusing fellow with the large views of the world. Of course, he puts his foot in it again.

"GRUNDY'S GAME!" By Martin Clifford.

Here we have St. Jim's at the best. It is a sparkling up-to-date story, and it shows some of the most popular fellows of the school taking a prominent part in what is happening. And there is a great deal happening. As regards Grundy, nobody can say offhand that he does not play the game. He always means to play it, and his actions on this celebrated occasion are no exception to the rule. There would have been no trouble at all had it not been for Aubrey Racke. He started it all, and he ought to have been much obliged to Grundy for chipping in. Racke thinks that he has hit on a marvellous scheme which will enable him to win a fortune in a French town. Grundy gets hold of Racke's plan. He thinks that if the plan is to be used at all, it should be put to some good purpose.

FURIOUS FUN!

It would be a shame to anticipate what follows, except just to point out that Grundy goes to France, and finds Tom Merry & Co. aboard the Channel boat. The "Co." are animated by the noblest motives. They desire to save Grundy from himself, and they have their work cut out. Grundy is one of those venturesome fellows, standing at nothing.

Mr. Martin Clifford knows France through and through. He knows just the kind of thing that would happen. We trace Grundy through a number of the most hilarious adventures imaginable. Grundy plunges on like an irascible bull in a china-shop. He is fogged by the swiftness of events. At times and seasons he even loses his temper! Watch how matters turn out. Tom Merry & Co., as stated, are also paying a visit to the glad land of Gaul, and jolly lucky it is! Keep your eye, too, on the volatile and talkative D'Arcy. He gets more chaffy than ever, and through it all the fun is fast and furious. The light-hearted St. Jim's fellows never had such a ripping holiday. They feel in their element, with the one notable exception of Grundy. He has to face a lot of music, and at the end of the trip he regards the mighty country of Bony Napoleontarte with mixed feelings. I am sure there will be but one wish amongst "Gem" readers when they have devoured next week's topping yarn, namely, that Grundy pays another visit to the cheery land on the other side of the Silver Streak.

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"THE KIDNAPPED HEIR!"

In next week's powerful story of Anthony Sharpe, the deservedly famous detective, we get a splendid atmosphere of romance, as well as a thoroughly well-written description of the subtle work carried through by Sharpe. The missing heir is spirited away—vanished into thin air. Detectives cannot work on thin air, but Anthony Sharpe finds a clue. He follows up the thread, and this leads him into perils worse than any he has yet encountered. There are thrills in plenty here. You get absolutely convinced that Sharpe will not only bring off one coup, to which a big reward is linked up, but that there will be still another triumph to set down on the great sleuth's list of victories. And what happens? I am not going to give away a very notable tale, but without a doubt your interest will be quickened in regard to Sharpe's search for the Mysterious "X," who intriques in the dark. He is as slippery as an eel. Will Anthony Sharpe, with all his record keenness, succeed in at last tracking down this arch enemy of society, whose trail is so cleverly covered time after time?

"A FORTUNE AT STAKE!"

Next Wednesday's "Gem" will contain this altogether remarkable story of young Dick Fenton, who is heir to a million. There are covetous eyes fixed on this vast fortune. Dick goes in deadly peril, thanks to the scheming of Mr. Dearth, his rascally guardian, who wants to get the youngster out of the way so that he may steal the prize. Dearth is in league with others, and the scoundrels stop at nothing. You will be fascinated by the narrative, which shows how Dick eludes the trap which is prepared. But there are further dangers to face. The boy has grit. He makes a bolt for the Far West. It is here that we enter the great world of the films. From this point the struggle is continued in breathless style. Dick's life hangs on a thread, thanks to a letter which gets into the wrong hands. But you will see all that comes of this matter next week, and I am certain your verdict on this fine story will be that it is a stunner.

"THE SPIDER OF THE NORTH!"

My letter-bag provides plenty of evidence of the popularity of the gripping story of mill-land. Tom Compton escapes next week only by the skin of his teeth from the clutches of his dastardly foe. One thing that has struck everybody in connection with this serial is the masterly manner in which young Compton carries out his will. He is a born leader, as we have witnessed, in scene after scene. He is proof against ugly rushes of a mob. He gets there by sheer pluck, and the way in which he handles a crowd of bullying underlings, the paid servants of the Spider, affords a lesson in courage of the best sort. Then the Lancashire touch is admirable. Don't miss the startling sensations to come.

OUR CRICKET COMPETITION.

Summer is swinging on, and with each week the interest in the Cricket Competition increases. The new problem goes a bit farther in excellence. It will appeal to everybody who knows the magic of the game.

THE TUCK HAMPER.

This feature is still booming. A tuck hamper always comes in handy, winter or summer, but especially in summer-time, for

it is at that season the picnicker is abroad. My advice is, as always, to send in the cheeriest, smartest little storyette on a postcard. Then the lucky tuck hamper may come your way.

A COUNTRY TRAMP.

A correspondent who thinks of taking his holiday on Shanks' pony inquires what he should take with him. He wants to carry very little indeed. A supply of socks, some handkerchiefs, a toothbrush, etc. That's about all that is needed. You need to go light on these tours. Don't, whatever you do, be bothered with a crowd of extras. It is not worth it, and it doesn't pay. Go off in your old clothes—they are pretty nearly always the most comfortable—and make sure of your boots. There is every chance of getting a rare lot of pleasure out of a tramp through the by-ways. The walker has things all his own way. He is not tied to beaten tracks. He can make bee-lines often enough for the place which he has decided shall be his resting-place at night. He can pick his footpaths and really see the country. Even the cyclist has to cry quits at times, and be satisfied with the lanes. But the fellow on tramp can penetrate anywhere, and if he goes south or north, east or west, he can discover wonderful bits of country, making his way through woods and across the rolling downs. I am not at all sure that he has not the best of it, after all. But he should not overtax his strength. If he is a brain worker he does not want to jump straight off into a record tramp. Take things easily in the best professional style. Do far less the first day than you intend to do the second. That's wisdom. It is also wise to be content with a mere snack in the middle of the day. You can make up for this by having a square meal at night when the day's work is done.

SWANK!

Have you ever noticed how eager some people are to go one better in the matter of any deed of note? There may be nothing personal in this, but, however the land lies, the thing is a mistake. It is just this kind of attitude that makes for discouragement, and there is nothing much worse than that. You know the kind of thing I mean. A fellow says he has succeeded in writing so many words a minute in shorthand. "Oh, that's nothing at all!" chips in somebody else. In the name of fair play why not let the chap have his little bit of satisfaction over his achievement! He will get his rubs—trust the world for that!—but why barge in and try to make him look small, just in order to prove to all and sundry that you may happen to be the better man? And, after all, it is encouragement we all want.

Your Editor.

WIRELESS SETS FREE

WITHOUT ANY COMPETITION OR
ENTRANCE FEE.

See this week's

PLUCK

which is an absolute "top-notch." It is absolutely packed with thrilling, gripping yarns, wonderful illustrations, and lots of fine helpful advice on "wireless." No boy should miss this week's "PLUCK" (on sale Tuesday, June 26th)—it's a real record number.

IMPOSTOR AND HERO!

A Further Story, Dealing with that most amazing character, Ginger, who has installed himself at St. Jim's in the guise of Mark Lathom, a nephew of the master of the Fourth. A Story Packed with Pluck, Plot, and Power.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Ginger's Resolve!

"ANY luck, Jack?"

Tom Merry, the leader of Study No. 10 and junior captain at St. Jim's, asked the question anxiously as Jack Blake entered the Fourth Form dormitory, where a group of juniors were talking together in whispers.

It was long past the juniors' bed-time at St. Jim's, but very few of the Fourth had started to undress, while Tom Merry and several other Shell fellows had not yet been to their dormitory. They had looked in on the Fourth, to discuss recent happenings at St. Jim's—happenings that were alarming enough to say the least of it.

For one of their number was missing. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth had started out that afternoon on the cross-country run with the others, and had not returned.

It was known that Arthur Augustus had sprained his ankle slightly, and had started to hobble back home; but though Gore and several other fellows had seen him returning, the swell of the Fourth had not arrived back at St. Jim's. And even now, at bed-time, search-parties, composed of seniors, were out scouring the countryside.

But this latter fact was small comfort to D'Arcy's chums, and Blake had just been to Mr. Railton to urge that a search-party of juniors might also be sent out.

A glance, however, at Blake's downcast face as he came in told them what the answer to Tom Merry's question would be.

"It's no go," he said, shaking his head miserably. "Railton won't hear of it. He says that if the seniors fail it isn't likely juniors will succeed. Which is utter rot, I think."

"Yes, rather!"

"Poor old Gussy!" muttered Tom Merry after a silence. "Where on earth can the chump have got to? Does anyone know which way he started back? Wasn't that new chap, Lathom, the last to see him? Does he know?"

As he spoke Tom Merry glanced round to where a junior, with a white, pinched face and a shock of red hair, was sitting alone on a bed a few yards away.

He was a new boy who had arrived at St. Jim's the day before under the name of Mark Lathom, nephew of Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master. And a strange sort of new boy he had proved to be.

Knowing as the juniors did, that the new boy hailed from a remote Western State of America, they had expected him to be a little rough and ready in his manners and speech. But this strange youth was more than that.

He had proved to be illiterate and uncouth—not at all the sort of fellow they could have expected Mr. Lathom's nephew to be.

Nevertheless, the juniors—or the decent chaps, at least—could have forgiven him this had he not also turned out to be a "smoky boulder" and a somewhat raucous young ruffian, who had signalled his arrival by kicking the sacred shins of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

Even fellows like Blake and Merry could hardly forgive an act of sacrilege like that, and it would have gone hard

with the new boy had not the cause of the misguided shinkicker been championed by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And with good reason, for the new boy had proved himself to be something better than an outsider. On the way from the station he had performed an act of gallantry by hauling the noble Gussy from beneath the wheels of a motor-lorry at great risk to himself.

And D'Arcy, unlike the others, could not forget this, and he had befriended Lathom and shown him many acts of kindness—little acts of themselves, but which meant a great deal to the outcast. As he noticed the eyes of the juniors fixed upon him, the new boy got off the bed and approached the group.

"You chaps want me?" he demanded sullenly.

"Yes," said Tom Merry curtly. "We want you to tell us all you can about this afternoon—where you left Gussy and all about it."

"I knows little more than you chaps do," was the sullen answer. "We'd jest left the woods on the far side when old eyeglass tripped and sprained his ankle. And he made me go on and leave him. I went, and comin' back I lost meself on the moor. That's why I was the last feller in. That's all I knows."

"Then you've no idea which way he started to come home—by the woods or across Wayland Moor?"

"No," said the youth, after a moment's hesitation. "I never seed him after that."

There was a silence.

"Well, that doesn't help us much," said Tom Merry, frowning. "It's more mysterious than those rotten thefts, and goodness knows they are mysterious enough."

Tom Merry was referring to another strange happening at St. Jim's that day. For that afternoon an extensive series of thefts had taken place at the old school. While the majority of the fellows were out of doors some light-fingered person—or persons—had raided nearly every study and dormitory in the School House.

Money, watches, pocket-wallets, sleeve-links, tiepins—scarcely a single senior or junior but had lost something of value. And so far there was not a single clue as to the author of the mysterious outrages.

"I can't help thinking," went on Tom Merry thoughtfully, "that there's some sort of connection between both affairs, though I'm blessed if I can see where."

"I think so, too," put in Aubrey Racke, with a sneer. "It's jolly rummy that D'Arcy should disappear at the same time that our dashed valuables vanish."

"You—you howling cad, Racke!"

There was a roar of angry protest and execration, and Racke stepped back and paled at the storm his words had aroused.

"You silly fool, Racke!" snapped Talbot warmly. "You know jolly well Merry didn't mean that. Old Gussy's the last fellow at St. Jim's who'd pinch anything from anybody!"

Racke did know it. He had only made the insinuation out of pure spite against the missing D'Arcy. And he regretted his foolish words now. Tom Merry, however, did not trouble to answer the cad of the Shell. He turned his back

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upon him, as did D'Arcy's bosom pals, Blake, Herries, and Digby.

But one fellow present took the insinuation seriously. And that junior, strange to say, was none other than the new boy. He had no intention to let the taunt pass unchallenged.

"What was that you said, longnose?" he said, facing Racke with clenched fists. "Did you 'int that old eyeglass pinched them things this afternoon?"

Racke ran his eyes sneeringly over the red-headed junior. "Pardon me," he exclaimed with lofty politeness, "but I was only addressing the gentlemen present—not you."

There was a low murmur, but the new boy seemed quite unmoved at the insult.

"You can say what you likes about me," he said quietly, "but you ain't goin' to insult old eyeglass when I'm 'ere! And you can take that for doin' it!"

And the new boy's fist shot out quick as lightning. It struck Racke full upon his prominent nose, and he collapsed with a yell and a bump.

"You—you low hooligan!" Racke spluttered, jumping furiously to his feet again. "I'll—I'll smash you for that!"

And Racke was about to fling himself upon the new boy, when he stopped suddenly as an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown appeared in the doorway. It was Mr. Railton.

"What—what does this mean?" snapped the Housemaster, glancing round. "Why are you juniors not in bed? And—bless my soul, Merry, why are you Shell juniors not in your dormitory?"

Tom Merry flushed. He felt that in Kildare's absence he ought, as captain of the Lower School, to have kept order.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," he stammered. "But—but we got a bit excited about what's happened, and—"

"I can understand that," said Mr. Railton quietly. "And under the circumstances I will overlook this. But let me have no more of it. You Shell juniors will proceed to your dormitory at once."

"Yes, sir."

The Housemaster turned away and left the dormitory, his kindly face grave and harassed. And the Shell fellows were following him when Jack Blake called to Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tommy!" he muttered in a determined whisper. "Railton won't sanction a junior search-party, but—but I don't see why we shouldn't go out, all the same, on our own. It'll be risky, but—"

"Blessed if I can see how we can, now he's refused us," said Tom Merry, frowning. "There'd be an awful row if we were copped—"

"I know; but I can't bear to think of sleep, with poor old Gussy missing," said Blake miserably. "We ought to do something. He might be lying unconscious on the moor—anything may have happened to him. Anyway, Herries and Digby and myself mean to go, if no one else will."

Tom Merry nodded slowly.

"All right, I'm on," he said at last. "But we'd better wait a bit, until the search-party has returned."

"I was thinking about one o'clock," remarked Blake. "I'm going to keep awake until then, and I'll come and rouse you then, if you like."

"Right!" said Tom. "I'll tell Lowther and Manners."

And the leader of the Terrible Three hurried out after his chums.

But it was long before sleep visited the eyes of the juniors that night. For fully an hour they lay in the darkness, discussing the amazing affair in breathless whispers until conversation grew more and more desultory, and one by one they dropped off to sleep.

For long after that Blake lay staring into the darkness and thinking about his absent chum. But, like the rest, he was tired out after the cross-country run, and, despite his intention to keep awake, he, too, succumbed to sleep about midnight.

But Blake was not the last awake.

For fully an hour after that Ginger, the new boy, tossed and turned upon his sleepless couch. Unlike the rest of the juniors, the new boy did not know how much the spiteful Racke's statements were worth—nor did he know that there was not a fellow at St. Jim's who would, or could, believe D'Arcy guilty of theft, however the facts pointed to that conclusion. And he naturally supposed that Racke's insinuations would be shared by others. This possibility was unbearable to the strange new boy.

He might be a rascally young rascal and a bit of a hooligan. He was; and did St. Jim's only know it, he was more than that. But the good-hearted Gussy's small acts of kindness had touched some hidden chord in the boy's nature—a nature that had never known kindness before.

And Ginger had every reason to know that Gussy was not the thief—for the simple reason that he himself was the thief. When he had given Tom Merry & Co. to understand that he was the last home from the cross-country run, he had lied. Far from being the last, he had been the first, and he had put the time to good—or, rather, bad—account by rifling the

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deserted studies and dormitories, afterwards hiding his spoils in the cloisters, and hiding himself there until darkness had fallen.

But he was sorry he had done it now.

"I wish I hadn't done it," he muttered over and over again as he tossed on his bed in the darkness. "I never thought as how old Eyeglass would be suspected; and I've got to put him right somehow."

For another hour the new boy lay thinking, and then suddenly, as if his mind was made up, he slipped softly out of bed and dressed quietly.

In his queer way of thinking there was only one way to save D'Arcy's honour. And that was by returning the stolen articles to their owners—thus proving the missing D'Arcy could not possibly have done it.

Though he was a newcomer at St. Jim's, he had already made it his business to find out how to leave the school in the still hours, and a few minutes later he was rummaging amid the dark cloisters. And when he re-entered the School House again he had a well-filled bag in his hands.

For a brief moment he stood hesitating, and then he moved to Kildare's study; and after placing the bag on the table he made his way back to the Fourth Form dormitory.

There he hesitated again as a sudden thought struck him.

"Blowed if I don't do it," he muttered at last. "Old Eyeglass was at the camp when I see'd him last. He's bin nosin' about the camp, and the gov'nor and Slaney have got him. If they have there's going to be trouble, and I'm blowed if I don't go and see 'em about it now."

And next moment the strange new boy had left the dormitory and was making his way cautiously out of the School House again.

It was fairly obvious that not only did Ginger, the new boy, know where the stolen valuables had vanished to, but he had a fairly clear idea where the missing Arthur Augustus had gone to also.

CHAPTER 2.

A Curious Incident!

THE new boy had left the dormitory barely ten minutes when the door opened again and Tom Merry entered. He tiptoed across to Blake's bed and shook him gently.

Almost immediately Blake opened his eyes and sat up, rubbing his eyes drowsily.

"Wassermarrer?" he growled sleepily. "Hallo, that you, Tommy? My hat, have I—"

"Yes, you sleepy owl," muttered Tom Merry. "Buck up, we've been waiting about five minutes!"

"Sorry. I deserve to be kicked for dropping off," said Blake contemptuously.

And he slipped out of bed, and a moment later was waking his chums, Herries and Digby. Well within five minutes the three juniors were dressed and had followed Tom Merry out of the dark dormitory.

Out in the passage Lowther and Manners were waiting, and a move was made for the box-room. There, boots were put on, and in a very short time the six juniors had crossed the dark quad and were standing in Rylcombe Lane.

"Look here," said Tom Merry. "I vote we try Wayland Moor first. As Gussy was crooked he'd be almost certain to take the easier and shorter route back across the corner of the moor. If we follow up the route to where the new chap says he left him, we ought to pick up some traces."

"Let's hope so," said Blake, though his tone was gloomy. "But it'll be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Anyway, we can only do our best."

Blake's words were true enough. The task the juniors had set themselves was but a forlorn hope, and they knew it. But they were resolutely determined to do their best, for all that.

The juniors lost no time, and, leaving Rylcombe Lane, were soon tramping across the lonely moor. The night was mild, but it was dark. Only a few stray stars twinkled in the sky overhead. They knew the route well, however, and, keeping in touch with the dimly-seen path, spread out with a few yards between them. Then they pressed forward slowly and, with the aid of pocket-torches, commenced the search.

For twenty minutes they pushed on, almost in silence, grimly subjecting every inch of the ground, every gully and thicket within reach of the path, to a rigorous search. Then suddenly Manners called to the others, and they hurried over to him breathlessly.

"There's a light ahead through those trees," said Manners almost in a whisper. "What can it be?"

By now the searchers had crossed the corner of the moor and had almost reached the belt of woodland—an offshoot of Rylcombe Woods, and separated from them only by Rylcombe Lane. And from somewhere within the belt of trees came a tiny gleam of red light.

"Looks like a fire," muttered Tom Merry, a little puzzled. "Ah, I know! It's only a gipsy encampment. I remember seeing it a couple of days ago."

"Then what about having a look at it?" said Blake a trifle suspiciously. "One never knows—"

"We'll be passing it, in any case!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come on!"

The juniors pushed on, and a minute later were treading cautiously through bush and briar amid the dark trees. And quite suddenly, in a little clearing, they came upon the gipsy encampment.

Two caravans were there, dark and silent. And, tethered to a tree close by were the dim forms of two scraggy horses. In the centre between the two vans were the dull-red, dying embers of a fire.

For a moment or so the juniors gazed silently at the peaceful scene. Quite suddenly a spasmodic flame shot up from the glowing embers of the fire, and lit up the vans and the clearing with a blood-red light.

