

SEVEN BOYS IN A BOAT!

A MAGNIFICENT, LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO'S
HOLIDAY ADVENTURES. BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

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No. 814.
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September 15th,
1923.



A PUNTING POSE BY COKER OF GREYFRIARS!

The St. Jim's Photographer gets the Picture that causes all the trouble!



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

My dear Chums,—Week in, week out, it is my pleasant job to draw special attention to the stories of St. Jim's. These are always new, and fresh as paint, though they deal with the well-known characters. It could not well be otherwise, seeing that if any special favourite happens to be missed in a single issue there is an immediate storm of protest. Now, as the GEM gets older, and even better known, it, of course, becomes more and more of an institution, and we realise more thoroughly how significant these grand yarns by Martin Clifford are. They indicate the development of the world, and show how life is sized up. Such characters as Tom Merry, Manners, Gussy, and Kildare are just so much England. You get grip in these captivating yarns, and plenty of action, while the wit is always well to the fore. And it would be a rare miserable age were the quality of humour lacking. To go through the world over-serious and with a face as long as a fiddle is merely to ask for trouble—and for failure—which unhappy brace of detrimentals are twins, and always found in company. Laugh and the world laughs with you. There's the uplift.

"TRACKED UP THE THAMES."

By Martin Clifford.

Now, a few cheery reflections of this nature came to me unasked as I was turning over the points in next week's yarn of St. Jim's. It is as good stuff as we have ever had in the GEM. It is full of the right down rattling spirit of the school, although the scene is pitched far away up the Thames, where the old river takes to much winding, and threads its way past islands, and through really picturesque country. But to give you a foretaste of the treat for next Wednesday we can give the picturesque the go-by, and come down to facts. There is nothing specially picturesque, for that matter, about Horace Coker of Greyfriars, though he is a good fellow, if hasty. The coming yarn concerns in intimate fashion a certain photograph of the lordly Coker. It has annoyed him immensely, and is just the sort of thing he would tear up in a rage, after explaining tersely to Potter and Greene why he hated it. But Coker's trusty henchmen are not on the spot to hear the views of their liege lord. Lucky for them! The photo portrays Coker in an undignified,

even embarrassing situation; he is seen at loggerheads with a punt-pole. So he has to track the rollicking St. Jim's fellows into the upper reaches of the Thames to get possession of the snap. William of Wykeham says that "Manners makyth man." In Coker's case, Manners makes Coker very wrathful. You will enjoy this bright and lively yarn.

"THE SHIP WITHOUT A CAPTAIN!"

By Jack Crichton.

This is a magnificent yarn of the sea, full of excitement. I am certain it will strike you as something of special merit when you read it in the new issue of the GEM. It recounts the startling experiences of a mariner who finds himself in the clutches of an unscrupulous plotter who is intent on getting possession of a valuable treasure lost at sea. The story has many thrilling moments. The piratical kidnapper cannot accomplish his purpose without the assistance of a man who knows the sea. Hence his dastardly plot to secure the services by the most abominable treachery of a sea captain whom he thinks he can force to do his bidding. How the plot works out you will see next week. The tale will make a fresh record for the GEM.

"RIVER-WISE NED."

These fine stories of the big estuary and the world of shipping have gone with a bang. Next week's tale presents a situation of a most dramatic kind. Ned is faced by a tremendous difficulty, but once again it is dogged as does it. We have been rather disposed to overlook the drama and the mystery—ay, and the tragedy of a big port which receives the ships from the further lands. The author of these yarns has rung up the curtain on a particularly fascinating phase of life, and his character of Ned will long be remembered.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

Mind you lose no time in securing a copy of this year's issue of the "Annual." It is indispensable. As a present it has no equal, and even if you have made up your mind to make an offering of it for Christmas to some chum, it would be wise to make sure of it now. The "Holiday Annual" is for all seasons. Summer or winter, it is the best companion in the world.

THE TUCK HAMPER.

This feature increases in popularity. Please remember that I am always on the qui vive for the brightest storyette. If you do not bring it off this week, or next, you may find success waiting for you a couple of Wednesdays ahead.

REAL PLUCK.

It's a puzzling question which is the highest type of courage. Is it to be found where a fellow realises the danger of his act as he springs into the water to save someone in difficulties, or is the best kind of pluck the spontaneous sort, without any special thought at all? Which-ever way it goes, certainly there is scope for pride in this summer's record of rescues from sea, river, and canal. Hardly a day passes but that one sees mention of a gallant act by a boy who has plunged in and brought a pal into safety. All honour to these young heroes! I should like to have their names down on a GEM Roll of Honour.

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SEVEN BOYS IN A BOAT!

A Magnificent story of the Holiday Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. Packed full of fun and thrills, and written by the inimitable

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Looking for Trouble.

"I 'VE seen that chivvy before somewhere!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It reminds me of something," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Either I've seen the chap before, or I'm thinking of a gargoyle or a Guy Fawkes mask."

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

The youth at whom they were gazing, from their boat, was big and rugged in form and somewhat rugged in feature. His best friend would not have called him handsome, but Lowther exaggerated in comparing him to a gargoyle or a Guy Fawkes mask. He really was not so bad as all that.

The Old Bus was tied up to the Berkshire shore, and the St. Jim's river-party were having tea in the boat. It was a blazing afternoon, and they were glad of the awning stretched overhead. It was quite cosy and comfortable in the roomy old boat, and Tom Merry & Co. did not envy other voyagers who flitted by in light skiffs and gossamer canoes. In the old Bus there was, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, room to "stretch" a fellow's legs. And when a fellow's legs were encased in beautiful bags with beautiful creases, that was a very important point.

Along the river came a punt, and in the punt stood the rugged youth whom the St. Jim's voyagers were regarding. He was poling, and he did not seem wholly happy with the pole. Indeed, the attention of the juniors had first been drawn to him by his series of miraculous escapes from nose-diving after a lost pole. How a fellow could handle a pole like that, and yet escape being found drowned, was quite an interesting problem to the St. Jim's tea-party in the Old Bus.

As the punter came nearer it dawned upon Tom Merry & Co. that they had seen him before. His features, though not handsome, were striking in their own way. His countenance, as Lowther observed, was the sort of thing that, once seen, was not to be forgotten.

Two other fellows were in the punt, lying at full length, with their heads on cushions, and apparently enjoying life.

But their enjoyment was perhaps only apparent. For it was to be observed that every now and then they stirred, casting anxious glances at the fellow with the pole. They were haunted by a fear that he would take a sudden sprawl and land on them. And as the punt came plunging on nearer to the moored boat the voice of one of them was heard in mild expostulation.

"Look out, Coker!"

"What's the matter?"

"You nearly trod on me, then."

"I'll quite tread on you, George Potter, if you bother me while I'm poling."

Tom Merry & Co. smiled. The name of Coker enlightened them. They knew now that they knew the rugged punter.

"It's a Fifth Form chap at Greyfriars," said Blake. "I've seen him there when we've been over at Greyfriars for the cricket."

"Yaas, I wemembah him now," assented Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He is wathah an ass, I believe."

"Looks it!" remarked Herries.

"And poles like it," said Digby. "I've been expecting him to dive every minute."

"I'll get out my camera," said Manners thoughtfully. "He's bound to go in, and I'll snap him in the act. It will be funny."

Manners sorted his camera out of the locker. Manners' photography was generally rather a serious matter, which he took with great seriousness. But he felt that a picture of Horace Coker, of Greyfriars, following his pole into the Thames, would be worth taking. It would furnish some comic relief in Manners' extensive series of pictures of the Thames.

The punt was quite close now, and Coker of Greyfriars, ceasing to pole, hailed the Old Bus.

"Hallo, there!"

Monty Lowther rose to his feet and bowed politely, raising his hat.

"Hallo!" he answered.

Coker stared at him.

"You're in the way!" he called out.

"Eh?"

"Get out of my way!"

"Which?"

"Deaf?" roared Coker. "Sheer, I tell you! Don't you know the rule of the road on the river?"

Tom Merry stood up. As the Old Bus was moored to a willow, and at rest, the St. Jim's party were not likely to cast off their moorings, and pull away from the bank, at the behest of the lordly Coker. They all stared at Coker, wondering whether he was serious.

Coker was quite serious. He waved a commanding hand at the seven juniors of St. Jim's.

"Sheer out, you Bank Holiday crowd!" he shouted.

"Bai Jove! We are not a Bank Holiday crowd, Coker!"

"Oh, you know my name, do you?" said Coker, staring.

"We've seen you before," said Monty Lowther politely. "Once my kind uncle took me to the Zoo. I looked into the monkeys' cage. And I've never forgotten you since!"

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Potter and Greene sat up in the punt and grinned. They were Coker's pals at Greyfriars, and Coker's pals in the holidays; but it is probable that, both at school and in the vac, they found Coker of the Fifth a little trying. They seemed to see something humorous in Monty Lowther's statement which was quite lost on Coker himself. A lack of a sense of humour was, perhaps, a defect in the character of the great Horace.

"I suppose that's meant for cheek," said Coker, after a pause. "If I come over among you, you'll know it!"

"Weally, Cokah—"

"I remember you now," said Coker. "You're the gang of fags that come to play cricket at Greyfriars with the fags at my school. Well, I've told you to get out of the way of this punt."

"My dear man," said Tom Merry mildly, "we're moored up. There's plenty of room for you to pass. You've got all the river between Berkshire and Oxfordshire to choose from."

"Don't you know the rule of the road?" snorted Coker. "Read up the rules before you go fooling on the river. I'll tell you. 'A punt being poled is entitled at all times to the course nearest the bank.' Got that?"

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"That's the rule of the river," assented Tom Merry. "But that doesn't apply to an anchored boat, when there's plenty of room to pass outside."

"Wathah not."

"I say it does!" said Coker.

"And that settles it?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Of course."

"Oh, my hat!"

Potter and Greene, in the punt, exchanged glances. They had been in that punt an hour. In the course of that hour they had collected fifteen disputes with other users of the river. Coker was starting on the sixteenth.

"I say, Coker—" murmured Potter.

"No need for you to say anything, George Potter."

"There's lots of room to pass, old chap," urged Greene.

"There may be. It's the principle of the thing," said Coker loftily. "I stand up for principle. Practically every craft we pass is breaking some rule or other. But I'm not seeing them do it without calling them to order."

"But—" urged Potter.

"Don't you chip in, Potter! Those fags have got to clear out of the way of this punt."

Potter sighed, and gave it up. It never was any use arguing with Horace Coker.

"You hear me, you fags?" roared Coker.

"We hear, O king!" answered Lowther.

"Are you moving?"

"Not quite."

"We uttably wefuse to move, you uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "I wegard you as a wivah-hog, Cokah."

"That's enough! If I come aboard you, you'll be sorry!"

"It would be rather painful to see your face at closer quarters, old bean," assented Monty Lowther. "Couldn't you put on a mask?"

Coker did not reply to that impertinent question.

"Well, if you will have it," he said, "I'm always ready to lick cheeky fags. I keep the fags in order at Greyfriars, I can tell you, and I'll show you how I do it."

And Coker poled on, evidently with the intention of coming on board the Old Bus, and administering chastisement to the cheeky fags who presumed to come between the wind and his nobility. Coker never counted odds.

"All hands repel boarders!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out! There he goes!" shouted Manners. "Stand clear!"

Manners' camera came up in a twinkling.

Coker was poling vigorously, not wisely, but too well. He drove his pole hard down, and the punt glided on towards the Old Bus with a rush. But the end of the pole remained firmly embedded in the bottom of the river, and it did not come out as Coker tugged.

Coker was still tugging manfully when the punt glided away from under his feet.

The nose of the punt bumped alongside the Old Bus. Coker's long legs shot into the air.

For a fraction of a second Coker was in the air, without any visible means of support save the punt-pole.

Snap!

"Got him!" said Manners.

That fraction of a second was enough for the St. Jim's photographer. Coker was out of sight after that.

There was a splash in the river, and the Thames flowed on peacefully and placidly over Horace Coker of Greyfriars.

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CHAPTER 2.

And Finding It!

"H E'S in!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The punt ranged alongside the Old Bus, and Potter held on to the gunwale and stopped it. Potter and Greene, and the seven St. Jim's fellows, stared at the widening circles on the water where Horace Coker had followed the punt-pole to parts unknown.

"Can he swim?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, he says he can swim like a duck," said Potter doubtfully. "But he says all sorts of things. My impression is that he swims like a plummet."

"Here he comes!"

Coker came up. His red and furious face reappeared over the surface of the Thames, and he was puffing and blowing wildly. His straw hat floated away to lodge in the rushes at a distance; the punt-pole had disappeared for good. Fortunately, Coker had not disappeared for good.