As it did so, Tom Merry gave a startled gasp, and gripped Blake's arm tensely.

"Look! That far caravan—on the steps!" he hissed.

"My hat!"

There was a simultaneous exclamation from the others—a stupefied gasp of utter amazement. And no wonder. For, seated on the steps of the second caravan was a boy—a boy clad in Etons. He was sitting, chin in hands, as if waiting for someone, and the flickering firelight played on his face and revealed his features clearly.

The face was familiar to the juniors.

"It—it's Lathom—that new chap!" breathed Herries. "What the thump—"

The juniors stared at each other in the gloom in sheer astonishment. But before anyone could speak there came the sound of heavy footsteps from the far side of the clearing. Next moment two men burst from the trees.

Two burly, rough-looking men they were—apparently gypsies. One of the two carried a bulky sack over his shoulder. As they came into the circle of firelight, both stopped, as if startled, as they saw the figure seated on the van-steps. But as the boy sprang up to meet them, one of them laughed aloud, and spoke.

"Blow me if it ain't Ginger!" he said, in obvious relief. "You fair gave us a start, kid. But what's the matter? Anything gone wrong?"

The watchers did not hear the muttered reply, and next moment the second rough-looking man unlocked the van door, and all three passed inside. Then came the sound of a match being struck, and the watchers caught a brief glimpse of the lighted interior before the door closed.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Tom Merry. "What on earth does that mean?"

Jack Blake shook his head helplessly. It was a question that not one of them could answer. The boy was undoubtedly Mark Lathom—or, rather, the new boy who had arrived at St. Jim's in that name. But how came it that a fellow who had only recently come from America, who had only two days ago arrived at St. Jim's, had become familiar—as he obviously had—with two such rough-looking men. And, in any case, what was he doing visiting them at this time of the night?

The juniors were completely mystified.

"There's some deep mystery here," said Tom Merry quietly. "Had we better do anything?" asked Lowther. "Shall we watch—"

"No!" muttered Tom, shaking his head. "It looks jolly suspicious, but it isn't our business to pry into the new chap's secrets. Besides, we've more important work on—we've to find old Gussy. We can ask that chap what it means afterwards."

And, with a last puzzled glance at the lighted window of the van, Tom Merry led the way into the blackness of the woods.

But could Tom Merry & Co. have seen and heard all that took place in that van just then, they would have been very surprised, and more-than startled.

Immediately the door had closed and the swinging lamp had been lighted, the man carrying the bag dropped it to the floor gently, and, opening wide the mouth, he revealed the contents—a mass of gold and silver plate that gleamed brightly in the lamp-light.



As the chums of St. Jim's entered the little clearing, Tom Merry gave a startled gasp, and gripped Blake's arm tensely. "Look!" he cried, pointing to the caravan ahead, on the steps of which a boy, clad in Etons, was seated. The flickering firelight played on the boy's face, and revealed his features clearly. "It's Lathom—that new chap!" breathed Herries. (See this page.)

"What do you think o' that, Ginger?" he asked the red-haired new boy jocularly. "Good night's work—eh? If we does as well as that at the school, we sha'n't grumble."

The boy scowled at the glittering silver, and then he glared defiantly into the eyes of the speaker.

"Look 'ere, guv'nor!" he said. "I've come to see if you knows anything about a bloke what's missin' from the school—a fair swell he is, with an eyeglass? Have you blokes got him?"

Both men stared a little as the boy spoke, and then Bolton's face darkened.

"Yes; we've got the young 'ound!" he snarled savagely. "He came spyin' round 'ere; but he won't do it again for a bit!"

"Then you've gotter let him go!" said the boy fiercely. "He's a good 'un, he is. If you don't—"

"Here, what yer talkin' about!" said Bolton angrily.

"What does it matter ter you?"

"'Cause the bloke's bin good to me, and I ain't goin' to let you harm 'im—that's why."

There was a grim silence. The men stared at the defiant boy. Then Bolton, who was obviously the leader, dropped the bag, and stood up, his face dark and threatening.

"Ho! So that's the game, is it? You'd talk to your step-father like that—the man what's brought you up! You'd turn on us, would you? I suppose," he asked sarcastically, "you 'aven't thought what it'd mean if we let the kid go? It would mean prison for Slaney and me, and a reformatory for you, Ginger, me lad!"

"Then—then he's seen that bloke in there?" muttered the boy, in a low tone, nodding his head towards the other van.

"Yes. He's seen and spoken to the real Mark Lathom, what we've kidnapped, and he knows that you're an impostor, Ginger, that you've taken that Yankee kid's place at St. Jim's. We copped him talking to the kid last night at the van winder. Now what about it, Ginger?"

The youth stood silent. The man spoke the truth, and he knew it. He had been an accomplice—though a very unwilling one—in the kidnapping of the real Mark Lathom. And he knew that if D'Arcy were allowed to go free—to expose the whole plot—it would mean prison for his rascally employers and for himself.

"What are you going to do with old eyeglass?" he asked hoarsely, at length.

"We sha'n't arm the kid, if he behaves himself," said Bolton, eyeing his stepson—if he was that—uneasily. "And how long we keeps him depends on you, Ginger. If you can do your job to-morrow—find out where that headmaster bloke keep his silver pots and things, and manage to get a wax impression of his safe key, then we'll do the job at night. Then, when it's safe, we'll clear out, and let 'em both go."

Again the boy was silent. Then he nodded.

"Right!" he muttered. "But if you harms him, I'll tell on you, and chance what happens to me! I mean it! I'm fed up with this game; and I wants to go straight, like them blokes at the school."

Bolton's face grew thunderous, and he raised his clenched fist, as if to strike the young outcast. But he dropped his arm quickly again, and his face twisted into a grin.

"Yer needn't be afraid of us 'armin' the kid, Ginger," he grinned genially. "I'd like to let him go, but I daren't, as yer must see. Now, cut off, and you can come an' see us agen to-morrow. And don't you be a soft young fool!"

The youth did not answer. He turned and left the caravan, and a moment later was hurrying back across the moor.

The boy's face was downcast and his heart was heavy. He had not anticipated D'Arcy finding out the secret. More than ever now he longed to be free from the clutches of his rascally associates, from the man he hated and feared, who had brought him up to a life of crime—a life he desired deeply to escape from.

But it seemed hopeless.

He reached St. Jim's at last, and glanced up at the old stone buildings, lying silent and still under the stars. And for a full minute he hesitated, thinking.

If he did not turn up at the camp the next day—or the day after, for that matter—he knew that his accomplices would not be alarmed, they would think that something had prevented his coming. Why not bolt now? He would be miles away before morning. Before Bolton and Slaney could guess he had run away from them he would be safe. He could renounce the old life for ever. Certainly he had never known any other sort of life. And without aid, without friends, what could he do?

But it was worth risking. Never before had he had such an opportunity to get away from his cruel taskmasters.

But what about D'Arcy? He knew what his rascally associates were capable of. How could he leave the good-natured Gussy—the only fellow he remembered who had ever shown him any kindness—how could he leave him in the clutches of the scoundrelly cracksmen?

"I won't do it!" he muttered. "I'm stoppin' to see old Eyeglass don't come to no harm. I got to get him out of that somehow."

The next moment the youth had swarmed over the school wall, and a few minutes later he was undressed and climbing into bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

CHAPTER 3.

A Surprise for St. Jim's!

ANY news this morning, Kildare?" Jack Blake asked the question eagerly as the captain of St. Jim's entered the Fourth Form dormitory early the next morning. There was a peculiar expression on Kildare's good-humoured face, and all the juniors eyed him hopefully.

Kildare shook his head.

"If you mean any news of D'Arcy—no," he exclaimed gravely. "We were out until midnight last night, but it was no good; we didn't find a trace of him. Where on earth the young beggar has got to goodness only knows."

Blake's face fell. He had hoped that this unusual visit of Kildare's meant news of D'Arcy.

But the juniors were soon to learn that Kildare did bring news, for all that—news of quite a different nature.

"Listen to me, you fellows," said Kildare, raising his voice. "All you chaps who have lost anything from your study or dormitory last night are to report to me after breakfast to claim their property."

"Wha-a-at?"

Kildare's words created a sensation.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Does—does that mean that the thief's been captured, Kildare?"

"No. But all the missing stuff has been restored," said Kildare grimly. "When I went to my study this morning I found the whole bag of tricks on my table."

"Great pip!"

"I fancy it's as I suspected—only a foolish practical joke," said Kildare. "But, if I could only get hold of the silly joker, I'd make him sorry for himself. Still, it's good to know there isn't a thief amongst us, after all."

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"Yes, rather!"

"I say, Kildare," asked Herries eagerly, "is my fountain-pen safe?"

"And my pocket wallet!" gasped Clive. "There were two quids in it—"

"And my gold hunter!" drawled Cardew.

"And my eight-day, collapsible, jewelled-in-every-movement silver turnip!" demanded Kit Wildrake, the junior from Canada.

Kildare laughed, as a perfect hurricane of questions was flung at him from every corner of the room.

"You've no need to worry, kids," he laughed. "I've checked the stuff from the list of missing articles, and it's all there. After breakfast, remember! And don't forget to line up in a quiet, orderly queue, or I'll line you—in another way."

And, with that threat, the captain of St. Jim's departed. He left the dormitory in a buzz, as the juniors excitedly discussed this unexpected development.

There was one junior, however, who took no part in the discussion; and that junior was the new boy. He listened to the chatter going on around him with a curious expression of remorse and shame on his face. He was already learning many things at St. Jim's, and the way in which these "young toffs" looked upon thieves and thieving was a revelation—and an education to him. But they never noticed him—even Blake & Co. had entirely forgotten him in the general excitement.

The juniors completed dressing, and in the passage Blake & Co. joined the Terrible Three. The two Co.'s went down to breakfast together. They found the dining-hall humming with the story. Even now, though, many of the juniors could scarcely credit the good news, and immediately the meal was over a general rush was made for Kildare's study.

Fortunately, Kildare's warning had its effect, and the juniors, though excited enough, were soon lined up in an orderly queue by Darrell of the Sixth. And when the first few who entered came out again, hugging their precious possessions with undisguised satisfaction, all doubts were set at rest.

"Well, this beats the band!" observed Herries, as he joined his chums, with his precious fountain-pen in his hand. "Who on earth could the merry practical joker be?"

"I suppose it must have been a practical joke," said Tom Merry. "If it was, then I'm jolly glad."

"I'm glad, too," rejoined Blake, a trifle huskily. "It's good news, but—but I'd rather it had been good news about old Gussy!"

The others nodded. They were all relieved and glad that the amazing affair had ended so satisfactorily. But it was, in their opinion, a small matter compared with the incomprehensible absence of Arthur Augustus.

As they strolled along towards the Hall they met Mr. Railton, and Blake stopped to speak to him.

"It's—it's about D'Arcy, sir. I—I suppose there's no news—"

"I'm sorry; no, my boy," said the Housemaster quietly. "It is extraordinary, and more than distressing. We have been in communication again with the police this morning; but they have nothing to report."

The Housemaster paused, but, as he saw the hopeless look on the juniors' faces, he went on kindly:

"There is, however, no need for undue alarm—yet. Kildare is organising another search-party, and we still have hope. But should no news be received by noon, Dr. Holmes proposes to wire to the boy's father, Lord Eastwood, and— Ah!"

Mr. Railton stopped, and his grave features relaxed. At that moment P.-c. Crump, of Rylcombe, escorted by Toby, the page-boy, came along, evidently bound for the Head's study.

"Good-morning, Mr. Crump," exclaimed the Housemaster eagerly. "You bring news—news of the missing boy—"

"I'm sorry to say as how I don't, sir. But I've got some news," said P.-c. Crump, a little impressively. "You'll be surprised, sir, to learn there's bin a burglary last night, at Glyn House, sir."

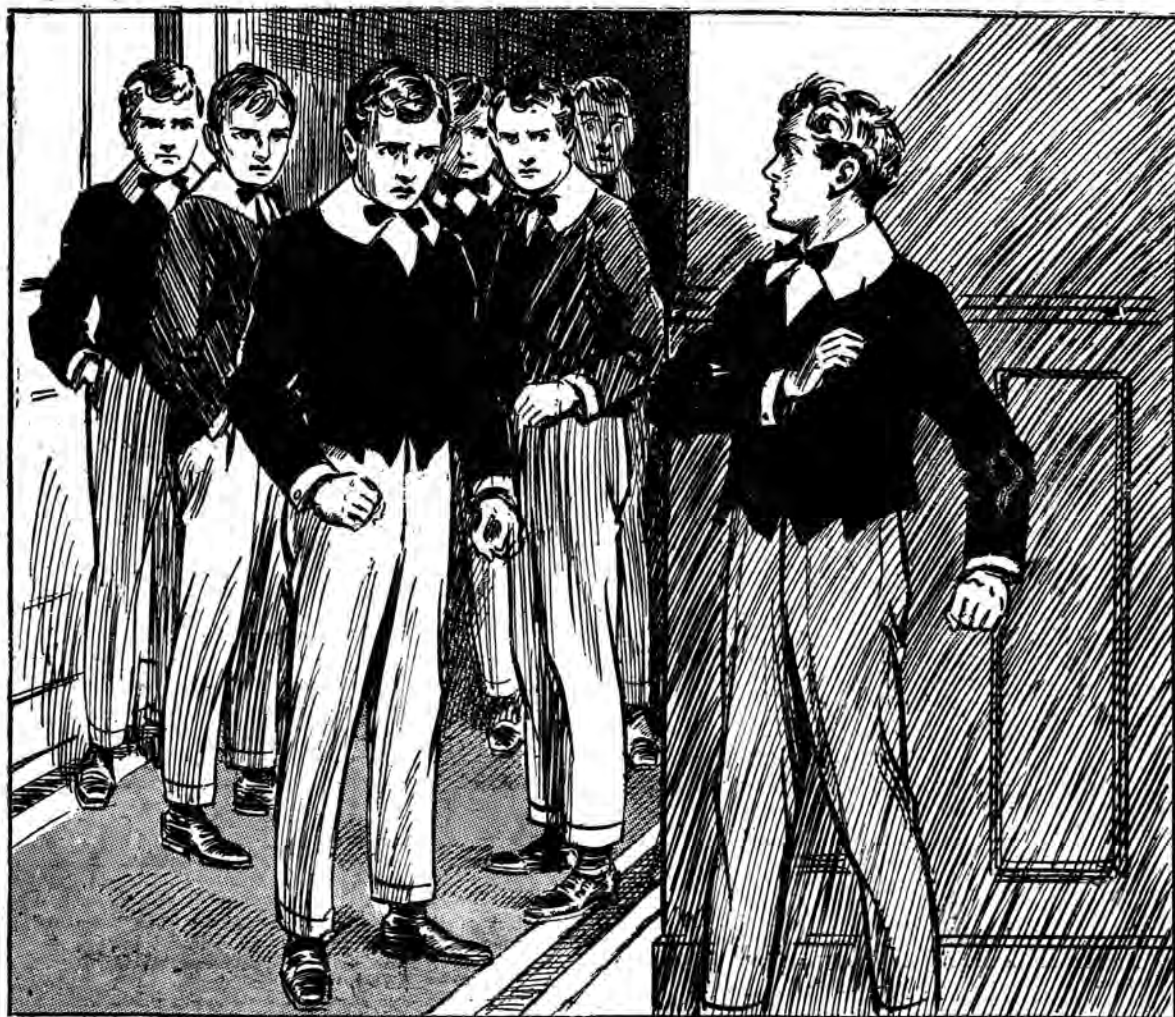
"Oh!" Mr. Railton's tone showed bitter disappointment, and was a trifle impatient. He had hoped that the news was good news of the missing junior. "And you came from Rylcombe to tell us this—"

"To warn Dr. Holmes, sir," explained Mr. Crump, glancing loftily at the startled juniors. "The hinspector phoned me to come and warn him as there's a gang of hexpert cracksmen workin' in the neighbourhood, sir."

"Ah; I see! Well, you will find Dr. Holmes in his study, Mr. Crump," said Mr. Railton.

The page-boy went on, with the portly constable in tow, and, with a kindly nod, Mr. Railton passed on.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Tom Merry. "What's the next thing, I wonder! Glyn House burgled, eh? I wonder if they got away with much? It looks— Hallo! Here's Glyn. We'll ask him."



"What with the burglary at Glyn's place, and the gipsy encampment," said Tom Merry, "there's something fishy about that new fellow Lathom—" Tom Merry stopped abruptly and his jaw dropped as he suddenly became aware of a red-headed junior standing in the shadow of a doorway near at hand. "You heard what we were saying, Lathom?" he said, stepping up to the junior. (See this page.)

At that moment Bernard Glyn of the Shell came along, and Tom Merry stopped him excitedly.

"I say, Glyn! I suppose you've heard the news—"

"What news? Something fresh about the thefts—" began Bernard Glyn wonderingly.

"No. Your house was burgled last night—"

"What?"

"We've just heard it from old Crump!"

And Tom Merry told the astonished Shell junior what P.-c. Crump had told Mr. Railton.

"My hat!" gasped Bernard Glyn, in alarm. "I hadn't heard a word about it. I'll get on the phone to the pater. Come on, you fellows!"

The juniors hurried along to the prefects' room. As it happened, Darrell was just emerging, and he readily granted permission to use the phone.

And a minute later, Glyn was ringing up Glyn House. When he joined Tom Merry & Co. a few seconds later, his face was grave.

"It's true enough, you fellows," he exclaimed seriously. "The scoundrels have collared hundreds of pounds' worth of stuff, and they've got clear away. It wasn't found out until this morning."

"My hat!"

The exclamation came from Manners.

"Last night!" gasped Manners excitedly. "These two men on the moor! Do you think—"

"What the thump—" began Tom Merry, frowning. "Great Scott! You think those gipsies had something to do—"

"What on earth are you fellows gassing about?" inquired Glyn.

Tom Merry hesitated. And then he hurriedly told him

of their midnight search for D'Arcy, and of the strange thing they had seen at the encampment.

"Great pip!" muttered Bernard Glyn. "I don't know what that business of the new chap means; but those two men with the sack—it looks jolly suspicious. Hanged if I don't ring up the pater and tell him."

And without further ado, Bernard Glyn slipped into the prefects' room again.

"This makes it more mysterious than ever!" remarked Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Blessed if I hadn't forgotten all about it. I'd intended to tackle that new fellow Lathom this morning about it. There's something jolly fishy about him—"

Tom Merry stopped abruptly and his jaw dropped as he suddenly became aware of a red-headed junior standing in the shadow of a doorway a few yards away. It was Ginger, the new boy, and from his alarmed face, it was obvious he had heard all.

He hesitated a moment, and then he stepped up to the junior.

"You heard what we were saying, Lathom?" he said curtly. "We saw you last night—at the gipsy encampment, when we were searching for D'Arcy. It isn't our business, but—but how comes it that you—a fellow who's only been in England a few days should be familiar with such a pair of rascals?"

For a moment the youth eyed them in alarm; but he quickly recovered himself, and his sharp eyes gleamed.

"If you wants to know, I'll tell yer," he said sullenly. "I only met 'em yesterday afternoon. Them was the blokes what put me right when I lost meself out running."

"And you broke bounds at midnight, to renew their acquaintance?" asked Herries, with heavy sarcasm.

The reply came cool and swift. "I was out like you—looking for D'Arcy!" he declared. "It struck me in bed last night as p'raps them gipsy blokes would have seen him, and I went to ask 'em."

There was a silence. The answer seemed reasonable enough; but it left the juniors cold. They could not forget the men's familiar manner of speaking to the boy. But before anyone could reply, Bernard Glyn emerged from the prefects' room.

"I've told the pater, and he thinks it jolly suspicious," he announced excitedly. "He's going to get a search-warrant out—he's a magistrate, y'know—and get the police to search the camp this morning. My hat! I wish—"

Glyn stopped in confusion as he became aware of Ginger's presence. But at that moment the bell for chapel began to ring, and Tom Merry took advantage of the interruption to end the discussion. He believed the new boy was lying, and he did not intend to ask for more lies.

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. walked away with Bernard Glyn, leaving Ginger staring after them.

"Crumbs!" muttered Ginger, in alarm. "So—the cops are going to search the camp, are they? I'd better warn 'em or the game's up proper!"

For a brief moment the strange new boy hesitated, his brain working swiftly. The finding of the prisoners in the camp would mean freedom for D'Arcy; but it would also mean prison for himself—and an end to his hopes of going straight—of starting life afresh.

No; it wasn't good enough. Though he was still determined to bring about D'Arcy's release, he did not want it brought about that way. There was a better way if he bided his time.

Without waiting to get his cap, without a thought of chapel or classes, the new boy left the School House and dashed bareheaded across the quad. A few minutes later he was running at top speed to warn his accomplices.

CHAPTER 4.

The Caravan Prisoners!

MEANWHILE, what had happened to D'Arcy?

When the swell of the Fourth had sprained his ankle during the cross-country run, he had urged Ginger, his new chum, to go on without him, and had then started back for St. Jim's.

Rather than return the way he had come he had chosen the shorter route across the corner of Wayland Moor, and it was when passing the caravan encampment that he had been amazed to see Ginger, whom he imagined was still taking part in the cross-country run, emerge from the larger caravan.

At the same moment Ginger had seen him, but, instead of stopping, the strange new boy had taken to his heels in the direction of St. Jim's. Considerably astonished, Arthur Augustus had started to hobble after him, when just as he was passing the smaller van, an alarming thing happened.

From beneath the van a large wolfhound had leaped out at him and sent him headlong. Fortunately, however, the dog was chained to a wheel of the van, and the brute's charge had sent D'Arcy rolling out of reach.

Dazedly, D'Arcy had staggered to his feet, when he was startled by a shout, and, looking up, he beheld a face at the little window of the van—a boy's face, so like Ginger's, that Gussy had almost fallen down with surprise.

But he was more surprised still when the stranger had made himself known. For he had claimed to be Mark Lathom, the new boy from the West. In a few brief words he had told how he had been kidnapped when on his way to St. Jim's, and ended by urging D'Arcy to go for help.

Before Arthur Augustus could do this, however, or even grasp the story clearly—two burly ruffians had rushed up and captured him. His wrists were tied together, and he was bundled into the van.

Then the door was slammed and locked, and the bewildered Arthur Augustus found himself a prisoner with the stranger who had solicited his aid.

For a full minute after that, the swell of the Fourth stared at the ragged-looking stranger who stood regarding him grimly, and a little remorsefully.

Like himself, the stranger's wrists were tied behind him, and now D'Arcy could see him more clearly he noted that, while the strange boy resembled the Mark Lathom he knew in essential features, there was yet a noticeable difference.

Both had the same glaring red hair and bright blue eyes; but whereas the face of the boy who had arrived at St. Jim's as Mark Lathom two days ago was pale and somewhat pinched, the face of this stranger was robust and sun-tanned.

D'Arcy was the first to speak. "Bai Jove!" he stammered feebly. "What does this remarkable affair mean? Weally, you know—"

"I reckon it means," said the stranger grimly, "that those

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rustling galoots have got you as well as me, chum. I guess I'm right sorry I asked you to chip in now—"

"But—but I uttally fail to undahstand, deah boy!" gasped the bewildered D'Arcy. "How—how can you be Mark Lathom when—when Mark Lathom has already awwived at St. Jim's?"

"I reckon you're wrong there, chum. If any galoot has arrived at St. Jim's in my name he's an impostor, that's sure. I guess I'm the real goods, if I am in rags!" ended the stranger, grinning down at his tattered attire.

"Bai Jove!"

"But I'd best put you wise to the yarn," went on the real Mark Lathom.

And next moment he was telling his story to the amazed Arthur Augustus. How he had started to walk from Wayland Junction, and had lost himself on the desolate moor in the mist and rain; how he had climbed up into the old windmill to take his bearings, and whilst there had made the acquaintance of the runaway Ginger, and afterwards of the boy's cruel taskmasters—Bolton and Slaney. Then he went on to tell how he had been lured to the camp, and, after being forced to change clothes with the reluctant Ginger, had been imprisoned in the caravan.

"But I reckon it was my own fault," ended the red-haired youth ruefully. "I shouldn't have been such a goldarned fool as to tell those rustlers who I was and all my family history."

"But—but what have the scoundrels done it for?" ejaculated the astonished D'Arcy. "Why—"

"I guess I can't answer that!" said the boy from the West. "But they've got some deep game on, sure!"

"It—it's amazing, bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, in great distress. "I nevah dweamed that youngstah was such a wascal!"

And in his turn he told of the young impostor's arrival at St. Jim's, and of the plucky way he had acted when Gussy was in danger of being crushed beneath the wheels of the motor-lorry.

"Gee! But that youngster's got grit!" was Mark Lathom's comment. "I guess, though, that doesn't alter the fact that he's an accomplice of those galoots. But, say, we've got to get out of this!"

"But how, deah boy? Have you tried—"

"Sure. But my hands being tied behind me I could do nothing. Now you've come I guess it's easier. If I can bite through that rope round your wrists—"

"Bai Jove!"

"But don't be too chirpy about that," warned the stranger. "It's one thing getting our hands free, but another getting out of this old shebang. And there's the dog chained up outside, remember."

D'Arcy's face fell, and at that moment a heavy step sounded outside. Next moment the door opened, and the scoundrelly Slaney appeared.

In his arms were a couple of horse-rugs. These he dropped on the floor. He went outside again, and returned with a plate of bread and cheese and a jug of hot tea. Evidently the rascals did not propose to starve their prisoners.

"Them rugs are to sleep on, and 'ere's yer tea!" said the man roughly. "I'm goin' to loosen your hands while you eats, but no games, mind!"

The man released the juniors' hands, and stood watchful as they set to work on the meal. D'Arcy scarcely touched anything, but Mark Lathom was not so particular. And when the meal was ended they submitted to be tied up again. It was useless to attempt to escape then, and they knew it.

But when the man had gone again Mark Lathom set to work resolutely on the rope that bound D'Arcy's wrists. But it was useless from the first. The rope was new and resisted all attempts to gnaw through, though he stuck to his task until his jaws ached and his gums bled.

He gave it up at last, and the prisoners flung themselves dejectedly on the heap of rugs. Fortunately for D'Arcy—who was, of course, still garbed in his running attire—a couple of old blankets were found in the van, and with these and the rugs they made themselves tolerably comfortable.

For hours they lay there while the dusk deepened into darkness. To while away the time Mark Lathom told tales of the West, whilst D'Arcy entertained his fellow-prisoner with yarns and news of life at St. Jim's.

But at last, tired out and hopeless, both boys fell asleep, little dreaming, as they slept, that help, in the form of Tom Merry & Co., had been within a hundred yards of their prison during the still hours.

It was broad daylight when they awoke, and the summer morning's sunshine was streaming in at the windows of the caravan. Presently the door was flung open, and Slaney entered with breakfast for the prisoners.

The same performance as on the previous day was gone

through, and when the meal was over the man bound them again, and left the van, carefully locking the door after him.

It was half an hour afterwards that Lathom, who was staring dejectedly out of the little window, gave a sudden exclamation.

“Hallo! Here’s that young galoot, Ginger,” he said grimly. “I guess there’s something wrong!”

Arthur Augustus jumped up to the window, and was just in time to see the bareheaded figure of the young impostor dash across the clearing and enter the other van.

“Bai Jove! It certainly does look as if somethin’s w’ong,” admitted Arthur Augustus. “That young wascal ought to be in class now.”

For several minutes they watched the other van, and then they saw Ginger come out and run towards the van they were in. He stopped below the side window, ostentatiously to pat and fondle the dog. But then, to the prisoners’ surprise, his voice came to them in a hoarse whisper.

“D’Arcy! I say, eyeglass!”

The prisoners glowered down at him.

“Bai Jove! You—you young wascal!” shouted D’Arcy hotly. “What do—”

“Shut yer row!” hissed the impostor, without looking up.

“Listen! I jist want to tell you to keep yer pecker up. I’ll have you outer that before long.”

And before either of the prisoners could answer him Ginger dashed across the clearing, and was swallowed up among the trees.

The kidnapped boys just had time to jump down and look questioningly at each other, when hasty footsteps were heard outside the van. Then the door was flung open, and Bolton, followed by Slaney, entered.

Both men looked considerably alarmed, and, without any preliminaries, they gripped the boy from America and, despite his surprised struggles, flung him roughly to the floor.

Bolton passed a length of rope again and again round the boy’s legs, and secured it. This done, he rammed a piece of rag into the boy’s mouth, and gagged him.

A couple of minutes later the alarmed Arthur Augustus was treated likewise. Then both were rolled to one corner of the van.

The scoundrels’ next proceedings filled the alarmed prisoners with astonishment.

Bolton stooped, and, inserting his fingers in a crevice of the floor, he tugged vigorously, and a section of the floor planking came up, disclosing to view—not the ground, but a shallow cavity. The van had a false floor.

But scarcely had the boys grasped the significance of this when they were lowered one by one into the dark cavity. Then the huge trapdoor was replaced, and the prisoners found themselves in darkness.

They heard their captors leave the van, and next second the door slammed.

For what seemed hours the unfortunate prisoners lay there scarcely able to breathe, until their senses almost left them under the strain. And then they became aware of voices outside the van, voices that, to D’Arcy at least, seemed familiar, and a thrill of hope filled them.

Quite suddenly the voices became clearer, and footsteps sounded above their heads. For some moments the tramp of feet, the sound of boxes being moved, and lockers being opened were heard, and then silence fell.

There followed another interminable wait, and then again came voices and footsteps above. Then, with startling suddenness, the planks above them lifted, and a flood of light swept into the hole.

The boys found themselves staring up at the grinning faces of Bolton and Slaney.

“You can come up now, my beauties!” said Bolton, with a chuckle.

The boys were lifted out, and the false floor replaced. Then, to the boys’ intense relief, the horrible gags were removed, and their captors set to work to release their legs.

D’Arcy’s legs were soon released, but for some minutes Slaney struggled ineffectively to untie the rope round Lathom’s legs. With an impatient exclamation, he took a claspknife from his pocket at last, and slashed through the rope.

In another moment both boys were free save for the cord round their wrists; and, without vouchsafing any explanation the rascals left the van, locking the door after them.

For some seconds the boys were silent, drawing deep breaths as they slowly recovered from their unpleasant ordeal. Then the boy from the West gave a gasping grunt.

“Gee, but I guess I’m glad that’s over!” he said thankfully. “But say, old chap, what’s the meaning of it all, anyway? I’m beat! Who were those strangers we heard?”

“It was the police,” explained D’Arcy dismally. “I recognised Inspector Skeat’s voice, and Mr. Cwump’s from Wylcombe. They were probabably searchin’ for me, bai Jove! How feahfully wotten!”

“Then I guess that explains why young Ginger came in such a hurry—he came to warn ’em.”

“I’m afwaid so, deah boy.”

For a moment there was silence. The thought that help had been so near and had failed them was bitter indeed. But even as they stood thus Mark Lathom gave an exclamation of joy as his keen eyes fell upon an article lying on the floor. It was the claspknife with which Slaney had cut his bonds, and had evidently forgotten.

“Great jumping crackers!” he gasped. “What a stroke of luck!”

And to D’Arcy’s astonishment the boy from the West flung himself on the floor, and, rolling over, began to grope blindly for the knife with his tied hands.

CHAPTER 5.

A Bid for Liberty!

“Bai Jove! Pway what is the mattab, deah boy?” asked D’Arcy in astonishment.

Lathom struggled to his feet, and, turning his back, revealed the knife, gripped in his hands.

“How weally wippin’!” ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

“Then—then we’ve a chance of escape, Lathom?”

“Sure—a fighting chance,” agreed the red-haired youth, clenching his teeth grimly. “And I guess we’re going to make the most of it. But I’m thinking we’d better wait until that galoot’s been in with dinner. Too late in the morning now.”

“Yaas, wathah! But have you a plan?”

“Sure!” The boy from America jumped up to the little window at the back of the van, and began to examine the framework keenly. “I guess I was right,” he went on, jumping down again. “The frames of these windows are only screwed in, and we ought to shift this one easily. Meanwhile, I guess I’d better hide the knife.”

And Mark Lathom carefully hid the claspknife in a safe place. Then the prisoners sat themselves down to wait for Slaney.

He came shortly afterwards, and immediately the meal was over, and the fellow had gone, Mark Lathom began his attack on D’Arcy’s bonds.

It was work that needed care, for the knife edge was like a razor, and the juniors had to stand back to back while the new fellow sawed cautiously. But he managed it at last, and once D’Arcy’s wrists were free it was a simple matter for him to release his companion.

Then the prisoners set to work on the screws round the window-frame. But they quickly found this a more difficult task than they had anticipated. The screws were old and deeply embedded under layers of paint. Moreover, they had to work carefully to avoid snapping the single blade of the knife.

By painstaking effort and careful manipulation, however, the screws were all drawn out one by one, though the evening was drawing in by the time the last had been coaxed from its bed. And a couple of minutes later the window had been lifted out and laid carefully on the floor of the van.

“Gee, but we’ve done it!” panted the red-haired youth. “We’ve got to look slippy before that galoot comes with tea. Out you get! And remember that if one of us comes to grief the other musn’t wait to help. Better for one to get clear than for both to be recaptured. Hallo! Come on—quick!”

At that moment a heavy step sounded outside, and Mark Lathom waited no longer for the vacillating Gussy to make the first move. He hauled himself up to the aperture and fairly hurled himself through.

He dropped, sprawling, on the ground outside, and, picking himself up, he darted across the open space and vanished amid the trees.

But unfortunately D’Arcy was not so lucky.

On his mettle now, he was through the aperture quickly enough, and dropped to the ground; but as he assayed to rise he fell back with a low groan.

In the excitement of the moment D’Arcy had forgotten his ankle, still weak from the sprain the previous day. He had dropped with all his weight on the damaged foot, which, unable to bear the strain, had given way under him.

At that moment something else happened that made the junior’s heart leap with dread.

There was a low, threatening growl, the sharp rattle of a chain, and round the end of the van leaped the huge wolf-hound, his ugly jaws agape and his wicked eyes glaring.

With a desperate effort Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet, but just as he expected the savage brute to hurl himself upon him, the chain jerked the brute back on its haunches. And happily the stout chain held it there, straining impotently to reach its victim.

At that moment also there came an angry bellow from the interior of the van, and immediately afterwards Slaney came dashing from the front.

For an instant he stared transfixed at the helpless D'Arcy, and then, with a savage imprecation, he flung himself upon the junior.

"Here, Jim—quick!" he yelled frantically. "Quick!"

There followed the thud of running feet, and Bolton appeared, to stop and stare in angry amazement at the scene.

"What the blazes—"

"Quick—after the other young 'ound, Jim!" shouted Slaney, pointing to the belt of trees. "I'll attend to this one."

Without a word Bolton dashed off in the direction his accomplice indicated; and, stooping, Slaney picked up the struggling D'Arcy as though he were a baby and hurried across the clearing.

He reached the larger caravan, and flung the junior to the floor. Then, despite D'Arcy's feeble struggles, the ruffian took a coil of rope from his pocket and tied the boy's wrists behind him. Then he left the van, locking the door after him, and dashed in the wake of his leader.

He burst through the belt of trees, to see Mark Lathom running in the distance, with Bolton a hundred yards behind. The fugitive was running well, and doubtless would have escaped then but for an unexpected development.

Coming from the direction of St. Jim's was a youthful figure, and both pursuer and pursued recognised him at the same moment. It was Ginger, the impostor, who, classes being over, was on his way to keep his appointment with his accomplices.

"Stop him, Ginger!" howled Bolton frantically.

But Ginger had no opportunity had he wanted to. Recognising another enemy, Mark Lathom altered his course; and, after a moment's hesitation, Ginger went in pursuit.

For quite five minutes the pursuit went on in grim silence. Once Lathom looked back, and as he saw that both men and Ginger were on his track, he went on with renewed courage, thinking, quite naturally, that D'Arcy had escaped.

Lathom was making now for a line of broken fence that showed on the skyline at the top of a slight rise, and as he noticed this, Ginger, who was the nearest to him, let out a terrified yell of warning.

"Stop! For Heaven's sake stop!"

But it was too late.

Even as the impostor shouted, the figure of the fugitive was seen to leap the low rails. For a brief instant he showed up clearly against the skyline in the gathering dusk, then he dropped from sight and there came a cry of terror to the alarmed watchers' ears.

With blanched faces they hurried to the spot. They knew what had happened. For beyond the fence the moor dropped sheer away into the dreaded quarry pool, and in his ignorance of the district the unfortunate Mark Lathom had leaped the rails and dropped to his death in the black depths of the silent pool fifty feet below.

But had he?

As Ginger stepped to the fence and peered fearfully over he gave a deep gasp of relief. At that spot just over the rails the ground fell away for a couple of feet only. Beyond this a shelving bank of loose sand and shingle sloped to the edge of the abyss. And half over the edge, his feet scribbling frantically at the face of the quarry, his fingers clinging desperately at the soft earth above, hung the fugitive.

Even as his pursuers reached the spot, the unfortunate boy began to slide, inch by inch, over the edge, and in that terrible moment, Ginger, the cracksman's accomplice, the illiterate vagabond and impostor, once again proved the sterling stuff he was made of.

"Old on, matey!" he cried confidently. "I'll soon 'ave you outer that!"

Slipping beneath the fence, the boy lowered himself on to the shelving shingle. He allowed himself to slide slowly downwards until he reached a scraggy bit of bush that grew near the extreme edge.

Digging his feet into the loose soil behind this, he swung his body round and took a firm grip of Mark Lathom's wrists.

Only just in time. At that moment the boy felt a tremendous tug that almost jerked his arms from their sockets, as Mark Lathom's feet lost all grip.

It was a moment of extreme peril, but the plucky youth held on, though the strain was terrible.

"Hold on, matey!" he panted hoarsely. "I—I'll try—Crumbs! Try to get a footing, for 'Eaven's sake! This here bush is givin'—Quick!"

Mark Lathom gritted his teeth and strove desperately for foothold. Suddenly his scrambling foot caught something that held, and—how he never knew—he managed to draw himself up and swing one leg over the edge and then the other.

At that moment, by a miracle it seemed, his fingers, groping beneath Ginger's straining wrists, gripped something—a sharp edge of firm rock, and his heart thrilled with hope.

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"Let—let go, kid!" he gasped. "I'm safe, I think. Hold on, and—"

Mark Lathom broke off. There was a soft, ominous swish, a stifled cry of fear from Ginger, and a shower of soil and stones swept past Lathom's face.

Then before he could stretch out a helping hand—before he could even grasp what had happened, the sprawling form of Ginger slithered past him and he was alone.

For an eternity of time he seemed to lie there in the ominous silence which followed, and then from below came a dull, distant splash, and he understood.

What Ginger had feared had happened. The shrub had broken away, and unable to stop his headlong descent, the plucky impostor had gone over—to his death.

At the thought Mark Lathom's blue eyes gleamed resolutely. He drew himself first to his knees and then to his feet. He stood swaying for a second, and then, even as his feet began to slide beneath him, he jumped outwards and downwards.

Down, down, down he fell, feet foremost, plump as a plummet, with the wind whistling past his ears and a horrible feeling that the whole world was falling away from him.

Then came a shock—a terrific icy shock—and a thunderous roaring in his ears as the waters of the quarry pool closed round his head.

CHAPTER 8. The Waif's Sacrifice!

THOSE next few terrible moments seemed like an eternity to Mark Lathom as he fought desperately against the blackness that threatened to overwhelm him.

Then, with startling suddenness, the darkness gave place to light, and he found himself on the surface of the pool, drawing in deep gasps of the cool night air.

For a time he struggled feebly to keep afloat, and then, as his brain cleared a little, he glanced about him eagerly.

As he scanned the dark waters in the deepening dusk a touselled red head appeared suddenly above the surface a few yards away, and he gave a deep sigh of relief. It was obvious at first glance, however, that Ginger could not swim, or had injured himself, for the boy was beating the water feebly in a frantic effort to keep afloat.

Taking a deep breath, Mark Lathom swam slowly, with great difficulty, towards him, and approaching him from behind he got a grip of the boy.

"Keep quiet, kid, and don't struggle!" he panted, as Ginger began to struggle again. "You're all right!"