"Grooooooogh—hooch!" was Coker's first remark.

He flung up his hands wildly. At Greyfriars, Coker was always ready and willing to give fellows tips on swimming. But in the Thames, his swimming much more resembled that of a plummet than that of a duck or any other fowl. His hands flew up, and his head went down, and he was on the point of vanishing again when Tom Merry hooked a boat-hook somewhere into him, and jerked him up again.

"Bwavo!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Hang on to him, Tom Mewwy! I weally thought he was a gonah, you know."

"Groooooogh!" spluttered Coker.

"This way," said Tom Merry cheerfully, and he dragged Coker up between the punt and the boat.

Then Potter and Greene got a grip on him.

They had no time to be particular where they gripped. Or perhaps they were annoyed with Coker. Coker sometimes had an annoying effect even on his best friends. Potter seized him by the hair, and Greene by his ear. The ear was large enough to give a good hold.

"Up with him!" gasped Greene.

"Yaroooooh!"

"We've got you, old chap!"

"Yooop! Leggo!" shrieked Coker.

"My hat! Do you want to be drowned? Pull him in, Potter."

"Yow-ow-ow-woooooop!"

Coker was landed in the punt. He sprawled there in a pool of water, spluttering and rubbing his ear with one hand, and his head with the other, in a state of breathless fury.

"Saved you, old chap!" said Potter.

"You blithering owl!"

"We've saved your life!" said Greene.

"You burbling cuckoo!"

"Bai Jove! I do not call that gwateful!" said Arthur Augustus. "Cokah, you have not yet thanked Tom Mewwy for hookin' you out."

Coker sat up in the punt.

"Wait till I get my wind back!" he gasped. "I'll thank him—I'll thank the lot of you! Oh, you just wait a minute!"

The St. Jim's juniors waited cheerfully, grinning. Potter and Greene looked rather uneasy.

"Dash it all, Coker, you were going down, you know!" said Potter.

"You silly ass! You know I'm a splendid swimmer! Do you think I was in danger?" howled Coker. "I could swim from here to Reading if I liked!"

"Hem!"

"Couldn't I?" roared Coker ferociously.

"Oh, of course!" said Potter resignedly. "Dear man, you could swim from here to Oxford, and carry the punt on the back of your neck if you put your mind to it. With Greens and me in the punt, too."

This was a generous concession on the part of George Potter; he really was conceding more than Coker claimed. But his soft answer did not turn away wrath.

"I'll talk to you later, George Potter!" gasped Coker, staggering to his feet. "I'm going to thrash those cheeky kids now! Mind they don't push the punt away."

Coker turned a Hunnish glare on the St. Jim's crew. They smiled at him sweetly. Blake stood ready with an oar, watching for the psychological moment. The punt floated about a foot from the boat, the boathook holding it.

Coker made a stride, to step into the boat.

At the same moment the boathook released, and Blake shoved at the punt with his oar. The space between the two craft widened from a foot to five or six feet at once.

Splash!

"Dear me!" said Blake. "He's stepped into the water! Now, I wonder why Coker stepped into the water?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Cokah seems fond of goin' swimmin' with his clobber on!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Coker hardly knew what had happened. Having stepped



"This way!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, and he dragged Coker up between the punt and the boat. Potter seized Coker by the hair, and Greene by his ear. "Yoop! Leggo!" shrieked Coker. "My hat! Do you want to be drowned?" demanded Greene. (See page 4.)

into water, he went straight down. His feet went first, of course, and jammed into Thames mud. Close by the tied-up boat the water was shallow, and Coker did not entirely disappear. With his feet planted in oozy, clinging mud, the water flowed just under his chin. He saved himself from going over in the current, by clutching at the boat.

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

Tom Merry & Co. looked down at him with smiling faces. Coker clutched at the boat, but he could not quite reach the gunwale to drag himself up. Potter and Greene looked at him from the punt, but did not offer to help him this time. His gratitude on the last occasion did not encourage his friends to come to the rescue.

Coker struggled in the water. He drew up one foot from the mud of the river-bed, only succeeding in driving the other deeper with the effort. Then he drew up the other, and the one sunk in deeper than before. Coker's chin went under.

"Groooooogh!"

"What a game!" smiled Monty Lowther. "It's simply jolly of you to come along and cheer us up like this, Coker. You should do this performance at a regatta. You'd get no end of coppers!"

"You cheeky-yoooooooooch!"

Coker's mouth was too near the water for sustained eloquence. He gurgled as the Thames flowed into it.

"He's going in deeper," said Manners, surveying Coker critically. "In about a minute his mouth will be right under, and it will be good-bye to Coker. Would you like me to send a copy of the photograph to your friends, Coker, to keep in remembrance of you? I got a splendid snap of you hanging on the punt-pole. It will cheer up your family, I should think, to have it—remind them of the kind of fellow you were before you were drowned, you know."

Coker glared and gurgled.

"Any last message?" asked Monty Lowther.

"You—you—gug-gug-gug!"

The Thames filled Coker's mouth again, and he had to shut it, though it was totally against his custom to shut his mouth. He was reduced to breathing through his nose, and his frantic attempts to dislodge his feet from the mud brought his nose closer to the water.

"Going—going——" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed, and leaned over, and got a grip on

Coker's collar. With a long pull and a strong pull he dragged Coker clear of the clinging mud.

"There you are, old bean," he said. "Not drowned this time! You two chaps had better take him home."

Coker grasped the gunwale of the Old Bus now. It was a quality of Coker's that he never knew when he was beaten. After all his painful experience, he was still coming aboard for vengeance.

"What a sticker!" said Dig. "Shall we waste a bottle of ginger-beer on him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Dig uncorked a bottle as Coker's crimson and furious face came over the gunwale. Swoooooooooosh!

Ginger-beer, taken in the usual way, was grateful and comforting on a hot summer's afternoon. Taken in the way that Coker took it, it was neither grateful nor comforting. He gave a spluttering yell, and let go the gunwale of the Old Bus.

Then Potter caught him, and he clambered into the punt. He sat down there and gasped.

"Had enough?" asked Tom Merry.

"For goodness' sake, Coker, chuck it!" said Potter. "We're fed up, if you're not. You've lost the pole, but we've got the paddle. We're going on."

"Look here——"

"Oh, rats!" said Potter.