Though he spoke with confidence, Mark Lathom felt anything but confident. A glance round told him that to try to land near where they were was hopeless. The cliff thereabouts dropped sheer into the water, and the nearest landing-place was far away on the other side of the pool.

Mark Lathom still felt weak, and incapable of the fight to reach it; but he clenched his lips, and turning on his back he struck out towards it.

"Let me go!" gasped Ginger hoarsely. "Save yerself, guv'nor! I—I ain't worth savin'! Let me go!"

"Not much, old sport!" panted Lathom. "Shut up!"

After that Lathom saved his breath for the struggle, and he needed it. It was not a long swim, but his clothes and boots weighed like lead upon him, and the additional drag of the helpless boy he was towing made him despair at times of ever reaching the platform of rock he was making for.

Fortunately the wretched waif had the good sense to keep still; but it was a grim and desperate fight for all that—a fight against terrible odds. But the boy's grim determination and resolute pluck won the battle.

Exhausted and panting, he reached the platform of rock, and with his last ounce of strength helped the gasping Ginger on to it. Then, in his turn, Ginger leaned over and helped him to scramble on to the ledge, and after that both boys sank, utterly spent, in heaps on the rock.

For a full minute they lay there, panting and gasping like stranded fish. Then the young impostor sat up and regarded his rescuer with mingled awe and astonishment.

"You—you saved my life, guv'nor!" he gasped huskily. "After what I done to you, too!"

Lathom eyed him curiously. He could scarcely regard him as an enemy now—after what had happened.

"And you saved mine first, so we're quits, I guess," he said, grinning feebly. "But we'd better be getting out of this—if we can."

Whilst speaking the boy from America had been glancing around him, and his heart sank at what he saw.

A couple of yards behind them on the rocky platform stood an old crane and a tumbledown shed—relics of the quarry outfit that remained, though the quarry itself had become flooded. And beyond this the rocky wall rose sheer and unscalable.

Looking upwards, Mark Lathom allowed his eyes to roam

round the edge of the quarry. There was no sign of Bolton or Slaney. The whole quarry seemed silent and deserted.

"I reckon we're stranded here, old chap," he said soberly, "unless we swim for it again, and I guess I don't feel up to that yet. What about those—those pals of yours? Looks as if they think we've gone under, and they've beat it."

Ginger's eyes gleamed and his brow darkened.

"Don't you think that! We ain't finished with 'em yet!" he declared hoarsely. "Them blokes ain't the sort to let either of us go!"

"You sound as though you ain't any too fond of them," commented Lathom, eyeing the boy curiously.

"I ain't!" said the boy fiercely; and Mark Lathom was surprised at the vehemence of the youth's reply. "One of 'em's my stepfather; but I 'ates them both, and all I wants is to get clear of them! I wants to run straight. I expects you thinks I'm as bad as them. But they made me do what I done."

The youth broke off, with a shiver.

"But it ain't no good talking!" he went on bitterly. "Anyway, don't think you've escaped from 'em, 'cause you haven't! The guv'nor must 'ave seen us swim over here, and he's gone round to get the boat, I bet—"

"The boat?"

"Yes! There's a little landing-stage and a boat at the far end of the pool, and they'll be coming looking for us in a minute, I knows!"

Mark Lathom's jaw set grimly.

"Then I guess they won't get me again so easily! I'm going to make a fight for it this time!" he said, getting to his feet quickly. "What about you? Am I to look upon you as a friend or a foe?"

For a moment the waif hesitated. Then he turned impulsively to the fellow whom he had rescued and who, in his turn, had rescued him.

"I'm going to help you, guv'nor!" he said huskily.

"Before this happened I didn't care a hang about what happened to you. It was different with that bloke as wears a winder-pane. He was good to me, and I meant to help him to escape if I could. But what's happened to him? Has he escaped, too?"

"I think so. Both those galoots came after me, so I guess he must have done."

"Then it don't make any difference to me whether I helps you to get clear or not!" said the outcast bitterly. "It's the stone jug for me, in any case! The game's up, and I'm goin' to give you your chance. Listen. You got to change clothes with me, and when we gets clear of this you can go back to the school in my place. It's too dark for 'em to spot the difference, and we're as like as two peas—"

"But what about you—"

"Never mind me! If I gets a chance to bolt I'm taking it! But hurry up!" muttered the boy urgently. "Them blokes will be 'ere in two ticks! Listen!"

Both stood stock still, listening. To their straining ears came the creak and splash of oars in the distance. And Mark Lathom hesitated no longer.

He grasped the fact that the young impostor was offering him a chance to escape, and he intended to make the most of it—though he little dreamed at the moment what a sacrifice the wretched waif was making in offering it to him.

Only Ginger realised that. He knew only too well that once in the hands of his scoundrelly stepfather his chances of escape were nil. And he also knew that when the deception was discovered he would have to face a terrible reckoning for his treachery at the hands of his accomplices.

On top of this, he fully realised that if D'Arcy had escaped, then by allowing himself to be taken back a prisoner to the camp he was jeopardizing his one slender chance of escaping the police.

But the boy had made up his mind, and he did not flinch. Working desperately, the boys wrenched their sodden clothes off, and in a moment or two Mark Lathom had changed his rags for the equally soaked Etons.

They had scarcely finished when a boat with two men in



The door of the caravan opened and Slaney entered, carrying a plate of bread and cheese and a jug of hot tea. "Ere yer are," he said roughly. "I'm goin' to loosen your hands while yer eats; but no games, mind!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Mark Lathom stared dejectedly at their captor. (See page 8.)

it—obviously Bolton and Slaney—swung into view round the projecting mass of rock in the gathering darkness.

"You'd best say as little as you can," muttered Ginger, in a low tone. "Let 'em think we're too done up to talk."

Lathom nodded, and at that moment a loud shout told the boys they had been seen, and the boat crept in towards them.

As it touched the rock Bolton stood up in the bows and drew it broadside on to the platform.

"Come on, Ginger, you young fool!" he snarled, glaring at Mark Lathom in the deep gloom. "Look lively, hang you!"

Mark Lathom muttered an inaudible reply, and dropping into the boat, he collapsed there as if he were done to the world.

"Now, you!" went on the scoundrel, scowling at Ginger. "And no games, mind, or there'll be trouble! We'll watch you don't give us the slip again, my beauty!"

Without answering, Ginger also dropped into the boat, and Bolton pushed off, while his companion settled down to the oars.

The boat crept out into the silent pool. Soon the landing-stage came into view. The men were morose, and seemed not a little frightened at the turn affairs had taken, and neither spoke again during the trip.

But it was obvious that they had no suspicion of the change of identity between the boys.

As the boat bumped into the landing-stage Bolton sprang out, and grasping the supposed Mark Lathom by his ragged collar, he hauled him roughly out of the boat.

"I ain't letting go of you again, young shaver!" he snarled savagely. "A nice dance you've led us, and it serves you right what you got!"

Ginger did not reply. He stood shivering, with bent head and chattering teeth. In his wretched, sodden rags he presented a pitiable object, and looked what he really was—utterly downcast and hopeless.

"As for you, me young hero," went on Bolton, turning, with a sneer, to the boy he believed to be Ginger, "you'd best cut off as fast as you can back to the school, Ginger, and get them wet things off! And don't forget to come along to-night as early as you can! I wants to see yer! Yer knows what about!"

Mark Lathom hesitated. Curiously enough, now he had THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 803.

the chance to escape he seemed strangely reluctant to take it. It began to dawn in upon his mind what a sacrifice the wretched Ginger was making, and his heart smote him.

But it was too late now.

"Lost yer tongue, Ginger?" snarled the man, glaring suspiciously through the gloom at the boy.

"All right, guv'nor!" muttered Mark Lathom in as good an imitation of Ginger's hoarse tone as he could manage. "I'll come!"

"You'd better!" snapped Bolton meaningly. "Don't come any more games with us, Ginger, or you knows what to expect! And now, young yankee-doodle, you'd best leg it, 'less you wants to catch your death o' cold! And we wants no coroner's inquests round here!"

And, with that, the man gave the wretched Ginger a rough push, and, with one of the scoundrels on either side of him, the boy scrambled up the steep slope in the direction of the camp, whilst Mark Lathom started off at a trot in the opposite direction.

He had not the faintest idea in which direction St. Jim's lay, but he knew that if he kept on he would get somewhere. And he ran on over the rough ground at a speed which soon sent the blood racing through his chilled veins.

CHAPTER 7.

The Raid on the Camp!

"HALF a minute, you chaps!"

As he spoke Tom Merry stopped suddenly, and his face whitened.

With the captain of the Shell were his chums—Monty Lowther, Manners, Blake, Herries, Digby, and Kit Wildrake, the Canadian junior. Still hopeful of finding traces of their missing chum, the seven juniors had been out since tea-time scouring Wayland Moor. But again the search had proved futile. And all of the juniors were feeling hopeless and despondent as they returned to St. Jim's in the deepening dusk.

As Tom Merry spoke, the others stopped and eyed him inquiringly.

"It's just struck me," said Tom Merry in a low tone. "We haven't yet searched round the Quarry Pool. Supposing old Gussy's been wandering round there in the darkness and—had an accident?"

The juniors looked at each other, and their faces blanched. "I don't say it's probable," went on Tom Merry quietly. "But—but it's quite possible. That doesn't mean necessarily that Gussy's fallen into the pool. He may be lying helpless on a ledge somewhere."

"We'd better go," said Blake hoarsely. "Good Heavens! Supposing he's—"

Blake broke off and gulped, but the others knew what he had been about to say.

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry.

The juniors hurried on in the gathering darkness, their hearts filled with dread and foreboding. Had D'Arcy lost his sense of direction in the darkness on that desolate moor? And had he stumbled over the quarry brink and met his death in that dark pool?

Happily the anxious searchers were soon to learn otherwise. They had been stumbling on for several moments when they became aware of a dim, bedraggled figure running towards them. It was Mark Lathom. More by good luck than by good management the boy from America had chanced, in his aimless running, to strike the right direction.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tom Merry as he drew nearer. "It's that new chap Lathom. What on earth's happened to the fellow?"

The juniors stopped and waited as the stranger came running up, his clothes clinging to him, and his boots squelching dismally as he ran.

"Say, are you St. Jim's fellows?" he panted, coming to a halt and glancing at their caps.

"St.—St. Jim's fellows? Of course we are, you chump!" snapped Tom Merry. "What the thump are you gassing about, Lath—"

Tom Merry broke off abruptly with an exclamation, and peered intently into the face of the boy before him.

"Who the thump are you?" he ejaculated in bewilderment. "You—you are not Mark Lathom—"

The stranger grinned faintly.

"I guess I am," he said. "I reckon I'm the only genuine article—all others are spurious imitations, chum."

"You—you're Mark Lathom?"

"Yep. But you seem surprised. Hasn't D'Arcy—that chap with the monocle—got back and told you the yarn?"

"What on earth are you talking about?" gasped Blake eagerly. "What do you know about D'Arcy? He's been missing since last night, and we're looking for him now."

"Then I guess I can put you right there," said the red-headed youth promptly. "And the sooner I let you have the yarn the better."

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And the next moment, in quick, telling language, the new fellow told his story—a story, needless to say, which left the juniors gasping.

The story seemed wildly improbable—incredible. And yet the story rang true. They knew it must be true. They remembered many significant things now. They remembered Ginger's queer ways, and the strange incident at the gipsy camp. And this stranger's bedraggled condition proved the last part of his story at least.

They were astounded. But their chief feeling was one of relief—relief at knowing that, whether prisoner or not, D'Arcy was safe, that nothing terrible had happened to him.

"Well, my only hat!" gasped Tom Merry at last. "It—it's incredible. Thank Heaven Gussy's safe, though. So that young rascal was an impostor, after all—a wrong 'un?"

"Yep, he was; but he's a good wrong 'un," said Mark Lathom deliberately. "I tell you, chums, that kid's got grit. He may be an accomplice of those galoots; but what he did, the poor kid was made to do. Anyway, he risked his life to save me over there, and he's sacrificed his chances of liberty to give me my chance, and I guess I'm going to see he gets out of this business safely."

The juniors nodded silently. The boy was a criminal, but he was also a hero. And this unselfish act in giving up his liberty so that Mark Lathom might go free touched the juniors' hearts. Certainly there was good in the little waif. He was worth saving from prison.

"But—but what about D'Arcy?" demanded Blake excitedly. "You—you said he escaped with you. How long ago was it?"

"'Bout an hour, I should say."

Tom Merry frowned.

"Then he can't have got clear," he said emphatically, "or we should have seen something of him. Anyway, we can't afford to risk it. Look here, chaps, we'll raid the camp. Lathom, you'd better leave this affair to us now. We'll put you right for St. Jim's, and—"

"I guess you don't," said Lathom emphatically. "I guess I'm going to see this show through—"

"But—but you're drenched to the skin! You'll catch—"

"I reckon it ain't the first time I've been damp," declared Lathom, with a chuckle. "So long as I keep on the move it won't hurt this citizen. I reckon I'm itching to get a smack in at those rustling galoots!"

"Then come on," said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming.

And the next moment the start was made for the encampment. There were still many things about the amazing affair that the juniors were puzzled at and curious about. But those things could wait. One thing was clear, and that was that Arthur Augustus, prisoner or no prisoner, was safe. And their hearts were light as they raced on over the moor in the gathering darkness.

They reached the belt of trees beyond which lay the camp, panting and breathless but grimly determined.

"I vote we go slow now, chums," said Mark Lathom. "No good butting in on a job like this without scouting round first. I might warn you that there's a dog—and he's some dog, I promise you."

Cautiously the juniors pushed on through the undergrowth, and as they came in sight of the caravan camp Mark Lathom gave a gasp of surprise.

The camp, save for the glowing embers of a fire in the centre of the clearing, was in darkness, and apparently deserted. And then, as the juniors became accustomed to the gloom, they saw something which justified the new boy's warning.

From beneath the farthest caravan a dark form emerged and came slinking across the clearing. The men apparently had gone, but they had left the dog to guard the camp.

"Great Scott!" whispered Tom Merry in alarm. "What an ugly-looking brute! If the beggar sees us—"

"I guess I'll soon settle him."

The speaker was not Mark Lathom, but Kit Wildrake. Like Lathom, he had come from the Wild West—not of the States, though, but of Canada. And as he spoke the schoolboy cowboy began to unwind a rope from round his waist.

"It's my lariat," he explained briefly. "I thought it might come in useful, and I guess it's going—"

Snap!

At that moment Manners stepped upon a hidden twig in the undergrowth, and the sharp snap that followed sounded like a pistol-shot under the dark trees.

"Look out!" gasped Herries quickly. "The brute's coming!"

It was true enough. The dog had heard the sound, and he came racing across the clearing. Frantically Kit Wildrake struggled with his lasso; but he had not time to use it. Next moment the huge wolfhound, his wicked eyes gleaming in the gloom, was upon them.

With a low growl the brute launched itself into the air, straight at the throat of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 8.

Gone.

IN that critical moment of peril Tom Merry kept his nerve and acted swiftly. He stooped suddenly and shot out his fist with all his strength. The blow caught the brute with a loud smack full and sure in the throat, and, with a choking grunt, the animal dropped back to the ground. This time Kit Wildrake was ready.

His arm swung round, and the lasso whizzed through the air, uncoiling as it flew, and just as the brute crouched for another spring at Tom Merry the loop settled round its head and encircled its neck.

"Stand clear!" yelled Wildrake.

With a strong tug he dragged the animal over backwards, and, even as the savage hound rolled, snarling and snapping at the rope round its neck, Wildrake gave his lariat a few turns round a slender tree-trunk, tied it securely, and then sprang for safety.

And only just in time, for in that instant the infuriated brute sprang to its feet and leaped after the daring junior.

But Wildrake was safe. The lasso tautened, and the dog fell back on its haunches.

"Thanks, Wildrake!" gasped Tom Merry, with a shiver, as the Canadian junior joined them again. "I—I thought my number was up that time!"

"I guess he's safe enough for a bit," said Wildrake coolly, glancing at the dog straining impotently at the rope. "But I say, you chaps, there doesn't seem to be anyone about."

The juniors glanced about them keenly. If the men were in the vicinity, it was strange they had not heard the dog's outcries.

"I guess I don't quite get the hang of this!" remarked Mark Lathom uneasily. "But we'll soon know."

As he spoke he ran to the steps of the smaller van. The door was open, and a glance inside showed that it was empty. He was about to leave the van, when the sudden recollection of the false floor came to him.

"Have any of you fellows a light?" he asked quickly.

Tom Merry produced a pocket torch, and by its light Mark Lathom lifted up the huge trapdoor.

"Well, I guess this beats me!" said Mark Lathom. "They're not here, that's sure. What about the other van?"

He dropped the trapdoor of the false floor into place, and followed the disappointed juniors outside. And a general move was made to the living-van.

They found the door closed, but not locked. Evidently the man had considered the wolfhound a sufficient guard against unwelcome visitors. But as Mark Lathom pushed open the door the juniors' hearts sank.

Like the first, the living-van was also empty. Suddenly, however, Tom Merry's face cleared.

"It's beginning to look as if Gussy's escaped, after all," he said hopefully. "And perhaps the scoundrels have got the wind up and bolted."

"I guess not," said Mark Lathom, shaking his head. "Sides, what about that kid Ginger? We'd better have a look—Half a minute, though! If that other van has a false floor, why not this one? Hand me that light a minute!"

Tom Merry handed over the torch, and Mark Lathom began to examine the floor. Suddenly he gave a grunt of satisfaction, and, calling to the others to stand clear, he placed his fingers in a crevice, and tugged hard.

What he had expected happened. A large section of the flooring came up, revealing a similar cavity to the one in the other van.

But if the juniors had expected to find the missing boys lying there, they were doomed to disappointment. As the light was shone inside, Tom Merry gave a groan.

"No go!" he said. "They're not—Hallo, what's this?"

Tom Merry broke off, and, jumping down into the cavity, he grasped a canvas sack which lay there. As he pulled it over, there was a metallic sound, and from the mouth of the bag a shower of articles poured—silver articles that gleamed in the light from the torch.

There came a buzz of astonishment and enlightenment.

"Gee, that's a find!" remarked Mark Lathom. "But what does it mean, anyhow?"

"I'll tell you," said Tom Merry excitedly. "This stuff, if



As the boat bumped the rocks, Bolton stood up in the bows and drew it broadside on to the platform. "Come on, Ginger, you young fool!" he snarled, glaring at Mark Lathom in the deep gloom. "Look lively, hang you!" Mark Lathom uttered an inaudible reply and stepped into the boat. (See page 11.)

I'm not mistaken, is the loot—the proceeds of a burglary at Glyn House two nights ago."

"Then—then these galoots are burglars—"

"Exactly. And I fancy that explains the whole question," said Tom quietly. "In my opinion, they sent Ginger to St. Jim's solely to pave the way for a burglary there!"

"Great Scott!"

"I believe you're right, Tommy!" muttered Blake, after a silence. "That kid must have a nerve! But, look here, what about old Gussy? It's plain he isn't here. If he hasn't escaped, then those scoundrels must have taken him somewhere else, and we must follow."

"And that ought to be easy," put in Wildrake. "The ground's soft, and if we can pick up the track, we'll soon find them!"

Tom Merry nodded, and his face cleared.

"Then let's make a start on the job," said Tom Merry. "But before we go, I vote we put this stuff in a place of safety, in case those men come back."

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors set to work, and, after hiding the sack of plunder in a thicket in the wood, they returned to the clearing. They had scarcely done so, when heavy footsteps sounded near at hand. It was undoubtedly the men returning, and Tom Merry gave a hiss of warning.

"Quick—hide, you chaps! And when I give the word go for 'em!"

The juniors dashed behind the shelter of the van, and waited, their hearts thumping. Next moment the two men burst from the trees, and came running towards the van, talking excitedly.

They reached the steps of the van, and then Tom's voice rang out:

"Now, chaps!"

There was a startled cry, and before the men could draw weapons—before they could move—the eight determined juniors were upon them, and never were two rascals taken more by surprise.

In the grasp of many hands they thudded to the ground, and though both were hefty rascals, their struggles availed them little.

"Quick—some rope, someone!" panted Tom Merry.