It was mutiny on board Coker's craft. But Coker was not in a state to deal with it effectively. He shook his list at Tom Merry & Co. as Potter paddled the punt away to the Oxfordshire bank. The juniors waved their hands cheerily in reply, and Arthur Augustus took off his Panama hat with a flourish.

The punt disappeared among the other craft on the river, leaving the St. Jim's crew chuckling. Coker of Greyfriars had had quite a cheering effect on them.

"I wonder," said Blake thoughtfully—"I wonder what Coker thought he was going to do, if he'd got aboard? As there's seven of us, and only one of him, I really wonder what he expected to happen?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear man!" said Monty Lowther. "I hope we shall see

him again. Anyhow, we'll send him a print of the giddy photograph, to remind him of the merry meeting."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

And, tea being over, and Coker of Greyfriars gone, Tom Merry & Co. cast off the Old Bus, and resumed their voyage up the Thames, towing along cheerily in the golden summer sunshine.

CHAPTER 3.

Wet Rain!

"WAIN!"

"And wet rain!" said Monty Lowther regretfully. It was rain, and it was wet. The day had been hot, not to say baking. The sun had been sinking in a bed of purple and gold. Arthur Augustus had prophesied a fine night, and suggested that the voyagers shouldn't trouble to put up the tent. To which the voyagers had agreed nem. con. After that, it was quite natural that rain should come on.

It started in a slow shower—in a sneaking sort of way. Blake said, as if trying to make the river-party fancy that they needn't bother, because it would soon be over. Instead of being soon over, it intensified, and came down harder and harder.

Arthur Augustus sat under an umbrella. He remarked how fortunate it was that he had brought an umbrella in the Old Bus. The other fellows, who hadn't brought umbrellas, did not seem to think it was so fortunate.

The Terrible Three were towing, and they went on towing for a time, till they were drenched. Then they got into the boat.

"Don't give in, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, from under the umbrella. "Don't mind a little wain. It will soon give ovah."

"Get out and tow," suggested Manners.

"It would be wathah difficult to tow and cawwy an umbwellah at the same time, Mannahs."

"I'll hold the umbrella," suggested Lowther.

"Do you think you could hold it ovah me vewy carefully, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus doubtfully.

"I wasn't thinking of holding it over you. Over me," explained Lowther.

"Weally, if you are goin' to be an ass——"

"Is that dashed river under the boat, or is it coming down on top of our heads?" asked Blake peevishly. "Blessed if I want any more of this. The climate is a swindle!"

"We shall have to get the tent up, after all," said Tom Merry. "But where are we going to put it up?"

"Echo answers, where?" said Dig.

The towpath, at this point, was bordered by a high stone wall. There was no sign of a suitable camping-ground to be seen, and to put up the tent in the middle of the towpath was not practicable. Camping-grounds, in fact, were never easy to find along the Thames. Owners of riverside property, as a rule, did not welcome strangers within their gates. Often and often had the chums of St. Jim's looked with yearning eyes into a lovely little back-water, and found a chain stretched across the mouth of it, to keep intruders out, and a big board announcing that they would be prosecuted if they ventured in. Indeed, as Monty Lowther had observed, dwellers along the Thames valley seemed to have quite a mania for prosecuting their fellow-citizens.

"We must try the canvas over the boat," said Blake. "After all, it's less trouble than the tent ashore."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tie up, then," said Tom.

The Old Bus was made fast to a projecting root of a big tree on the bank. Then the St. Jim's voyagers proceeded to get the canvas cover over the boat.

It was quite a simple arrangement. Iron arches fitted across the boat, and the canvas was spread over them and fastened down.

This turned the boat into a nobby little houseboat; or, at all events, it should have done so.

But in boating on the Thames, as in all other departments of human activity, theory sometimes fails to coincide with practice.

Along with the rain came the wind—quite a strong wind. There had been hardly a breath in the hot afternoon, when the juniors would have been glad of it. Now that they didn't want it, it came, and it came howling. With wind and rain and fast-falling darkness, some of the cheery good-humour of the St. Jim's party seemed to go.

Also, Arthur Augustus' umbrella went.

The wind caught it and lifted it from his hand, and Arthur Augustus grabbed after it too late.

He jumped up, with the rain pouring on him. Six other fellows were getting out the canvas, which was billowing in the wind. They were not likely to bother about a flying umbrella, which seemed to be understudying a parachute, only that it was going up instead of down.

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"There goes my bwolly, you fellows!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Let it go!" snapped Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Go after it!" suggested Lowther.

"Weally, you ass——"

"Help us with this canvas, dummy!" roared Manners.

"I am gettin' wet, Mannahs."

"We're wet already!" hooted Herries.

"That is no weason why I should get wet, is it, Hewwies? Your wemark seems to me iwwelevant."

Herries breathed hard. One of the iron hoops had fastened itself round Herries' neck instead of in the proper place, and it seemed to make George Herries cross.

"Lend me a hand, you image!" he breathed.

"My umbwella——"

"You frabjous ass——"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Blow your silly umbrellah!" shrieked Manners. "Help us, can't you?"

"Yaas, deah boy, when I have wecovahed my umbwellah."

The umbrella had blown into the branches of the tree. It was jammed there in the boughs and twigs, blowing about like a huge bird. Arthur Augustus eyed it anxiously.

"Will one of you fellows climb into the twee and get my umbwellah?" he asked. "I would go myself, but it would wuin my clothes."

"What about our clothes?" hissed Blake.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"There it goes!" said Monty Lowther, with satisfaction, as a fresh gust caught the umbrella, and whirled it away.

"Oh deah! It's gone!"

The umbrella vanished into the gloom up the river. Arthur Augustus caught a glimpse of it on the turbid waters for a moment, and then it was gone for good.

"Why didn't you keep hold of it, you ass?" said Lowther.

"Then you might have blown away with it."

"I call that a wude wemark, Lowthah."

"Are you trying to roll me up in this canvas, Lowther?" asked Blake, in sulphurous tones.

"No; I thought that's what you were trying yourself, old bean."

"You silly owl!"

"You silly ass!"

"Pway don't wag, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway show that you can keep your tempahs, blow faih, blow foul, you know. What are you twyin' to do with that hoop, Tom Mewwy?"

"I'm trying to fix it across the boat, you howling ass."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Yarooooooooh!" roared Tom. The hoop, instead of fixing, gave a sudden spring, and caught Tom Merry on the side of the head. The captain of the Old Bus gave a terrifio yell.