Manners released his grip, and dashed into the van. He came out a couple of seconds later with a length of rope in his hands. And despite the scoundrels' frenzied struggles they were rendered helpless.

The juniors got to their feet, panting and breathless.

(Continued on page 16.)

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EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

MY DEAR READERS,—It's quite a red-letter day for all of us chaps at St. Jim's when the circus comes to town! The arrival of a circus is usually heralded by a band and procession which tours the neighbourhood to advertise the show. The last time it came by we were at class. Our Form master was out of the room at the time, so we all rushed to the window. We were so interested that we didn't hear the return of Mr. Linton. My word, wasn't he waxy, eh? He lined the lot of us.

We all troop to the circus when there's one in the neighbourhood.

We at St. Jim's know quite a good bit about circus life. Some time ago we became very chummy with the proprietor of a circus who used to bring his show to Wayland Heath, and we often used to go behind the scenes. How different things are! The glamour of the ring and arc-lights is gone; but by coming into close touch with the circus folk one realises that they are kindly, homely people indeed, and in many cases quite different from what we imagine them to be from our seats round the grand arena. For instance, the brave, dashing lion-tamer may be a regular funk when it comes to dealing with his wife; and I've seen a lady snake-charmer scream and go half potty in the presence of a mouse! Perhaps it is not generally known that Gussy, who is quite a good horseman, has ridden in the circus ring and gained much applause, and he was once smitten with the charms of a lady horse-rider belonging to the same circus; not the first time, of course, that our tame chump has lost his heart—and head! Monty Lowther, I think you will all agree, would make a topping clown if only he'd discard some of his old, hoary chestnuts and think of some fresh jokes! Fatty Wynn shows great promise of becoming a circus fat man. And Baggy Trimble would go quite well, as the Human Bo-Constrictor, wouldn't he?

Ah, well! Here's to the next circus that comes to Wayland Heath, and may we not be broke when the time comes!

Tom Merry

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 803.

THINGS THAT ATTRACT ME AT A CIRCUS!

(Short opinions of various St. Jim's Celebrities, specially collected for this number!—Ed.)

TAGGLES:

"Which the lions hat a circus har my chief hatraction. Feroshus brutes, ain't they? And wot I says is this 'ere—some of those 'ere young rips at St. Jim's oughter be thrown to the lions—just to scare some o' the cheek out of 'em. No, I wouldn't 'ave 'em heaten, because I've got no grudge against the lions. Wot I says, and wot I've always maintained is this 'ere—all boys should be drowned at birth. Then there wouldn't be no circuses!"

A. A. D'ARCY:

"I wathah like the gals in a circus, y'know, deah boys—especially the ones who wide horses. Some of them are weally wippin'—and good sports, too! I think I'd like to be a wingmastah in a circus. That would give me an opportunity to dwess pwopahly in evenin' clobber and look weally smart, bai Jove!"

FATTY WYNN:

"What attracts me in a circus is the Human Skeleton chap, who is supposed to fast for twenty days. Ugh! How on earth he does it licks me properly! I'd only last two days at the most, but the bare thought of going without grub sends cold shivers down my back!"

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW:

"I always go for the monkey-house at a circus, for there one can meditate on one's schoolfellows, and, looking round, see how true was Darwin's Theory!" (Have you ever looked in a mirror yourself, Cardew?—T. M.)

G. A. GRUNDY:

"The last time I was at a circus I was very interested in the Boxing Kangaroo. The cheeky keeper chap told me to take my face away, as it worried the animiles, and wen I started to give him a whopping, he set the Boxing Kangaroo on me. Ow! By sum strange coincidents, the Kangaroo knocked me all over the tent, and properly gave me the K.O. But wate till that circus comes round agane!"

MY CIRKUS KAREER!

By Baggy Trimble.

MI Cirkus Kareer was a short but bi no meens a sweet wan! You sea, I happened to be hard up; so wen I herd that the Fat Boy at the cirkus on Wayland Heath had been taken bad with fatty degeneration, I applide for the job!

The cirkus proprieter looked me upp and down, and sed I'd do. So they rigged me upp in a sort of spangled baithing suet and put me on show!

Br-r-r-r! It woz a kold day, too!

When I nocked off for a little while, I went round the back to see if there waz any grub nocking about. Peeping in wun of the karavans, I saw a magnificent spred lade out on the table! So in I krept, and fell to!

Then, to mi horror, I saw a horrible figgur in the doreway! It waz the cirkus strong man, Sampsonio!

"Retch!" he howled.

I jumped up and dodged round the karavan.

The performance was still on wen I ran blindly into the ring, upsetting the klowin in the middle of a summersalt. Sampsonio fell over the klowin, and that gave me a chance. I climed hastily up a tall ladder to the tite rope which at that presise moment Grippio, the Human Fly, was performing upon.

Looking down, I saw Sampsonio kumming up the ladder after me. Wot was I to do?

The people in the cirkus yelled, and Grippio neerly lost his balance! I reached the center of the rope, and then Grippio, snarling with roth, came at me! And, looking round, I saw Sampsonio crawling along the tite rope, too.

The cirkus proprieter and a number of men dragged a huge water tank into the center of the ring, rite underneath the rope where I was struggling with mi to assailants!

"Drop him!" yelled the cirkus proprieter.

Next minnit, the rope gave way and the three of us dropped into the water tank!

How I got out alive beets me. I got out, and I took to mi heels and ran out of the cirkus and streeked back to St. Jim's.

Never agane shall I konsent to appear in a cirkus!

GRUNDY the LION TAMER!

By Jack Blake



"JOLLY good show!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy warmly.

The circus performance was over, and we—that is to say, the Terrible Three, D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, and I were filing out of the huge marquee with the crowd.

There were heaps of other amusements, for besides the circus there was a menagerie and several side-shows. We spent quite a long time looking round, and then went into the next field for some tea.

We were returning to the circus again when we saw a strange sight. It was George Alfred Grundy standing in front of a cow, looking fixedly at it. Grundy did not move his eyes from the cow's face for a long time—not till he heard us coming, in fact.

"What are you looking at that cow for, you idiot?" asked Tom Merry.

"I'm trying to demonstrate the power of the human eye!" said Grundy. "You chaps have heard of how wild animals have been overcome by the influence of the human eye, haven't you? Well, I'm experimenting on this cow!"

"Ye gods!" gurgled Tom Merry.

"He's potty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy looked wrathful. He could not see anything to laugh at.

"Look here, you cackling idiots, I'll whop the lot of you!" growled the mighty man of the Shell. "I'll—"

"Never mind, Grundy," said Monty Lowther, winking at us. "I, for one, am interested in your experiments in—ahem!—animal mesmerising. You're just the chap to mesmerise animals! Don't laugh, you chaps! Come along to the circus with us, Grundy, old fellow!"

Monty winked again, and we knew that he had something up his sleeve. So we ceased to laugh and heaped soft sawdust on Grundy. Almost mollified, he went back with us to the circus ground. And on the way Monty Lowther confided unto us a plot.

Monty Lowther went into the menagerie, and five minutes later we others went in together.

The menagerie was well filled with people. It contained all sorts of animals in cages—monkeys, wolves, bears, lions, and tigers.

At one end of the menagerie there was a large cage containing a ferocious-looking lion. In front of it stood the lion-tamer—a short, pleasant-looking fellow in a gaudy uniform.

"Ladies and gentlemen, gather round!" he cried. "This is Togo, the great African lion! I am offering a prize of ten pounds to anyone who will enter the lion's cage!"

Everybody gathered round and looked at the huge monster that was squatting

in the corner of the cage, growling. There did not seem to be any takers.

"I say, Grundy, here's your chance to demonstrate the power of the human eye!" said Tom Merry. "You ought to be able to fix your eyes on the lion and subdue him, you know!"

"Ahem!" said Grundy, blinking at the lion.

"Yaas, go in and win, Gwundy, deah boy!" said Gussy encouragingly.

The lion-tamer opened the cage door, and we all gave Grundy a shove that sent him sprawling into the cage.

Grundy blinked at the lion, but the force of his eye seemed to have no effect on the lion. The monster walked forward, and Grundy gave a wild yell and dodged round the cage.

"Yaroooooh!" he cried. "Lemme out!" Curiously enough, nobody in the menagerie seemed to be frightened. On the contrary, they seemed to be highly amused. Grundy ran round and round the cage, yelling at the top of his voice, and the lion ran after him, roaring in a terrifying manner.

Then the lion gave a spring, and Grundy had a very rough time of it. At last he tore himself free, and the lion-tamer opened the cage door.

Grundy fairly hurled himself through the door. The lion roared after him!

"Grooooooh!" gasped the Shell fellow, coming to a halt where Tom Merry & Co. stood. "Oh dear! That was awful!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from inside the lion's cage. "Coming in for another go, Grundy?"

Grundy wheeled round, and his eyes goggled out of his head when he saw Monty Lowther climbing out of a lion's skin. Everybody in the menagerie



Grundy fairly gasped when he saw Monty Lowther climbing out of the lion's skin.

shrieked with laughter! As for Grundy, he could only stand and gurggle.

"Mum-my hat!" he stuttered at last.

"I've been spoofed! I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty, of course, had obtained the connivance of the lion-tamer, whose wallet he had saved. An empty cage, a lion's skin, and five minutes' confidential talk with the people in the menagerie before Grundy came in with us had been sufficient for the working of the trick.

Grundy collapsed, and staggered from the menagerie looking quite dazed. He was followed by howls of laughter, and had to hide his diminished head at St. Jim's all the evening, after that!

"RATTY" in the RING!

By George Kerr.



"COMING to the circus?"

Redfern asked that question in the New House on Wednesday afternoon—the usual St. Jim's half-holiday.

Figgins was sitting at the table, scraping away with pen and ink and impot paper.

"Ratty's given me five hundred lines, and orders to stay in this afternoon to write 'em!" he said woefully.

"Can't you manage to slip off, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins jumped up and smote the table. "I will come!" he said. "Rats on Ratty!"

Figgy kept his word, and we went.

It was a jolly fine performance, too! More than half of the turns were over, and the performing elephant was doing his tricks, when all of a sudden Tom Merry, who was sitting behind with a lot of School House chaps, gave a yell.

"Cave, Figgy! Here comes Ratcliff!"

"Figgins! You disobedient young rascal! Come with me!"

Mr. Ratcliff's heavy hand descended on Figgins, and the hero of the New House was whirled out of his seat.

"Yow!" he roared. "Leggo!"

He tore himself away and jumped into the ring!

Mr. Ratcliff, throwing all decorum to the winds, jumped into the ring after Figgy.

"Hi!" yelled the circus proprietor. "Get out! You're interrupting the act!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared everybody.

At that moment Jimbo, the performing elephant, planted his huge bulk in front of Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Ratcliff lost his temper, and began to "Shoo" violently at the elephant.

Jimbo evidently didn't like that. He gave a snort and twirled his trunk round Mr. Ratcliff. Next minute the spectators were amazed to see the Housemaster being lifted bodily in the air! Mr. Ratcliff howled. The others roared.

Jimbo whirled round, and gave Mr. Ratcliff a thorough shaking. Then, with perfect calmness, the elephant deposited the struggling Housemaster on the back of Pinto, the fiery Arab steed!

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Figgins.

A great shout went up as Pinto, frightened by his strange rider, commenced to gallop wildly round the ring.

Mr. Ratcliff hung on until he could hold on no longer. Then, as the horse galloped by the hanging trapeze, Mr. Ratcliff reached out and grabbed it. He came off the horse's back, and hung in mid-air on the trapeze!

Figgins ran forward, choking with laughter.

"Hold on, sir! Ha, ha! You're all right now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff jumped down. He did not go for Figgy. He just glared at him, and then dashed out of the nearest exit. He left everybody in hysterics.

Figgins, on returning to St. Jim's, was summoned before the Head. After a little explanation, Dr. Holmes took a reasonable view of the affair, and gave Figgy a light caning. Figgy said it was worth it, though!



"What the blazes does this mean?" blustered Bolton. "What—"

"It means that the game's up, you scoundrel!" snapped Tom Merry. "What have you done with your prisoners?"

"Find out, hang you!" snarled Bolton viciously. "I'm hanged if—"

"So you will be some day, no doubt!" said Tom Merry coolly. "Meanwhile, you can cool your heels here until the bobbies come to you. Right away, you fellows!"

And the juniors left the clearing.

CHAPTER 9. Gussy's Brain-Wave!

THEY crashed through the belt of trees, and almost immediately found the tracks of the two men on the ground, soft from recent rain. Kit Wildrake led the way with the pocket torch; but his skill at woodcraft was scarcely needed. The youngest tenderfoot could have followed the trail with ease. With scarcely a stop they hurried on over the quiet moor as they followed the deep footprints of the two men.

But one thing was soon evident. The trail was leading the juniors in the direction of the quarry pool. And as they went on the juniors' uneasiness grew.

Where was Arthur Augustus—and Ginger? Was it possible that the scoundrels had rid themselves of their prisoners by flinging the helpless boys into the quarry pool?

It was a terrible thought, and the juniors pressed on, their hearts filled with a dread they dare not even put into words.

But presently their fears were eased as the trail branched off suddenly within a few yards of the quarry edge.

Breathing freely again, the juniors followed it down the

slope to the lower ground, and, to their surprise, it led them to the little jetty at the water's edge.

"Looks as if they took them in the boat, I guess!" said Mark Lathom, puzzled.

"No doubt about that," agreed Kit Wildrake, after an examination of the trail round about. "Is there any place round the quarry—a cave or anything—where they could have taken them, Tommy?"

"There's the old shed—the one Lathom spoke about," muttered the captain of the Shell. "My hat! That's what the scoundrels have done, I bet! Nobody ever goes there, and old Jackson of the Abbey Farm, who has the boat for pike-fishing, only uses it rarely."

"Then come on!" snapped Jack Blake.

There was no room in the boat for all, and Manners, Lowther, and Digby stayed behind while the others tumbled aboard, and Blake grasped the oars.

By now the moon had risen, and shed a silvery flood of radiance on the still surface of the silent pool. By its light the boat was guided out into the pool and round the huge rock.

As the shadowy outlines of the crane and the shed came in sight, Tom Merry sent a loud hail echoing round the rocky walls of the quarry.

It was followed by a deep silence, save for the splashing of the oars, and then an answering hail, faint and eerie, reached the juniors, and they gave a simultaneous shout of joy.

"Go it, Blake!"

The boat fairly danced over water towards the shelf of rock, and scarcely had it touched when the juniors had bounded ashore and had reached the shed.

There was no padlock on the door, the iron bar across being merely secured by a peg of wood. This was tugged out, and next moment the door was flung wide.

"Bai Jove!"

"Gussy! Hurrah!"

From the gloomy interior of the shed two dim figures staggered out into the moonlight, and an instant later their bonds were severed, and the crowd of delighted juniors had surrounded Arthur Augustus and Ginger.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as Blake hugged him. "I—I am delighted, of course, to see you, deah boys! But—but wpay do not be so wough, Blake, deah boy. You are wumpling my collah."

(Continued on next page.)

NO GENIUS NEEDED TO READ THIS EASY CRICKET CONTEST AND CARRY AWAY A BIG CASH PRIZE!

First Prize £5. Second Prize £2 10 0, & 10 Prizes of 5s. each.



What You Have to Do!

Here is a splendid cricket competition which I am sure will interest you. On this page you will find an easy picture-puzzle. What you are invited to do is to solve this picture, which gives the history of the Nottingham Cricket Club, and when you have done so, write your solution on a sheet of paper. Then sign the coupon which appears below, pin it to your solution, and post it to "Nottingham Cricket Club" Competition, GEM Office, Gough House, Gough Square, E.C. 4, so as to reach this address not later than THURSDAY, July 5th, 1923.

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

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

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

Name

Address

G

It was the same old Gussy, and the juniors laughed; they could afford to do so now.

"But—but why did the galoots bring you along here?" asked Mark Lathom, in astonishment, after a while, turning upon the scared Ginger. "Did they find out—did they spot you, kid?"

The outcast nodded slowly.

"Yes, guv'nor. They shoved me in the van, and told me to take me wet things off. When I was changing into these here togs—which is me own—they lit the lamp, and spotted me at once. They were hopping mad, and—"

"And the frightful bwutes thwashed the poor young beggah cwnelly, bai Jove!" put in Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Look at his face, deah boys."

The juniors looked at the hapless waif in deep pity and compassion. The boy's face was bruised; it still bore traces of the rough handling he had received.

"They—they guessed what had happened," muttered Ginger, in a low tone. "They knowed I must have given 'em away."

"But—but why should they bring you out here?"

"Because they knowed the game was up, and I s'pose they meant to have their own back outer me afore they bolted."

"But they could have done that by leaving you at the camp, for the police to catch," said Tom Merry, puzzled, "without delaying their escape by bringing you here."

"Right enough! But they knowed I'd know where they'd make for, and they thought I'd tell the cops—that's why. They knowed nobody would find us here for days, mebbe not at all; and it'd give 'em a good chance to get clear."

There was a silence.

"Well, the heartless scoundrels!" breathed Tom Merry, at last. "But you've nothing further to fear from them, Ginger. They're already trussed up, and before morning will be in the hands of the police."

"But that won't help me, guv'nor," said the boy bitterly. "I'm booked for the stone jug myself now, I s'pose. But I expects I deserve it. I bin a wrong 'un; I sees it now. It was me what pinched all them things at the school, though you young gents thinks now they weren't pinched."

"Great pip!"

"Then—then why did you put the things back?" ejaculated Blake.

"'Cause that bloke, Racke, said D'Arcy 'ad done it. Old Eyeglass 'as bin good to me, and I wasn't goin' to let him be blamed for what I done."

There was another silence—a silence which the waif quite misunderstood.

"It ain't no good," he said, with a gulp. "You'd best hand me over to the cops—"

"We're not blaming you. Don't think that," said Tom Merry gently. "We blame those scoundrels who trained you—who brought you up to a life of crime."

"And I guess we're going to see you get clear, sonny," snapped Mark Lathom, glancing round meaningfully at the others. "I put it to you fellows: Hasn't the kid earned his freedom?"

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "Gingah was the tool of those wascals—more sinned against than sinning. He has confessed ewevythin' to me, deah boys."

"It's good of you gents, after what I done!" muttered the impostor huskily, his eyes shining. "But—but all I wants is a chance to get clear—to start afresh and go straight."

Tom Merry's face was troubled.

"And you shall, if we can help you," he said slowly. "But—but I don't see how we can save you now. I wish we could. The police—"

"What about the Head? He's a good sort, and would help him, I'm certain," suggested Blake.

"I know. But he was an accomplice of those scoundrels, and even the Head couldn't save him from the police. The only way out I can see," went on Tom Merry, frowning thoughtfully, "is for Ginger to get well clear of the district before morning. We could have a whip round, and raise enough for Ginger's fare, and perhaps a bit over, to keep him going till he gets a job; that's if you chaps are willing."

"Yes, rather!"

"Then we'd better be moving, or he'll miss the last train from Rylcombe. Come on!"

The juniors crowded into the boat, and an instant later were moving across the moonlit pool. They reached the little jetty at last and as D'Arcy sprang out he was greeted by a roar of welcome and delight from the juniors waiting there.

"Buck up!" cried Tom Merry. "You fellows can hear all explanations afterwards."

He led the way towards St. Jim's. There was no need to visit the camp again; the police could see to that. Within twenty minutes they arrived, breathless, at the gates of the school.

"Now for the whip round," Tom Merry said. "I can go ten bob."

But the whip round never took place.

At that moment a large touring car swept out of the drive leading to the Head's private house, and as the lights from its headlamps showed up the group of juniors there was a delighted cry, followed instantly by the sharp application of brakes.

As the car drew up, a tall young man sprang out and ran towards the juniors.

"Arthur!"

"Bai Jove! It's Conway—my bwothah Conway!" yelled D'Arcy joyfully.

"By gad! You young scamp!" said Lord Conway, gripping the hand of Arthur Augustus delightedly. "Where on earth have you been, Arthur? The pater got the Head's wire and sent me down. What does this business mean?"

Helped by his chums, Arthur Augustus related his adventures, and when he had finished Lord Conway gasped.

But, before he could express his amazement, D'Arcy gave a sudden start, and his noble eye gleamed. He glanced at the unhappy Ginger, who was standing, looking extremely scared, a few yards away. Next moment he was whispering earnestly to his brother.

"By gad!" muttered Lord Conway, his good-natured face thoughtful. "It's rather risky, Arthur, but—" He broke off, and glanced keenly at the miserable face of the outcast, Ginger. Then he nodded grimly. "Right! I'll do it, Arthur." He went on, with a smile. "I was going to put up in Rylcombe for the night, but I'll run on home with him now. I'll slip over and see you again to-morrow."

And, to the utter bewilderment of the juniors, Lord Conway beckoned to the astounded Ginger to jump into the car.

Then he sprang into the driving-seat, and as he waved a farewell to the juniors, the car hummed away up Rylcombe Lane.

"What the thump—" began Tom Merry.

"It's all wight, deah boys!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "Conway's weally a bwick! He'll look aftah Gingah—"

"You—you mean—"

"It was weally a brilliant notion; stwuck me in a flash, y'know!" murmured Arthur Augustus modestly. "I put the case to Conway, as ffrom one gentleman to another; and, as I expected, he agweed. He's wathah a sport, y'know. He's taken poah old Gingah home to Eastwood House; he's goin' to give him a job there. So now the poah beggah's twouble's are ovah. Isn't it wippin', bai Jove!"

And all the juniors heartily agreed that it was.

There is little more to add. Late that night the police visited the camp, and took charge of Bolton and Slaney. They also took charge of the plunder that Tom Merry had hidden. And the delight of Bernard Glyn's father at its recovery can be imagined.

It was, of course, a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's. And the general amazement at the story, the relief and overwhelming joy felt by all at the safe return of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy can be left to the imagination. It was inevitable, of course, that Dr. Holmes should ask as to the whereabouts of the impostor, Ginger; and the juniors had expected this. But beyond stating that he had escaped—which was quite true—Tom Merry told nothing. And, curiously enough, Dr. Holmes did not press for details. Perhaps the good-hearted doctor suspected something of the truth.

Mark Lathom did not stay long at St. Jim's. Urgent business matters recalled his father back to the States, and Mark went with him—a fact regretted by all, for during his short stay the boy from the West proved himself to be a rattling good fellow.

Altogether, though, the affair ended happily all round, excepting, perhaps, for Bolton and Slaney, who went to break stones for several years under Government supervision.

And Ginger? Well, the police never did trace him. Certainly they never dreamed of looking for him at Eastwood House, the paternal home of the noble Gussy, where Ginger, in the capacity of an under-gardener, is striving to wipe out the bitter past—to lead a better life. And, from accounts that from time to time reach St. Jim's, he is succeeding admirably—is proving to his kindly benefactors that he was, indeed, worthy of the chance they had given him—the chance to go straight he had longed for.

THE END.

(As you all know, Martin Clifford excels in screamingly funny stories, but just wait until you read next week's ripping story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "GRUNDY'S GAME!" You will be sorry when you get to the end of it. As there is sure to be a great demand for next week's GEM, you cannot do better than give an order for your copy RIGHT NOW!)

A Splendid Story of Daring Adventure in the Wild West!



A Thrilling Story, telling how the Six Stalwart Chums of Thunder Creek save the Pay-car.

CHAPTER 1.

A Great Sensation!

"TAKE the strain!" shouted Jim Raven, leader of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. His five comrades and Banks, the fellow who had come up to Sam Knapp's Rolling River camp in search of sport, gripped the stout cable in their toil-hardened hands. Jim Raven, who was "anchor man" to this tug-of-war team of seven, having the free end of the rope to do what he liked with, gave it a turn around his body, and threw his weight upon it very much in the manner of a horse getting into its collar. "Now—pull!"

It was a queer, one-sided sort of tug-of-war; for the six Sportsmen and Banks had no rival team to pull against. That was not their way of getting into training at all. They were pulling against a stout young fir tree; the rope was attached to the tree at a height of about six feet from the ground.

All seven tugged and strained valiantly. They dug their heels into the ground, and hauled away unitedly. They set their teeth, they grinned in their intensity—and, after several seconds of fierce effort, the tree tilted decidedly towards them.

"Spell-ho!" shouted Jim Raven. "Don't talk! Now—take the strain! Now—pull!"

Again, seven strenuous young fellows took the strain, then threw their hearts and souls into their self-imposed task. Again the young tree tilted, and there was a slight upheaval of earth and a ripping as of roots being torn from the ground.

"Again!" shouted Jim. "Let her have it!"

For the third time those lusty youngsters, who put sport of any kind before work of the nicest kind, strained and gasped and pulled.

"Some hopes of that tree ever growing up now!" chuckled Smiler Dickinson, who was the Canadian Sportsman. "Hard lines on the tree; but we've got to get fit for to-morrow's tug-of-war; and those Galicians and Doukhobors who fancy themselves so much are a hefty lot. Still, if we pull like that, we ought to have them where we want 'em!"

"And that'll be another hundred dollars to send to young Syd," said Sandy Graham, the Scot. "Losh, mon! How we do work for yon laddie away over there in England!"

"But the kid's worth it all—and look at the fun we get!" said Digger Harrison, the Australian Sportsman.

"And if we don't win this time, I'll have to score another failure," Banks chimed in. He was not one of this irresponsible brotherhood that had taken young Syd Patterson under their wing for the period his father was to languish in gaol, guilty, they said, of stack-burning. It was a sure sign, though, that the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek thought Jack Patterson an innocent man; otherwise, perhaps, they would not so readily have adopted the unfortunate man's son.

"I've got to score sixty per cent. of wins in all sports up here, or else I'm going to lose my wager with young Grogan. Foolish, conceited sort of wager it was, too, considering yon fellows were up here. But then, I didn't know yon were."

"Anyhow, we're helping yon to score a point," grinned Pete Craddock, the Yankee, "this time. Say, if seven of us can uproot a tree like that, I think we ought to be able to pull those Doukh's all over Alberta, and then some!"

"Take the strain!" said Jim Raven, still again. And they all took the strain. "Pull!" he roared; and this time they pulled so strenuously that the lusty young tree gave up the struggle altogether and came down with a crash, its earth-clogged roots pointing forlornly up to the glorious, summer-evening sky.

"Anyway, it'll be handy for firewood, when it's dried," said Jim, referring to the tree. "Well, fellows, I think we're fit enough to tackle to-morrow's job. Say, I think it's the finest idea going, to get all the sport the country offers. Some people may think we all ought to do nothing but work up here; but all work's just rot! And now what'll that be?"

They were resting now on the bank of Rolling River; a favourite spot of theirs, about half a mile downstream from where Sam Knapp was constructing his bridge. As he spoke, Jim Raven looked across the river, which was narrower here, though deeper and

swifter than at the bridge, and as he looked he saw a mounted figure dash from out the trees on the other side. The man on the horse raised both arms at once, two revolver shots sounded out; and then he slipped from the saddle and struck the ground heavily, while the horse he had been riding trotted away campwards.

As the Sportsmen watched this strange sight, two other horsemen rode into view, also on the other bank. They drew rein on their mounts and looked down towards the ground, where the first newcomer was now lying, very still. One of them took deliberate aim at the prostrate figure with a revolver he carried.

"Hi!" roared the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek and Banks, in loud chorus. "None o' that, there! Hi—yon're spotted!"

The two riders across the river looked towards the hefty bunch of railroad workers and athletes. The man with the revolver did not shoot.

"There's dirty work at the cross-roads to-night!" yelled Jim Raven, and kicked his knee-boots off in a twinkling. The others all followed his example. None of them gave much time to thinking out what ought to be done; but it was fixed in the minds of all that a brother-man wanted assistance.

There was nothing in the way of a weapon amongst the seven who had seen all this—except their fists. But they cared nothing for that. Here the river was about three hundred yards wide. To run up to the bridge—half a mile—cross the bridge and run down-river another half-mile would take far too long. Jim Raven considered. They were all good swimmers. It would only take a matter of a few moments to swim across to render aid to the man who had fallen from his horse.

So they all plunged in the river, heedless of the guns they knew the men at the other side possessed.

The two mounted figures watched the Sportsmen for the first fifty strokes or so they each made. Then one of them dismounted and examined the man on the ground.

The swimming Sportsmen were still too far away from the opposite shore to allow them to see the features of these men. But Jim Raven, as he swam, looked as steadily as he could at

what was going on. The man with the revolver examined the man on the ground for as long as it took Jim to swim a score of powerful strokes, then he appeared satisfied with his scrutiny, for he mounted his horse again; and he and his companion dashed off into the trees.

A few moments later the dripping, scantily-clad Sportsmen reached dry land. Pat O'Hara, being the best swimmer in those regions, was the first to land, and he it was who bent over the still figure that was lying on the sloping river bank, all sprawled out, staring up at the sky and writhing slightly, the while he groaned.

"Begorra, and it's shot the man is!" said the Irishman. "And if he isn't dead, it's not far from death he is just now!"

Jim Raven and Banks examined the man more closely. Banks, the others knew, had walked a hospital down east in his time.

"Shot all right, and it looks like having a near thing for him," said Banks. "Any of you know him?"

None of the Sportsmen could recall having seen this man before. They all could see that he was not quite white. There was a bullet wound in his chest; and another bullet had scraped the top of his head, making a nasty and deep furrow in, amongst the coarse black hair.

"Quarter-breed, I should say," said Jim. "Suppose we ought to see about getting him back to camp, hadn't we? Hallo!" For the man had moved suddenly, and was now groping out with a dusky hand. His lean fingers caught the strong ones of Jim Raven; and he pulled Jim down towards him, until the leader of the Sportsmen had his ear very close to his lips. He muttered something; what it was only Jim Raven could hear; the others, although they crowded around, could not catch a word. Not much did this Breed say; then he closed his eyes, gave a moan, and lay so still that, hastily, Banks pushed Jim aside and again examined him.

"Let's carry him to the camp," said Banks. "If he doesn't get proper attention at once he's going to die. Camp doctor's around this evening, thank goodness."

Jim Raven and Smiler Dickinson formed a chair of their locked hands. Others lifted the sorely wounded man and placed him as comfortably as was possible in it. And then, slowly and very carefully, they carried the stranger campwards.

Many halts were necessary, at each of which Banks examined the injured man anxiously. Then, when they came to the uncompleted bridge, they had to step mighty carefully along the erection of piles and irregularly-spaced sleepers. But at length, without shaking the sick

man up unduly, they got him to the camp, got him into a spare shack, and laid him down on a pile of blankets. Then they summoned the doctor. With nothing further to do, the Sportsmen and Banks went outside again, and there Jim Raven scratched his chin rather thoughtfully.

"What did the fellow say when he whispered to you?" asked Smiler Dickinson of Jim.

"Ten to one he was just raving a bit," said Jim. "Yet what he said seems darned exciting. He said that he had found out from a gang of crooks—those two we saw were of the gang—that they were planning to hold up the pay-car when it comes along, about midnight."

The other Sportsmen laughed at that. They were not in the habit of giving things very deep thought. Purely on impulse, anyway, they had appointed themselves "godfathers" to young Syd, and ever since they had had to scheme and fight and struggle to find the wherewithal to support that youngster, now living on the best in Yorkshire, Jim Raven's native county. But Jim Raven did not laugh, and sharply he bade them "shut their heads," which they did when they realised how serious their young leader was.

"Hold up the pay-car?" repeated Pete Craddock. "Where, when, how? Come to think of it, the paymaster is coming up to-night, some time, with cash enough



As the handcar rounded a sharp bend, the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek were almost dazzled in the darkness by the glare of an approaching locomotive's headlights. Jim Raven stamped his foot hurriedly down on the brake and brought the car to a standstill.

to pay the men at Rolling River and some other camps. Corporal Nevin was saying as much."

"To-night, according to what that poor gink whispered to me," said Jim, "at Devil's Falls. That's fifteen miles down the track, isn't it? Idea seems to be for some man, hidden away on one of the freight cars that'll come up with the train, to slip the coupling of the caboose, which is the end car of all, and leave it on the track, at the mercy of the hold-up men when they come along. Captain Swayles, the paymaster, will be in the caboose, so will all the money-boxes."

"He seems to have told you a heap in the short time," drawled Digger Harrison. Digger was a practical fellow, without much imagination, perhaps, but a tip-top sportsman.

"Of course," said Jim, "he didn't say all that. But what he did say set me thinking. What about it? Shall we let 'em know at the camp? Chances are that chap'll die before he can speak again."

Here Banks chimed in. Banks was not one of the Sportsmen, but he was a good friend to all of them by this time, if he was their keen rival in all branches of sport.

"There are seven of us," said Banks, "and we've all got guns and horses, if we like to use 'em. There'll be the train crew, too. Well, what about all of us riding down to Devil's Falls and seeing if it's true? If it is, then we'll be a hefty bunch to fight any train-robbers off. There'll be the train crew, also. But if we start telling Knapp all we know, he'll have the laugh on us if it's all a scare. Besides—and I know you want cash for a purpose—what about the reward the company will be sure to give, if it's true, and we manage to frustrate the hold-up gang?"

Banks' idea smelt of adventure. Anything that smelt of adventure or sport was sure to appeal to the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. They did not even discuss Banks' plan, but they accepted it unanimously. Jim Raven, though, offered a slight amendment.

"No need to take the horses, though," he said. "We'll pinch one of Knapp's hand-cars and pump our way down to Devil's Falls. It's after nine o'clock now. We'll do it in an hour easily, so we'll start up when it gets dark here."

And so it was agreed upon. Light-heartedly enough they prepared for this break in the monotony of their lives. And it is safe to assume that each and every one of the Sportsmen hoped the muttered words of the quarter-breed would be true. All too seldom did the chance of getting mixed up with thrills come their way up there in Sam Knapp's Rolling River bridge camp.

CHAPTER 2. To the Rescue!

TWILIGHT is short up near the Northern Alberta foothills, and, by ten o'clock, it was as dark as ever it can be in a Canadian mid-summer. Lights were supposed to be out at Knapp's camp at ten o'clock, also, and so nobody noticed the six Sportsmen and Banks as they stole out of the camp and made for the shed near the railroad track, where most of the track's equipment was stored. There were two of those cumbersome, hand-propelled cars stored away in the shed, and one of these the young adventurers purloined shamelessly. It was a heavy

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thing, with flanged wheels and pump-handles. But the seven soon got it out of the shed and set up on the track.

Grasping the handles, and working together in perfect time, they started to pump the vehicle along the unsurfaced track. Two men can make a hand-car buzz along fairly swiftly, so when seven got hold of it, they soon had it bowling along at an exhilarating rate, despite the fact that, after the first half-mile or so of pumping, they had a pretty stiff grade to negotiate.

For the first five miles of their journey all went well. Then, just as they rounded a sharp bend, they were almost dazzled in the darkness by the glare of a locomotive's head-lamp. They certainly were not expecting this, and they had not much time in which to get clear of the oncoming train.

Jim Raven stamped his foot hurriedly down upon the hand-car's brake, and the thing came to a standstill. Then all seven jumped to the ground, and at once lifted the cumbersome car from the rails. Giving it a prodigious heave, they hurled the thing clear. For this was a single track only. Just in time they all stepped sideways, and then a heavy, lumbering freight-train, going downhill, went past them, kicking up dust and small stones beneath it as it went.

"Hi!" roared Jim Raven, as the cars rumbled and clattered past him. But the engineer and fireman neither heard him nor noticed him.

The last car went past, but the last car was not the caboose; and yet no freight train would travel into the wilds like this without a caboose in rear.

"Did you notice that?" asked Jim Raven, when the noise had subsided and the train had passed well out of sight. "No caboose!"

"So much of what the Breed said seems to be right," said Smiler Dickinson. "But we've got ten miles to go yet. The train's come along earlier than we thought. Shall we be in time?"

"Funny the engineer and fireman shouldn't notice that they've left the caboose behind," said Sandy Graham. "But they don't seem to have done so."

"We'll have to pump like the very deuce!" said Jim Raven. "Get her on the rails again, fellows!"

A minute later they were bowling along again on the hand-car at a speed that was almost incredible. The flanged wheels of their conveyance screeched and purred; the car jolted sickeningly at times over the rail-joints; swayed at some unexpected depression in the unsurfaced track. But the jovial Sportsmen thought little of the risks they ran of being derailed and sent tumbling down some steep grade. They just put all they knew into their work, and, being as fit as any athletes could want to be, their efforts were rewarded. In a very short space of time, after going down a short, slight decline, they saw, just ahead of them, a silent object, that had a red lamp burning upon it.

Again Jim Raven stamped down upon the brake. As he did so, a man carrying a trainman's lamp, ran towards them. First glance told the Sportsmen who he was. They knew him; he was Dan Figgins, the conductor.

"Say, who are you?" asked Figgins. "What's up?"

"Are we too late?" asked Jim Raven.

He was breathing a little heavily now, for he had not spared himself in that swift ride from the bridge camp. "We heard all about it!"

Another man came along, whom the Sportsmen also knew. He was a grey-haired man with a military bearing. He was Captain Swayles, the paymaster of the construction company for whom the Sportsmen were working.

"We've been left behind!" Swayles shouted. "Less than an hour ago, and we're stuck!"

"Yes; I understood you were going to be," said Jim Raven. "We didn't know whether it was true or not, and so we came down here to find out. So you haven't been held up yet, sir?"

"Held up!" The paymaster gave a start, then, gripping Jim Raven by the shoulder hard, shoved his face close against the face of Jim. "Help up! What are you talking about, my lad?"

"It's all right," said Jim. "You'll know us, captain. We're the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek, and this is Banks, a pal of young Grogan's. We aren't playing the fool. We heard you were going to be uncoupled here, at Devil's Falls, and held up by a train-robber gang, because you've got the pay for the men aboard!"

"My hat!" It was the conductor speaking now, and at once he left them and climbed aboard the caboose. When he reappeared he had a revolver strapped about his waist by a belt. "A hold-up, eh?"

"Yes; but you came along sooner than you were expected," said Jim. "Still, the fellow who was hidden away in one of the cars did his part of the work, and uncoupled you, knowing you would be helpless, stranded here. That's why we came along to give a hand."

The paymaster eyed over the doughty seven appraisingly. They were a sturdy bunch. He heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that they all carried revolvers.

"At the same time," he said, "I don't like to wait here till that fool of an engineer's found out we're left behind."

Jim Raven glanced at his watch. It was not yet eleven o'clock. But even as he did so he started, sure that he heard a horse whinnying in the bushland that lined the track.

"Can't we get the car away from here?" he asked. "Once upon this hill she would start rolling of her own accord most of the way down to the camp. I think—Ah!" He pulled out his revolver suddenly and peered hard into the bush where he had heard the horse whinnying.

Everybody turned his eyes in the same direction, and the sharper-sighted ones were sure they could see, amidst the thick shadows, the moving shapes of men and horses. The Sportsmen thrilled, and they all drew out their revolvers. Dan Figgins, the conductor, did more than that. He fired point-blank into the bush, and a yell answered his shot. Then everything became still and silent again.