"Bai Jove! That was wathah clumsy," said Arthur Augustus. "You'd bettah let me fix it. I shall get dwenched at this wate."

Tom Merry rubbed his head.

"You burbling chump——" he began.

"For goodness' sake, Blake, stop rolling yourself in the canvas!" said Lowther. "This isn't a time for japes!"

"You—you—you——" gasped Blake.

"Keep your tempahs, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "Take example by me. I am not gettin' excited, or callin' fellows names. Leave that hoop to me, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry, busy rubbing his damaged head, was glad to leave the hoop to Gussy. Gussy handled it in a masterly manner, quite forgetting the hinge in the middle as he jammed it into place with his masterly hand. He was reminded of that hinge as it clicked, catching a fragment of Gussy's noble skin as it shut tight.

The yell that Arthur Augustus gave might almost have been heard from Reading to Staines.

"Yoooooooooop!"

"Stop that row, Gussy, for goodness' sake!"

"Yoowwwwwwwp!"

"What's the trouble?" howled Blake.

"Wow! This howwid thing has pinched a gweat lump out of my hand!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Clumsy!" said Tom Merry, still rubbing his head.

"You uttah ass——"

"What?"

"You burblin' dummay——"

"Who's calling fellows names now?" inquired Tom Merry.

"You cwass duffah——"

"Go it!" said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "Isn't old Gussy eloquent when he gets going?"

"You thumpin' chump——"

"Look out!" roared Blake. "Hold it!"

The billowing canvas escaped Blake. Half a dozen folds of it descended upon Arthur Augustus, and flattened him down in the bottom of the boat. There really was danger of the canvas blowing right away after the umbrella; and naturally the juniors flung themselves upon it to save it in time. They



The lamplight fell upon two writhing figures on the floor—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Horace Coker, who was banging Arthur Augustus' head as though he fancied himself the village blacksmith. "Yowowow! Help! Murdah!" shrieked D'Arcy. (See page 10.)

also flung themselves upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was under the canvas, but that could not be helped.

"Hold on to it!" gasped Blake.

"Hang on!"

"Got it all right!"

From beneath the billowing canvas and the struggling juniors came a muffled voice of anguish.

"Gewwoff! Gewwaway!"

"Dear me! Gussy's underneath!" said Monty Lowther.

"My knee's jamming on something under the canvas——"

"Yawwoh! It's my head!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"I thought it felt like a block of wood," assented Lowther.

"Yawwoh! Gewwoff!"

Arthur Augustus struggled spasmodically under the billows of canvas. His head came out into view at last, tousled and wild-eyed.

"You wotten wuffians——"

"Hallo, Mr. Punch!" said Lowther. "Isn't it just like Gussy to start playing Punch now?"

"I am not playin' Punch!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I have been neahly suffocated, and feahfully knocked about."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "Was it your leg I was treading on?"

"Ow! Yaas!"

"What a pity it wasn't your face!" said Blake unfeelingly.

"You howwid hooligan——"

"Try again," said Tom Merry. "My hat! The boat's nearly swamped, and the canvas is dripping! Bother the thing!"

"Blow it!"

"Bless it!"

"The canvas covah ought to have been put up as soon as it started wainin'," said Arthur Augustus.

There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus was right, but his wisdom came a little too late to be of any service. Tom Merry & Co., drenched with rain, struggled with dripping canvas in a heavy downpour. The boat rocked and swayed,

and the lantern had gone out. The juniors fell over thwarts, and oars, and baggage, and one another, and quite a chorus of observations rose from the boat—mostly of an emphatic nature. Blake sat down at last, panting.

"I don't know what you fellows think," he said, "but I'm fed up. We can't get any wetter than we are, so leave the dashed thing where it is."

"Don't slack, Blake, deah boy."

Blake peered round in the darkness.

"Where's that boathook?" he hissed.

"What the thump do you want a boathook for now?" demanded Manners.

"To brain that image."

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be called an image, Blake, and I should certainly not allow you to bwain me!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"He couldn't!" snorted Lowther. "It would want a microscope to find the brains, first."

"Weally, you wottah——"

"I'm done!" said Tom Merry, sitting down. "Blow the cover, and bless the boat, and bother the rain. I'm fed up!"

"That's all vewy well, Tom Mewwy; but——"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! If you call that civil——"

"Cheese it!" roared Blake.

"I considah——"

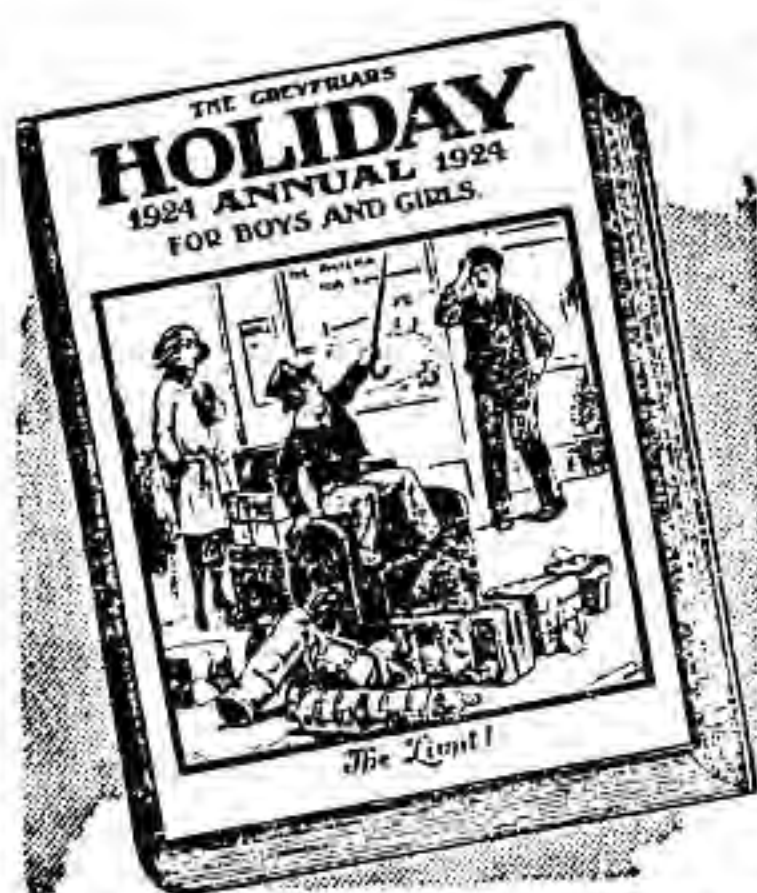
"Hallo! What's that light?" asked Herries, suddenly standing up and staring in the darkness along the bank.

Through rain and gloom and windy trees a ruddy light shone in the near distance. The juniors had been too busy to observe it before.

"Might be an inn," said Manners hopefully.

"Might be!" snorted Blake pessimistically. "As if there'd be an inn handy, when we're deatched and dripping and hungry."

"Let's see," said Tom Merry.



LOOK AT THIS, BOYS!

Now go and get
the original in the
nearest book-
seller's.

To-morrow may
be too late!

"If it is a wivah-side mansion, deah boys, we'll ask for sheltah for the night. I am suah the people would be hospitable."

"Oh, my hat! I don't think!" said Tom. "Let's hope it's an inn."

The rope was cast off, and the juniors put out the oars, and pulled the boat towards the light. That ruddy light grew stronger, and they perceived that it came from the window of an inn standing back from the towpath—about a hundred yards from the spot where they had stopped for the night. The juniors' feelings were almost too deep for words as they realised how near shelter they had been—if they had only known it.

"Better late than never," said Tom Merry, as cheerfully as he could. "Buck up!"

The boat was pulled up to the landing-place. Blake made fast to a post, and the juniors crowded ashore.

"Bai Jove! I hardly like to show up, you know, in this wet and wumpled state," said Arthur Augustus.

"You can stay and watch the boat," suggested Dig.

"Wats!"

And the drenched and dripping party walked up to the inn.

CHAPTER 4.

A Night Ashore!

TOM MERRY & CO. had set out on their voyage up the Thames with the determination not to sleep under a roof from start to finish. They changed that determination now.

It was quite a cosy and comfortable little inn, with a stout, purple-faced landlady and a stout, purple-faced landlord. The juniors were allowed to crowd round a big kitchen fire, the warmth of which was grateful and comforting. The landlord scratched his plump nose thoughtfully over the question of rooms for the night.

"There's three young gents putting up here," he said. "They've got three rooms. And there's two fishermen got two more. If you young gentlemen can pack into two rooms—rather small—I dessay we can make up beds."

"We can pack into a sardine tin, if there's a lid to keep the rain off," said Monty Lowther.

The innkeeper grinned.

"Then we'll manage somehow," he said.

"It's wathah annoying for three fellows to have a room each, and us to pack into close quarters," said Arthur Augustus to his comrades. "I woudah if they would mind packin' a bit closer."

"Probably," said Tom Merry. "You can ask them."

But it seemed that the three young "gents" were absent in the village, which was somewhere in the darkness behind the inn, so Arthur Augustus was unable to make his modest request. Two small rooms were better than nothing; and, baggage having been fetched up from the Old Bus, the juniors were glad to get into their rooms and change into dry clothing. Then, feeling more cheerful, they came down to supper with healthy appetites.

The three young gents had not turned up when supper was over, and the innkeeper opined that they were sheltering from the rain somewhere. Tom Merry & Co. went up to bed without seeing them.

Arthur Augustus glanced round the room he entered with a disparaging eye. Blake and Herries and Dig took possession of the smaller of the two rooms, and turned in. The larger one—it was not very large—was for four of the party—Arthur Augustus and the Terrible Three. There was a bed in it that could hold two, and a sofa made up as a bed.

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Arthur Augustus eyed the bed, and eyed the sofa, and eyed his companions in misfortune.

"Which are you fellows havin'?" he asked.

"Which?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yass—the bed or the sofa?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I'd wathah have the bed," said Gussy. "But I'm weady to wuff it. If you fellows pwefer the bed, I'll take the sofa. Aftah all, pewwaps you'd bettah have the bed, as there are thwee of you," he added generously.

"You blithering cuckoo," said Manners, in measured tones, "it goes two to the bed and two to the sofa!"

"Imposs, deah boy. One to the sofa and thwee to the bed," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Then I'll have the sofa," suggested Manners.

"I twust you are not goin' to be selfish, Mannahs. If I am willin' to wuff it on the sofa, you fellows ought to be satisfied with the bed, I suppose."

"Toss up for it," said Tom.

Tom Merry and Manners won the bed. The made-up sofa was left for Arthur Augustus and Monty Lowther.

"There weally isn't space for two, Lowthah," murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Take the floor if you prefer it, old top," said Lowther, sliding into the sofa-bed.

"I do not pwefer the flooah, Lowthah."

"Then give your chin a rest."

"Wats!"

The candle was blown out, and silence and slumber descended on Tom Merry and Manners, but not on the occupants of the sofa. After a few minutes the voice of Arthur Augustus was heard in thrilling tones:

"You are jammin' your knee in my back, Lowthah!"

"That's all right. I don't mind your silly back!"

"I mind your wotten knee, though!"

"That better?" asked Lowther.

"Yawooooh!"

"What's the matter now?"

"You neahly hurled me out of bed, you wuffian!"

"There's no satisfying some people," said Monty Lowther, with a sigh. "There, is that better?"

Bump!

"My only hat! What are you up to now, Gussy?"

"You—you—you—" gasped Arthur Augustus, sprawling on the floor. "You—you atrocious wuffian, you have pitched me out of bed!"

"Pitch him out of the window, too," came a sleepy voice across the room.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Shut up!"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, and groped in the dark for the sofa. It was very dark, and perhaps that was the reason why, in groping, he jammed his knuckles into Monty Lowther's eye.

It was Lowther's turn to yell.

"Yow! Ow! Wow!"

"What's the mattah, Lowthah?"

"I—I—I'll—"

"Can't you fellows keep quiet?" asked Tom Merry, starting out of a doze. "Aren't you tired?"

Bump! Lowther was groping now, and there was a concussion between his knuckles and Gussy's nose. Gussy sat down.

"Bai Jove! I'm goin' to give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Lowthah, you uttah wottah, I am goin' to thwash you as soon as I have lighted the candle."

And Arthur Augustus groped wildly for his clothes, in search of matches.

Monty Lowther rolled off the sofa.

"Gussy, old man—"

"You wottah!"

"There really isn't room for two on that sofa," said Lowther. "I'm going to root round for another bed. If those chaps aren't coming back from the village, it's a pity to leave their beds empty for the night."

"We haven't heard them come in," said Tom Merry. "Very likely they've stopped somewhere. Go down and ask the landlord, Monty. It's pretty late now for them to come back."