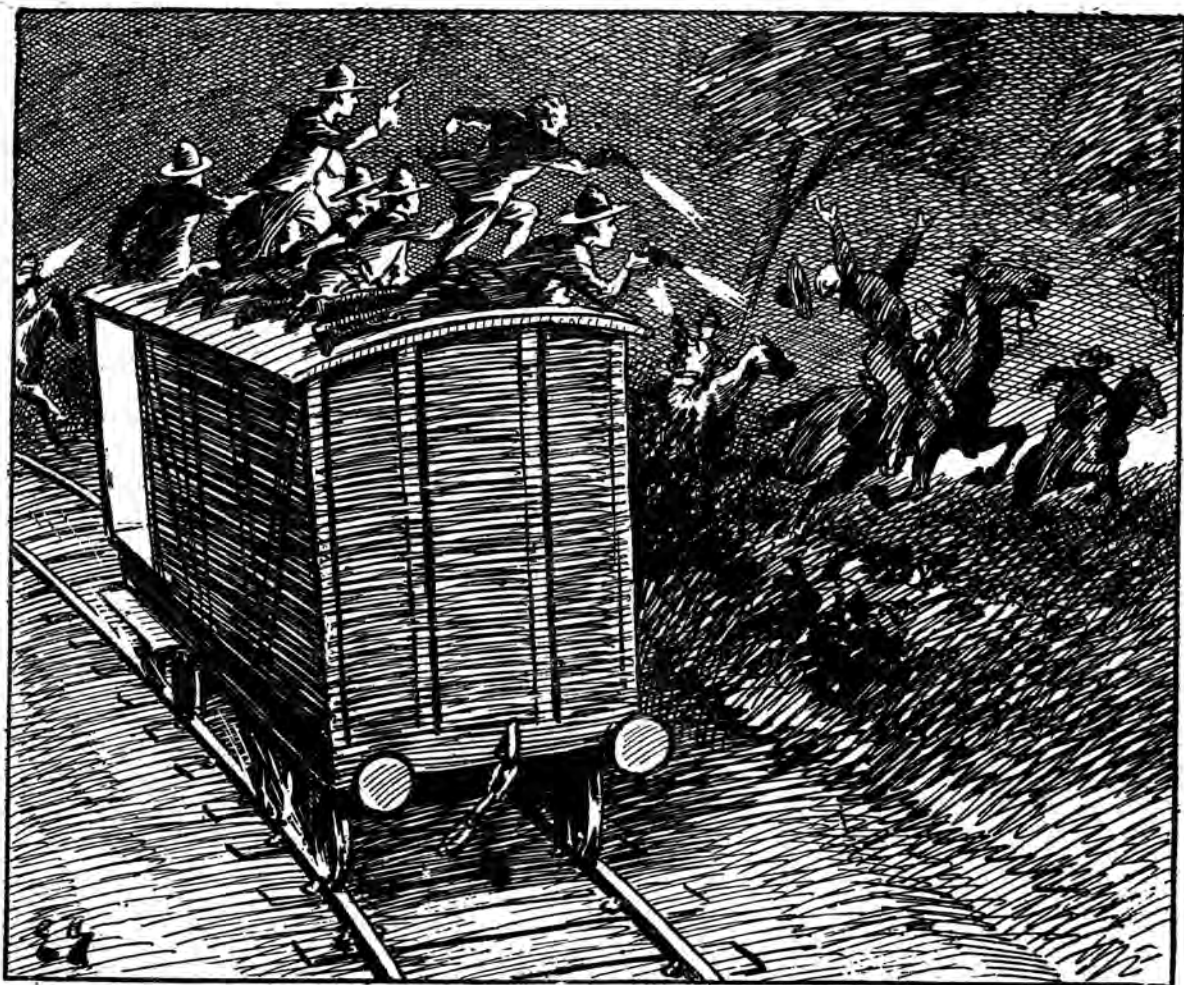
"They're hangin' around, waiting their chance to rush us!" said Figgins. "Darn it! I wonder how many of them there are?"

"Got a rope?" A sudden idea had seized Jim Raven. It was one of those reckless ideas that all the Sportsmen frequently had, and, wild though most of their ideas seemed to be, they usually were very successfully carried out. "We'll pull the car to the top of the rise. Remember, Sportsmen, we pulled a tree up by the roots only this evening."

The Sportsmen gave a combined howl of pleasure.

"This yer caboose weighs—" Dan Figgins began.

"Don't care how much it weighs;



Jim Raven, panting for breath, clambered on to the roof of the car, and flung himself down flat on his stomach alongside his six comrades. There was much yelling and crashing of undergrowth as several horses came galloping alongside the caboose. Then came the repeated crack! crack! of firearms.

"We've been training for a tug-of-war!" said Jim Raven. "Get a rope, Dan, and we'll train some more!"

"Gosh! I've heard about you Sportsmen before!" muttered Dan Figgins. He was without a brakeman; probably both of them had been at the forward end of the train at the time of uncoupling the caboose at the rear. "Right, I'll git ye one!"

There was no more whinnying in the bush, nor could they see any human or equine shapes moving there now. But Jim Raven was sure those who had meant to rob the pay-car were still hovering around, ready to rush when they thought the time was fit.

Dan returned with a length of rope, and this was firmly fixed to the caboose. How many tons that car weighed nobody stopped to think; nor did it worry the Sportsmen that the track was uneven and that there was quite a stiff upgrade to be tackled that would last for almost a hundred yards.

"Take the strain!" shouted Jim Raven, taking his place as "anchor man" in his tug-of-war team. And the Sportsmen and Banks all took their places and gripped the rope hard. Figgins also lent a hand, as did the paymaster.

"Pull!" chanted Jim; and they all set their backs to it.

It was like pulling at that young fir-tree at first, but they dug the heels of their boots against the edges of sleepers,

and hauled and strained and panted heroically. Then, very gradually, the heavy caboose came towards them. Jim Raven, the last man in the team, with the free end of the rope twined around his powerful body, got a toe-hold on another sleeper and pulled again. The others did the same. Once they got the car moving, the pulling gradually became easier, though it required a huge amount of strength to keep its wheels rolling up the stiff upgrade.

"Take the strain! Pull!" chanted Jim Raven periodically, each time it was necessary to get a fresh toe-hold against a sleeper. And his fellow-Sportsmen, forgetting in their keenness and effort that they were not actually playing at tug-of-war, obeyed him without question, pulling strongly and scientifically, wasting none of their strength, while the caboose rumbled after them.

Their hearts were almost bursting when at length they got the cumbrous caboose on the top of the rise. Then they paused. By this time they were breathing heavily, but in no distress. Dan Figgins, who was fat and unfit, was gasping and blowing like a wheezy elephant. The paymaster was panting painfully, his hand over his heart, for he was an elderly man, and the Sportsmen knew, still suffering from a chest-wound he had received during the war.

But they had scarcely time to breathe freely before several shots rang out. Bullets spattered against the sides of

the caboose, and the Sportsmen, the conductor, and the paymaster all dodged into safety on the other side.

"Thought they hadn't gone away," muttered Jim Raven. "Say, fellows, we haven't finished our job yet. But keep cover. Now, get your shoulders against the thing, and shove like billy-ho! You, sir, get aboard, will you—and you, too, Dan!"

The paymaster and the conductor did not hesitate, for even as he spoke Jim Raven and his comrades got the caboose moving again, and in a second the thing was travelling down a steep grade, gathering speed at every revolution of its wheels. The two older men scrambled aboard, just as more shots were fired from the track-side. Then Dan Figgins opened fire on several shadowy shapes he saw moving in amongst the trees.

The car was travelling so swiftly now that the Sportsmen had to break into a run to keep pace with it.

"Climb aboard—up on top, and lie down flat!" roared Jim Raven, running strongly now, for the caboose required no further urging down the grade. "Hustle, or you'll be left behind!"

Like monkeys, Banks and Jim's comrades clambered up the iron ladder that led to the roof of the caboose. Jim, hanging on to a piece of ironwork now, running in great, leaping strides, was the last to climb. He was panting for

breath when he did get on to the roof and hung himself down flat on his stomach, alongside his six comrades.

There was much yelling going on in the darkness now, much crashing of undergrowth, as though several horses were galloping alongside the caboose. An occasional shot was fired at them. The Sportsmen gripped their revolvers, and, though they were no great gunmen—a sportsman can be that—they returned the fire as well as they could, while the caboose thundered down the grade, swaying and rocking, its wheels screeching and sending sparks out into the night.

Below, the Sportsmen could hear the booming reports of Dan Figgins' revolver. Once they saw a horseman come crashing to earth, and they wondered whether it were Figgins' shot or one of their own that had brought the man low.

Then it occurred to Jim Raven that they were travelling much too swiftly for safety. They certainly had forestalled the hold-up men by their quick action, but there was no reason why they should get derailed, and perhaps killed, after all they had done. Jim said nothing to his comrades about what he was going to do. But he was nearest to the brake-wheel of the caboose. He came to his knees, then to his feet, and, though the car was travelling far more swiftly now than any horse could gallop, he staggered along the top platform and clutched the brake in both his powerful hands.

Several shots whined over the plucky youngster's head. But he ignored them, and applied the brake slowly and carefully. Just then the track took another dip, and had Jim been another moment later in what he was doing, the caboose would have been derailed, especially as the track took a sharp bend just here.

Yet Jim did not let the great, roaring caboose slow down too much. He worked the brake very nicely, keeping the car at what he considered a safe speed. He kept it at that for five miles, at the end of which time the track became level, and the caboose slowed down naturally. The hold-up men were well behind now.

Then the caboose had halted Jim dropped to the ground.

"All right inside there?" he asked those inside.

"Pretty well so," growled Dan Figgins, who was nursing a bullet-chipped arm. "They got me some. The paymaster seems all right, which is a good job. Say, boys, your methods seem bold, but some effective."

"You're remarkable fellows, you Sportsmen," said Captain Swayles. "I don't know how the company will be able to help rewarding you. You undoubtedly saved the pay-chests. I have over a hundred thousand dollars here with me, and there would have only been the two of us to defend it if you hadn't come along. And your notion of playing tug-of-war with the caboose! It would have seemed funny, only you did it under fire, and seemed to be enjoying it, too."

"As a matter of fact, we were, sir," grinned Jim Raven. "So much that I don't think we could accept any reward. Only—Humph!"

"Shall we go on pulling the darned thing to Knapp's camp?" asked Smiler Dickinson. "There's just another slight upgrade, then it's almost a straight run down to Rolling River."

"We'll see if those ginks try again," said Jim.

But they did not. Indeed, in less than five minutes afterwards the caboose was almost derailed again, for the engine that had so carelessly left them behind came along, on reverse, sending sparks

shooting up from her smokestack. However, the engine was stopped in time to save an accident.

Followed then about five minutes in which the air was rendered quite sultry by the words of Dan Figgins, who managed to show the engineer and fireman—who did not take the tongue-lashing lying down—that he was annoyed with them. But, when the air cleared, the engine was coupled to the caboose, and there followed five miles more of a merry ride.

But the pay-car was safe.

CHAPTER 3.

A Battle of Giants!

"TAKE the strain!" chanted Jim Raven. "And try to think you're pulling the pay-car away from hold-up men. Steady, boys!"

Everybody at Sam Knapp's bridge-camp was watching this tug-of-war with interest. But the Sportsmen's opponents had the most support, owing to the fact that these opponents were foreigners, and the great majority of Knapp's gangsters were foreigners from Central and Northern Europe. Still, there were plenty of people watching the Sportsmen and Banks, among them being Knapp himself, Corporal Nevin, of the Mounted Police, and Captain Swayles, the pay-

NEXT WEEK—

"A FORTUNE AT STAKE!"

A Thrilling Story of Film and Adventure.

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master. Dan Figgins had had to return with his train and the report of the attempted hold-up. In that report, by the way, many complimentary things had been said about the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek.

There were seven hefty Doukhobors hanging on to the end of the rope that the Sportsmen did not hold. Nevin, acting as referee, was very careful to see the exact centre of the rope was over its proper mark. Though Jim Raven was shouting his instructions to his comrades, it was Nevin's job to give the word "Pull!"

And he gave it. Then followed a battle of the giants. The Sportsmen had pulled hard when uprooting that tree the night before, and they had pulled harder when hauling the pay-car out of danger, but now—well, they pulled!

Jim Raven, with the rope about his waist, set them all a worthy example. Grimly, silently, they hauled away. The Doukhobors did the same thing, though not quite so silently. They were stout, stocky men, without much imagination, but with the strength of oxen. Their bearded faces were set and grinning in their effort. But they were no more full of determination than were the faces of the six stalwarts of Thunder Creek and Banks.

The rope seemed likely to snap, so taut was it. It was a new rope, and it certainly did stretch appreciably. But for three unbroken minutes not a man

gave way a step. The sinews of all of them could be heard to crack under the fierce strain.

"Pull!" panted Jim Raven, and tried to throw another ounce or so of effort into his work. His comrades responded nobly.

The Doukhobors began to scrape their feet in the ground.

"Pull!" roared Jim again, and the Sportsmen answered in beautiful combination. The Doukhobors began to chatter excitedly, and stabbed their boots into the ground to brace themselves more solidly.

"Pull!" again the Doukhs were drawn forward. The centre of the rope was almost over the line now. Another haul the Sportsmen gave. The white handkerchief tied in the middle of the rope crossed the line for a moment, only to come back again as the foreigners made a desperate effort to save.

"And—pull!" roared Jim. Such an effort those seven youngsters put out that not only did the handkerchief come over the line, but the first three of the Doukhs followed with it. Then came another, the mightiest pull of all, which fetched all seven men well into the Sportsmen's territory.

Of course, the Doukhobors were dissatisfied with the result. Men of that race are poor losers. But undoubtedly the win was for the godfathers of young Syd Patterson.

"Which means a hundred bucks to be shared up between you," said Banks, when they had regained their breath. "More cash for Syd!"

"I'm doubling the prize, whatever it is," said Captain Swayles, who had had a talk with Corporal Nevin about these Sportsmen during the day. "And the company'll be worth a thousand dollars, I'll bet, as a reward for what you've done for them."

"Pshaw, a thousand!" whistled Jim Raven. "That'll put young Syd right for a year, at least."

"But I'll bet," said Nevin, who himself had done pretty well out of that attempted hold-up, inasmuch as he had captured four of the gang that afternoon. "I'll bet it don't stop your sport, you fellows! Nothing short of death would stop that! Slackers!"

"Oh, we'll find plenty of excuses," said Jim, with a grin. "We might start saving up for Syd's university education."

"There's another matter of a thousand dollars might come your way, too," said Nevin. "You were instrumental in the capture of Red Ike Watney, a much-wanted bad man, for whom that amount of reward is offered. Looks to me as though you're well on to fortune."

"Won't figure too much on that," said Jim Raven. "You mustn't forget that, if it hadn't been for that Breed we'd never have got on to the thing at all, and we'd never have made what we have. I doubt, if we hadn't learnt what we could do when we pulled that caboose, whether we'd have beaten the Doukhs, even. They gave us a real old bit of sport."

"And there's going to be quite a lot more sport up here," said Banks quietly. "I've got to beat you in a lot of things before I win my wager. So don't get flabby. Singleticks, shot-putting—oh, heck! I've got a lot of work to do up here!"

"We'll be ready when you are, old man," said the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek.

(Don't forget there will be another splendid adventure story next week, boys! Make a note of the title: "A FORTUNE AT STAKE!")

THE MOST POWERFUL AND DRAMATIC SERIAL EVER WRITTEN!



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

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

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

Tom is unable to save Barton's Mill, which is blown up, the owner being killed. From that time it becomes Tom's only ambition to crush the Spider. He obtains a post through a friend, Dick Stearns, on the staff of the "Clarion," the offices of which are next to those of the Spider's. Here he meets Dennis Gale, another victim of the Spider's handiwork, who promises to assist him in his great fight. The Spider plans to capture Compton and Stearns, but his attempt proves futile.

Later, another mill is threatened, and Peter Grant, the manager, calls for Compton's assistance. Tom hurries to the scene, and is just in time to avert disaster. After this Tom receives a strange message—a call for help from Mr. Kane, who is made prisoner by the Spider in an old bulk out at sea. Tom effects a rescue, and a fierce fight with the Spider's men ensues. Tom makes good his escape, however, only to find that Kane has mysteriously disappeared again. Stiff and tired, he moves off to retrieve his bicycle.

(Now read on.)

A Terrible Catastrophe.

THE dawn was already lighting the eastern sky, and Tom, hurrying along to the spot, found, to his delight, that his machine was there. He dragged it across to the lane behind the beach, and paused with his foot on the rest, ready to mount.

"Where am I to go?" he muttered.

What route must he take to cut off the enemy now? What could he do single-handed—against them? Where would they carry Morton Kane?

"They were desperate," thought Tom. "What if they've knocked him on the head and sunk him with a pig of iron round his neck? But the body would be washed up, weighted or not—bodies always are washed up here—with the marks on it, and I saw them with him last. There's too much evidence. They might do it, though."

Tom glanced keenly seaward. He could see all round from where he was, and the day was breaking full. His heart leaped. The boats were still in sight, both of them, black specks on the water, far out.

Something long and slim, cutting along at a wonderful rate, was speeding towards them.

"A motor-launch!" exclaimed Tom. "Can it be one of the Mersey police-boats?"

The launch stopped alongside one of the black specks, paused for some seconds, and then raced away at incredible speed towards the mouth of the Mersey.

No sooner had Tom seen this than he sprang on his machine, and pedalled away at the top of his speed the way he had come.

"If I discover where she goes, and get hold of her," he muttered, "it will be the best day's work I've ever done! What can she be? Whom has she got aboard? And what's the Spider doing all this time in Dunchester? Good heavens! Has he got hold of Kane's offices and newspaper, and is he using them for his own ends?"

Tom pedalled along unwearingly, and made very good time indeed. But as he went new reasons occurred to him. It was a long time before he was able to reach Birkenhead, however, and from there he made his way to Liverpool, where he searched all the docks and quays and boathouses diligently. There were few such things as motor-launches there, and he accounted for each, and found it could not have been the one.

At last at a small, private quay he found an oil-launch that his eye told him at once was the one he had seen. She had nobody in charge of her, and Tom took the liberty of going over her, and making a thorough inspection.

There was nothing remarkable about her, save that she was more powerful than most motor craft of her size, and her fittings were costly and rich. Tom soon found a wharf watchman, who told him all about her.

"She belongs to Mr. Schneider, the cotton millionaire," said the man.

"Yes," said Tom, "I expect she does. But she came in this morning, didn't she? Where from?"

"I dunno. I see her come in, though."

"Was Mr. Schneider aboard?"

"I ain't sure, but I think he was. There was a gent in a big waterproof cloak."

"Ah!" said Tom. "Anyone else?"

"Only his men."

"Where did this gentleman go?"

"He was ill, I reckon. Looked limp and used up. It ain't twenty minutes since he arrived, an' he went to the big 'otel there."

Tom made tracks to the place swiftly.

Yes, a gentleman had been there. He wasn't well. He had been seasick, he said, while trying his launch. He had gone away in a motor-car five minutes ago, after drinking half a tumblerful of neat brandy. The hotel porter, encouraged by a good tip, told Tom this.

"What sort of a car?" said Tom hurriedly.

"A big 'un—dark red colour, with yellow wheels."

Tom flew to the time-table on the wall, and looked up a train. There was one starting in two minutes. Tom sprang on his machine again and raced off to the station, where he was just in time to get his tickets and board the train, first buying a time-table and bicycle map. He saw his bicycle into the van, tipped the guard to let him ride with it, and busied himself with the table.

"Fast train, but doesn't go direct to Dunchester," muttered Tom, turning over the leaves. "If I'd caught the ten-three, I'd have got straight through. Confound it! Got to change at the junction, and wait half an hour there. The train I shall catch there is a slow one, too. That won't do. I shall arrive quicker if I hop off at the junction, and pedal the rest of the way."

Tom had made up his mind that the only thing to do was to get back to headquarters with all speed. All trace of Morton Kane was lost, and whether the Spider was at Dunchester or had been in the launch, he did not know.

To try to follow the motor-car on a bicycle would be folly, even if he knew where it had gone. Strange, nameless suspicions began to creep into the boy's brain, and urge him back to Dunchester. He could have hardly said to himself what he thought, but not for a long time had he been so uneasy and helpless.

At last the train pulled up at the junction, and, though it stopped barely a minute, Tom was down the road and out of sight on his machine before it continued its journey.

He rode rapidly through the small town, and redoubled his pace as soon as he reached the country roads beyond, pedalling rapidly between the tall, sweet-smelling hedges and along the country lanes.

He had looked up the route in the cycling map he had bought, and carried it in his head, making no mistakes.

He was hungry and tired by this time, but he resolved not to slacken till he reached Dunchester and got to Hargreave Buildings. He was nearly half

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 803.

way to the cotton city, when he heard a well-known droning buzz on the road far behind him.

"Motor-car," thought Tom. "Wish I could get 'em to give me a lift."

The sound came nearer, and it was evident the car was being driven well above the legal limit, and without fear of police-traps.

"My eye!" thought Tom, as he steered close to his own side. "They're shoving her along!"

He threw one glance over his shoulder, and his heart gave a leap. It was a dark red car, with yellow wheels, and very powerful. Tom remembered what the hotel-porter had told him.

It was the face of the man who sat next the driver that made Tom start. A tall figure, wrapped in a big cloak, just as the porter had said, and the large, bent form was that of the Spider. But the face—the face was that of Morton Kane!