"Bai Jove! I wathah think I will go down and ask the landlord," said Arthur Augustus. "I should vevy much pwefer a bed."

"Bow-wow!" said Lowther, and he slipped on a coat in the dark, and slipped out of the room.

"Lowthah, you wottah—"

But Lowther was gone. He was not, however, gone very far. As a matter of actual fact, he went into the nearest room which belonged to the absent "gents," and ascertained that it was still unoccupied. After waiting there a few minutes, he came back.

"All serene," he said. "There's a bed empty. You can have that dashed old sofa to yourself, Gussy."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"No, you shall have the bed," said Lowther, in a burst of generosity. "The sofa will do for me. Come along, Gussy, and I'll show you the bed."

"Bai Jove, that is vewy decent of you, Lowthah. I shall not give you the thwashin' I mentioned."

"Thanks no end," said Lowther. "Don't trouble to dress—just shove on a coat, and come along."

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy put on a coat over his pyjamas, and followed Monty Lowther from the little room. Lowther led him in the dark across the landing, to the unoccupied room. There he struck a match and lighted a candle.

"There you are, Gussy! Turn in!"

"Bai Jove! This is weally vewy nice! I say, though, the othah chap's pyjamas are lyin' on the bed."

"What does that matter, so long as the chap isn't?"

"Vewy twue, deah boy. Good-night!"

"Good-night, old bean!"

Monty Lowther retired, and closed the door. He returned cheerfully to his own room, and settled down on the sofa.

"Gussy all right?" asked Tom Merry sleepily.

"I believe so. He's got quite a nice large room to himself," said Monty Lowther. "I don't know what he'll do when the owner comes in, but otherwise he's quite all right."

Tom Merry sat up in bed.

"What? Didn't you go down and speak to the landlord?"

"Nunno."

"But the fellows may be coming back to their rooms!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Pretty certain to, I should think," said Lowther, with a yawn. "I fancy they're waiting somewhere for the rain to stop. It's giving over now, I think."

"But—" Tom Merry gasped. "Whose blessed bed have you put Gussy into?"

"I really don't know. It belongs to one of the fishermen, or one of the three young gents, I imagine. Gussy will know when the owner comes home."

"You awful ass!" gasped Tom. "There'll be a row!"

"Shouldn't wonder. Good-night!"

"I say, Monty—"

Snore!

Tom Merry chuckled, and laid his head on the pillow again. The Terrible Three of St. Jim's were soon asleep—sleeping the sleep of the just. And in the large room, in a comfortable bed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy also slept the sleep of the just—a happy slumber that was destined to have a rude awakening long before morning.

CHAPTER 5.

An Alarm in the Night.

"BEASTLY wet!"

"Rotten!"

"Oh, don't grouse!" growled Horace Coker.

"Blessed if I ever saw such fellows for grouching!"

Potter and Greene grunted. Coker had been "grouching" for three miles in the rain, and they felt it was hard if they couldn't take a turn.

The three young gents had returned late to the Silver Swan inn. Little as Tom Merry & Co. had guessed it, the three young gents were their old acquaintances, Coker & Co., of Greyfriars.

Coker & Co. had been exploring the country when the rain came on. They had been lucky enough to get shelter in a farmhouse, and supper there, and then they had waited for the rain to stop.

It is a peculiar thing about rain, that if one waits for it to stop, it never does stop. So it proved in this instance; and Coker & Co. were driven to walking back through the rain to the inn—three miles of it. Their tempers suffered—especially Coker's. Coker seemed to think, somehow, that it was Potter and Greene's fault that the rain had come on at all.

"Everybody gone to bed!" growled Coker.

A single dim light gleamed from the inn. Everybody was in bed excepting boots, who was sitting up for the late comers.

Boots rubbed his eyes and blinked at them.

"You're late back, gents," he said.

"We didn't think it was early," said Coker.

"Might be civil to the man," murmured Potter. "He's sat up jolly late for us."

"Who's not being civil?"

When Coker asked a question in that tone of voice, it meant that Coker was ready for an argument. Potter wisely declined to make any rejoinder. He was too wet and tired and sleepy for a row with Horace Coker.

"Sleepy job, sitting up, sir," said boots insinuatingly.

"Very likely," said Coker.

"I don't mind obliging a gentleman, though," said boots.

"Of course," said Coker. "It's your duty."

Boots grunted.

As a rule, Coker exuded tips. He had plenty of money; and according to Potter and Greene he chucked it about.

But on the present occasion Coker was tired and cross, so the hungry sheep looked up and was not fed, so to speak.

"Give me a candle," said Coker.

"Your candle's in your room, sir," said boots sulkily.

"There's a candle in hevery room."

"I can't go barking my shins over that dashed staircase in the dark, man!" snapped Coker.

"It ain't my dooty to bring your candlestick down, sir," said boots stolidly. "You can complain of the chambermaid to-morrow if you like."

"For goodness' sake, come on, Coker," implored Greene. "Do you think you're at the Savoy or the Ritz?"

"Oh, shut up, Greene!"

"Look here—"

"I've asked you to shut up, Greene!"

"Well, I'm off," said Greene, and he started up the stairs, and Potter followed him.

"You're impertinent, my man," said Coker to boots.

"Ho!" said boots.

Coker followed his comrades up the stairs in the dark. He felt for matches in his pocket, but, of course, there were no matches in his pocket—on such an occasion a fellow never does find matches in his pocket. Coker breathed hard and deep, and groped his way up narrow and creaking stairs.

Potter and Greene reached their rooms and went in. They knew their rooms easily enough in the dark; they had been staying a week at the Silver Swan. Coker knew his room well enough, too, and he groped his way to it, opened the door, and went in.

There was a pale glimmer of starlight from a diamond-paned window. Coker crossed over to the table beside the bed, where there should have been a candlestick. It was not there—for the excellent reason that a new occupant of the room had happened to move it. There was a box of matches on the candlestick, Coker knew; but as he did not know where the candlestick was, that did not help him.

Coker grunted angrily.

He was annoyed all round; it had been a trying day for Coker. His encounter with the St. Jim's juniors had been disastrous—he had had to pay for a lost punt-pole—Potter and Greene had been irritating—and the weather had had the cheek to turn rainy while he was out for a country walk. Even the boots had been cheeky. Now he was groping around in the dark, and couldn't find a candlestick, and hadn't a match. It really seemed to Coker as if the whole universe was up against him specially—Nature itself seemed oblivious to his importance. He groped, and knocked over a chair, and murmured something under his breath as a leg of the chair banged on his shin.