Was this man the Spider, disguising himself on the journey, after disposing of his rival, and going back to impersonate Kane, and take his place? If so, the villain had achieved a master-stroke.

Kane or no Kane, the car was close upon the young cyclist. Suddenly Tom heard a hoarse cry, a guttural oath, and, casting back another glance, saw the car bear down straight upon him.

Whoever they were, they meant to run him down; that was plain. Tom felt a thrill of despair.

How could he escape the powerful motor? Tall hedges hemmed the road on either side, and there was no way to escape. He was already going at his best speed. With an effort, he tried to sprint.

For a few moments it seemed he was

keeping ahead of the motor. The road was a down grade, with a good surface. Tom's machine was of the best, and few could keep a bicycle going as fast as he. But above the appalling whir and splutter of the monster behind him—like a Maxim-gun in action—Tom caught the sound of a shrill, mocking laugh, and knew he was at the enemy's mercy.

He dared not cast another glance behind him, but set his teeth and prepared for the worst. It would be a swift death, but all Tom's soul rose in revolt at being wiped out by the enemy like this—run down in the open as a jackall is hunted by dogs, and making sport for the scoundrel he had defied and defeated so often.

"Take it easy, Tom Compton! We do not want to push you too hard!" said the mocking voice behind him again. "Your troubles will soon be over! We must all die some time, and you will be saved a lot of worry in Dunchester."

Tom made one last mad effort. Some way ahead his straining eyes caught sight of an open gate in the curve of a very slight bend in the road. Was there a dog's chance to turn through it?

It meant a practically certain smash, but Tom felt he would sooner split his own skull than be killed by the mocking villain behind him. Could he reach the gate in time? The engine of the motor seemed to be thundering under the very saddle of his machine. Like a flash the gateway came to meet him, and he wrenched aside to shoot through it.

He all but succeeded. The cycle's front wheel glanced against the field side of the gate-post with a jerk that sent Tom flying through the air like a stone from a catapult.

As he was hurled forward he heard the

motor-car hit the gate fair and square with a crash like the collision of two iron steamers, followed by a flash of light and a rending explosion.

Tom struck the ground with a force that seemed to knock the life out of his body. A thousand lights shimmered before his eyes, and then turned to total darkness.

The Escape.

THE last thing Tom was conscious of after the rending report of the motor-car as it struck the post behind him was a long, gasping groan, somewhere close by on the ground. Then a pungent smell of heated naphtha and scorched paint crept into his nostrils, and all became a blank.

How long he lay there, and what had happened, he had no inkling. His memory seemed jolted right out of him; he could not even convince himself where he was. Had the enemy got the better of him, or had the smash put them out of the fight? Was he seriously injured?

After the lapse of ages, as it seemed to him, he heard, as though in a dream, a distant throbbing. It came nearer and nearer, and Tom's half-awake senses told him that it was not a car, but a motor-bicycle, by the sound. It stopped close by. Then there seemed to be a general stir round about him, and the hum of voices.

"Didn't we get him, then?" said one. And the answer was another confused hum. Tom could see nothing. He felt as though he were in another world, listening from behind a curtain to what was going on in the old one. Above the murmur rose a voice he knew only too well, suave and clear.

"Make haste, you dolts! We have lost enough time already! There's a dogcart coming along the road there—one of you stop it!"

"That's the Spider," thought Tom drowsily. He heard men bustling about, and the leader's cold, bitterly suave tones ordering them about and cursing everybody, as was his wont.

"You, Jenkins, get on that machine of yours, and order a motor-car for me at Wrayford. I'll change into it there. Off with you, you blockhead! What are you waiting for?"

The plop-plop-plop of the motor-cycle began before the speaker had finished, growing into a shrill whir, and speeding away into the distance.

"Bring that dogcart up! Every moment is precious. The cursed whelp has got away while I've been lying here like a log, goodness knows how long!"

"It's half-past twelve, sir," answered a voice.

"It was twelve when we first sighted the cub!" returned the Spider savagely. "That means we've lost nearly half an hour. I can't make out how he wasn't smashed to pulp, and myself, too! Is that fool Hans alive?"

"I think so, sir. But he's unconscious. I believe his skull's fractured."

"Serve him right, the idiot!" He drove us slap into the post. Put the fool on a gate, some of you, and carry him away. We must leave no trace of this business. When Jenkins comes back he must work at that motor till he gets it in some sort of order, and trundle it off to Wrayford. Bring up that dogcart, you crawling fool! Are you going to be all day long with it? Now, drive like the deuce, sir! Do you hear?"

The stamping of a horse followed, the cut of a whip, and then the sound of wheels spinning down the road, with a last order shouted from the distance. Around Tom there was a tramping and a



How Tom Compton escaped from the old hulk under the noses of the Spider's men!

few muttered words, then footsteps retreating, and after that dead silence.

Tom, still feeling himself in a dream, dozed off into blank unconsciousness again. What had happened, or why nobody had interfered with him, he was far too dazed to think. It might have been an hour, two hours, or five minutes, that he lay thus; but finally the throb of a motor-cycle smote on his ear again, and he felt more wide awake.

"So der whelp got away?" said a gruff voice, with a German accent. "It's a wonder dey all wasn't killed. But it ought to have smashed der boy."

"Here's his bike," was the answer, "all twisted up. The front wheel's busted. Ay, he must have sneaked away while the boss an' Hans were lying there knocked silly. The car never touched him—it hit the post."

"Oho!" thought Tom. "So I've sneaked away, have I? How's that? Why haven't they found me?"

His eyes opened slowly, but he could hardly see anything. A soft green gloom seemed to envelop him. As his senses rapidly returned, he found he was lying in a deep ditch, full of dead leaves, roofed in by tall, tangled grasses and ferns, which made a natural ceiling of vegetation, through which the light filtered.

"By George," he thought, "I must have been pitched over the handlebars like a sack and fallen in here! The ditch is choked with greenery, and it closed over me when I broke through it. I don't suppose they can see where the place is from outside. But am I hurt?"

He felt himself gingerly, but could discover no damage. He had fallen softly, and, though the shock knocked the wind out of him and dazed him for a time, he felt fit enough now, and what he heard outside sharpened his wits. He raised himself to his knees cautiously—the ditch was fully three feet deep—and tried to peer through the screen of grass and bracken.

He saw a foreign-looking man, with a white face and puffy cheeks—a stranger—and beside him a tall, lean man he had noticed before at Hargreave Buildings. It was a man named Jenkins, who had arrived on the motor-cycle.

"Evidently the Spider's men have gathered round to help him out after the accident," thought Tom. "He's always got aid at hand."

"Wasn't dey hurt?" said the German.

"Hans had his skull broken, I reckon, but the boss got off with a black eye and a shaking. He was on the near side, and shot out clear."

"A black eye," thought Tom. "I'll remember that. I wish I'd seen him before he went off. Was he Morton Kane? If not, where is Kane?"

Anxiously Tom tried to think what the solution of the puzzle could be. The knot was becoming so complicated, and the Spider was covering his tracks so well, that for once in his life Tom felt nonplussed. If Kane himself was still at large, was he in danger? Had the Spider's spies got him again? Or had they put him out of the way, once for all, when they had the chance? Morton Kane, the great millionaire, was a difficult man to make away with safely.

The voice of the motor-cycle man broke in upon the thoughts that were tormenting him.

"I called out the motor at Wrayford. The boss'll be in it by this time. He's got a big thing coming off in Dunchester—a thing even the cub won't be able to mess up for him."

"He has wonderful luck at upsetting things, dat cub," put in the German doubtfully.

"He ain't goin' to last much longer, I can tell you. We haven't paid proper



As Tom was hurled forward he heard the motor-car hit the gate with a crash like the collision of two steamers, followed by a flash of light and a rending explosion.

attention to him yet. The boss is drawin' the nets round him tight, an' the last way out is bein' closed."

"Then why did the boss risk his own neck to run him down here?"

"Because everything is a risk while the cub's above ground, an' every day is precious. It'll take three to four more days to finish him properly now."

"I must get out of this," thought Tom. "If every day's precious to them, every moment's precious to me. How long are the fools going to stand there and chatter? He's started to tinker the car now, and that'll take hours. I can't wait all that time."

He peered cautiously round to see if there was any way of escaping unseen. He was stiff and tired, and did not feel sure he could beat the men in a chase across country, and if he took the road, the motor-bicycle would catch him in no time.

An idea struck him. The motor-cycle, where was it? It had not been brought into the field.

On the left of the ditch was the hedge, and on the other side of the hedge the road. Tom could see dimly through the screen of hawthorn, and, to his joy, he caught sight of the motor-cycle leaning against it on the other side, nearly opposite him.

His plan was formed at once. He could ride only one make of motor-cycle—the Ariel. Dick Stearns had one. Tom understood no other, and it was not a time to fumble with strange machines.

"I can creep through the hedge," muttered Tom. "If it's an Ariel, I can start it in a few seconds; if it's not, I'll rip up the tyres with my knife and bolt for it!"

He waited no longer, but commenced to creep through the hedge. There was no time to lose. The German was poking

about the place, while the other was attending to the motor-car.

"Donnerwetter! Dere is a big ditch here," said the German suddenly. "Jenkins, look here! Der brambles is broken. Someone has been here!"

"What!" exclaimed Jenkins, hurrying forward. "You don't say! What if the cub got chucked in there? It ain't unlikely; an' nobody saw him— Ah! Stop him!"

Tom was already half-way through the hedge when the man caught sight of him. He had wormed his way through a thin place near the hedge, and as Jenkins rushed forward the boy broke clear, gained the road, and rushed to the motor-cycle.

"Stop him!" yelled Jenkins, flinging himself into the hedge. "Shoot him! Quick, Max, or we're done!"

The ruffian Jenkins flung himself into the hedge and made a grab at Tom, but the boy just dragged himself clear in time. With an oath, the man tried to crash his way through the hawthorn-branches.

"I'll rip the life out of you for this!" he roared. "Stop him, Hans, can't you?"

But the hedge was thick and strong, and the big rascal could not get through the little bower by which Tom had escaped. He tried to fight through the thick of it, and in three seconds was jammed fast in the middle, yelling and cursing, with thorns pricking him in a hundred places.

Hard pressed as he was, Tom could not help giving a shout of delight, for one glance showed him the motor-cycle was a No. 5 Ariel, like the one belonging to Dick Stearns, which he had so often borrowed. He switched on the connection even as he reached it, jerked the little lever over, and jumped on just as

the motor began to thump and spit beneath him. At the very moment the thing was starting the German came rushing round through the gate and flew at him, shouting savagely.

Had he gone on he must have caught Tom, for the cycle had not yet attained any speed, and there were but a few yards between them. But as the German made his rush Jenkins broke through the hedge, with a hoarse yell, right across his fellow-rascal's path. The two men bumped into each other with a thud that sent both staggering backwards, to sit down heavily in the road.

"Fool!" shrieked Jenkins. "Schweinhund!" screamed the German.

They scrambled up hastily, and rushed forward again. But Tom, who was shouting with laughter, had got the machine under thorough control by now, and, knowing that he could leave them mere specks in the distance whenever he chose, could not resist the sport of playing with them for a few moments.

"Come on, beauties!" he cried, shooting the cycle ahead, and checking it to let them come up. "Come and do your duty! What'll the Spider say if you lose his fine new motor-cycle?"

The ruffians tore after him, and again the cycle sped forward out of their reach, to slow down again. The pursuers frothed with rage.

"Fire at him, Hans! Fire, you fool!" roared Jenkins. "You've got the pistol!"

The instant the words reached his ear Tom clapped on the very utmost speed the motor could reach, and wished he had done it before. He did not know the ruffians were armed, and he bent over the handle-bars as he caught sight of the gleam of a bright pistol in the German's hand.

Thup-pup-pup-pup-z-z-z-z-z! went the motor.

It leaped away like an arrow from the bow, and tore away down the road in a long streak. The German's revolver banged rapidly four times, and Tom thought he was bound to be hit.

A bullet felled the handle-bars with a splash of bright lead, and screamed away at a tangent into the air, and three more whistled past Tom's ears. But the fat German was too severely blown by his run to shoot accurately, and by the time the last two shots were fired Tom and his buzzing mount were mere specks far down the road, till they swept round a corner and vanished for good.

"Phew!" said Tom, rattling away on the road to Wrayford. "I would have served me right if they'd potted me for

showing off like that! Business before pleasure in future. It's a rare piece of luck, getting this jigger! It'll whisk me into Dunchester pretty well as soon as the Spider gets there!"

The outlying town of Wrayford soon loomed ahead of him. Here it was that the Spider went for a motor to carry him onward. There would be spies of the gang there, no doubt; so instead of motoring through the town, Tom turned off to the right, and skirted round it by the by-roads, joining the highway again beyond. He kept up his best speed whenever it was possible, not worrying himself about incidental police-traps or fines for exceeding the speed-limit, and averaged a good thirty-eight miles an hour.

Not long after leaving Wrayford behind he saw a fast-moving speck in the distance that caught his attention. He was overtaking it fast.

"It's the Spider's car," he said. "This jigger makes much better time on these roads than he can. I'll follow on, and see where he goes. Ah, they've seen me, confound it!"

The left-hand occupant of the car, next the driver, turned in his seat and took a long look at the pursuing motor-cycle. The road was straight, and there was no chance of concealment for Tom. The two men in the car seemed to confer for a moment, and then Tom saw an arm move two or three times over the back of the car.

"What are they up to?" he thought. "They can't stop me now, anyway. I'll stick to them till they—Great Scott! Confound the thing!"

There was a loud report, and the bicycle seemed to drop slightly, and then bump along heavily. It soon had to be stopped dead; and Tom, dismounting, found both tyres were cut to the rims, and the machine, of course, crippled.

"That's what he was doing, the beast!" exclaimed Tom, looking at the road, which was strewn with broken glass, several pieces of which were sticking in the tyres. "He had some bottles aboard, and hove them over to cut my tyres. Glad it's his own beastly bicycle, anyway. But he won't mind that. He's out of sight now. I must hurry along on foot; it's only a mile or two further."

The road was empty, and Tom footed it at the best pace he could. The smoke of Dunchester and the loom of its black chimney-shafts was only a little way ahead, and soon Tom got a lift on a butcher's cart, which took him to the suburbs of the town. Thence he soon

made his way to the centre, and was once more among the bustle and the stir of the great city, where he had striven so long and bitterly with his deadly enemy.

"He's had half an hour's start of me," thought Tom, as he paused by Stanford Street Station. "Where now?"

The question was soon answered. He set straight off for Hargreave Buildings, the great block in which Kane's offices and the Spider's—deadly rivals—were side by side. Tom meant to see first of all what had been doing in his absence.

The first thing to find out was if any news of Kane had reached the office. If it had not, Tom made up his mind to have a quick consultation with Dennis and Dick, and start out after him on a fresh trail.

The Spider's side of the buildings was dark and empty-looking, as usual, and Kane's side was less busy in appearance than was generally the case. Tom entered his employer's house, went up by the lift, and into the secretary's room.

"Any news of Mr. Kane?" he said.

"None whatever," replied the secretary. "It's eight days since we've seen him. Why, do you think anything has happened to him?"

"Yes," answered Tom. "I do."

He went out with a heavy heart, paused a moment on the landing, and then went swiftly and noiselessly upstairs to Kane's private office. There was no one in the ante-room. He passed into the sumptuous office itself.

"The picture!" he muttered to himself. "It closed as I came in, I'll swear!"

He stared at the big, full-length oil-painting of Morton Kane on the wall. He knew well it covered a secret door in the wall, for Kane had come through that way the second time Tom saw him.

The boy examined the picture closely, and tried to find the way to swing it open; but his efforts were in vain.

"It's got some very tricky way of working," said Tom to himself; "but I'm certain I saw it shut as I came in through the door. I'll sit here and wait."

He waited ten minutes—twenty, turning matters over rapidly in his mind.

"It's no good speculating and making theories," he muttered at last. "Things are getting into such a tangle that nothing but a jolly big discovery will throw any light on them. Whoever the people are that are spoofing me, I've got them so hard pressed that they're pretty well at their wits' end to keep things dark, I think. Is that blessed picture going to open again?"

But the next surprise came from a different direction. It was an ordinary, respectable footstep, coming across the landing from the lift in a respectable way; but it was a footstep Tom knew well. It passed through the ante-room; the door of the office opened, and in walked Morton Kane himself.

(What explanation can Morton Kane offer to Tom Compton now? You will learn for yourself when you read next week's extra-long instalment of this powerful serial. Meanwhile, take the tip and place your order for next week's bumper number of the GEM now. It will save disappointment coming your way.)

THE RESULT OF OUR GRAND CRICKET COMPETITION.

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

F. DIVER,

55, Rutland Road,
South Hackney, E. 9.

The second prize of £2 10s. has been divided among the following five competitors, whose solutions contained one error each:

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M. A. Howard, 31, Blandford Road, Beckenham, Kent.

F. Crickmere, 50, Loudon Street, Irvine, Scotland.

Lizzie Dakin, 63, Albert Street, Burslem, Staffs.

C. Nixon, 45, Rose Street, Hanley, Staffs.

Jerry Morgan, 27, Victoria Road, Folkestone.

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

SOLUTION.

The Cricket season commences this week, and as the picture puzzle competitions on celebrated football teams have been so remarkably popular, your Editor is pleased to say that he has arranged to carry on with the County Cricket elevens. The same money prizes will be offered for correct solutions.



My Readers' Own Corner

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

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

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!

TIT FOR TAT!

At a dinner-party a well-known comedian had finished his speech, and as he sat down a lawyer arose, put his hands into his trousers-pocket, and laughingly inquired: "Doesn't it strike this company as a little unusual that a professional comedian should be funny?" Then the comedian drawled: "Doesn't it strike this company as a little unusual that a lawyer should have his hands in his own pockets?"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to: P. F. Robert, 3, Havilland Street, St. Peter Port, Guernsey.

ACCORDING TO ORDERS!

"He's perfectly quiet," remarked the man to the two girls who were hiring a pony and trap. "Only you must take care to keep the rein off his tail." "We won't forget," they said. When the girls returned, the man asked them how they had been getting on. "Splendid!" they exclaimed. "We had one sharp shower, but we took it in turns to hold the umbrella over the horse's tail, so there was no real danger!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to: Perry Lynch, 8, Greenhough Street, Ancoats, Manchester.

TWO'S COMPANY!

"You are all blockheads," thundered the schoolmaster; "but there must be one among you who excels in some-

thing, if only in ignorance! Let the biggest stand up!" The invitation was more in the nature of bluff than anything else, but, to the teacher's surprise, one lad rose to his feet. "Oh," said the teacher, "I am glad to see that one has the honesty to admit ignorance!" "It's not that, sir," said the lad, "but I hadn't the heart to see you standing there by yourself!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to: Henry Thomas Mead, 61, Doynton Street, Highgate, N. 19.

ABSOLUTELY USELESS!

The young lad was in court for the third time on a poaching charge. His father was also present in the court. "Now, look here," said the judge to the lad's father, "can't you make this boy do better? If you showed him the right way he wouldn't need to appear here at all." "I have shown him the right way, sir," answered the father; "but the young fool always blunders the job, and is always getting caught!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to: C. Clapham, 15, Wright Street, Otley Road, Bradford, Yorks.

IT HAD TO DIE!

A certain man was notorious for his harsh treatment and conduct towards his debtors. In one case he actually called on a customer for the collection of his accounts on a Christmas Day. In answer to his query as to payment, the debtor, who was enjoying a good Christmas dinner, replied that he couldn't pay, as grim poverty was staring him in the face. "In that case," said the creditor angrily, "how is it that you can enjoy the luxuries of a turkey?" "Alas," said the debtor tearfully, "I couldn't afford its keep!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to: H. E. Parton, 100, Talbot Road, Blackpool.

ONE SHILLING A BOTTLE!

A man went into a chemist's shop and bought a bottle of patent stuff which was warranted to cure coughs and colds. Three days later he went to the chemist and complained that his throat was stopped up, and he could scarcely breathe. "I've drunk all that patent mixture," added. "Drunk it!" yelled the chemist. "Why, that's an Indian rubber solution to rub on the soles of your boots!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to: Charles Payne, 8, Bramble Tree, Borsal, Rochester, Kent.

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