"Oh, bust the candle! Blow everything!" snarled Coker. "I suppose I've got to turn in in the dark. Blow!"

The bed was in shadow in the corner, but there was really enough starlight from the diamond-paned window for Coker to glimpse his way about. He groped over the bed for his pyjamas first.

Then he jumped!

His pyjamas had been moved; and there was somebody in the bed. Under the coverlet he felt a recumbent form!

Coker gasped.

"What—"

Another gasp from the bed answered him. Naturally, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been awakened.

"Gwoogh! What—"

"My hat!" stuttered Coker. "They've put somebody in my bed! My bed! The cheek of it! I—I'll—I'll—"

Coker bent over the bed, to drag the bedclothes off the intruder with a drastic hand. At the same moment the startled Arthur Augustus sat up suddenly.

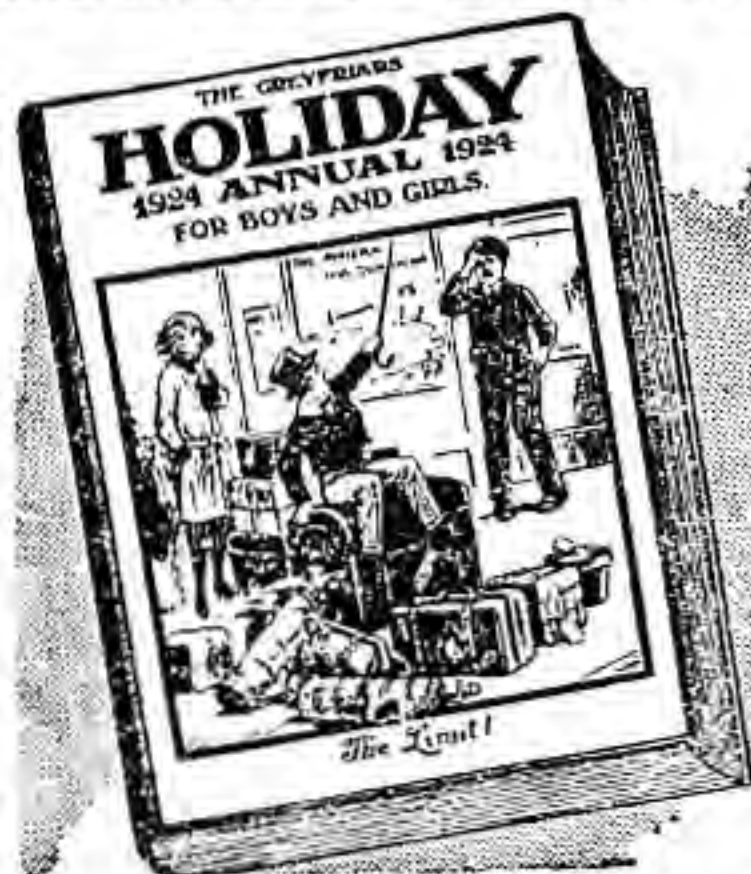
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published!



Crack!

The top of Gussy's noble head came into sudden and violent contact with Horace Coker's chin.

The concussion was terrific.

Coker staggered back with a wild roar; and there was a yell of anguish from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Ow! I've knocked my beastly head on somethin'. Wow! Yow! Oh, my nappah!"

"Ow! My chin!" gasped Coker, clasping it with both hands.

For a moment or two Coker felt as if his jaw had been driven up through the crown of his head.

It was not really so bad as that. But undoubtedly Coker was hurt. He clasped his chin and howled.

Arthur Augustus rubbed his head and glared round in the gloom. There was somebody in the room with him; he knew that. He could only suppose that it was a burglar.

Arthur Augustus wasn't afraid of burglars. The swell of St. Jim's feared no foe. He grasped a pillow as the handiest weapon of defence, and leaped from the bed.

"Burglars!" he shouted. "Help!"

Swipe!

The pillow smote Coker's head, and the Fifth-Former of Greyfriars went with a crash to the floor.

Arthur Augustus was on him the next second, with the spring of a tiger. His idea was to keep the burglar down till help arrived. For all Arthur Augustus knew to the contrary, the ruffian might have a revolver about him.

"Help!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Blake—Hewies—Dig—help! Burglars!"

"Lemine gerrup!" roared Coker.

"Keep still, you scoundwel!" panted Arthur Augustus, planting his knee on Coker's neck. "Help! Burglars! Help!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice rang through the riverside inn; indeed, it might have been heard across the river. It woke every echo of the building. Voices were heard calling, and doors opening. A gleam of light came from somewhere.

"This way!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I've got the burglar!"

That was the case; but only for a moment. The next moment the burglar had him. Coker of the Fifth was a little too hefty for Gussy. He grasped the junior and whirled him off, and Gussy came down on the floor with a crash. Then Coker was top dog.

He seized Arthur Augustus by the hair, and proceeded to bang his noble head on the floorboards.

Wild yells rose from Arthur Augustus.

"Yow-ow! Help! Whoop! Burglars! Murdah! Whooop! Help! Oh, my nappah! Help!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Wow! Help! Wow!"

CHAPTER 6.

Not a Burglar!

LIGHT gleamed in at the door. The innkeeper, half-dressed, with an alarmed face, stared in, lamp in hand. Behind him came quite an army—Potter and Greene and Blake and Herries and Digby and Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther. Then came boots, armed with a pitchfork. They stared into the dim room, and the lamplight fell on two writhing figures on the floor—Arthur Augustus, struggling for his life, and Horace Coker, banging Arthur Augustus' head on the floor as though he fancied himself the village blacksmith, and the floor an anvil, and Gussy's noble head a hammer.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Murdah!"

"I'll teach you!" roared Coker. "Snoosing in my bed, by gosh! Hitting a chap on the chin because he wants his own bed! I'll teach you!"

"Help! Yawwooh!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "You've done it now, Monty! It's Coker—that Greyfriars' dummy!"

"He seems to have woke Gussy up!" remarked Lowther. "Gussy sounds a bit wakeful."

"Yooop! Help!"

"Gentlemen—" gasped the innkeeper.

Blake and Herries and Digby rushed on Coker, and dragged him off their noble chum. They did not drag him gently. Coker went to the floor with a crash.

"Now, what's this game?" demanded Blake.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Gussy—" exclaimed Herries.

"Wow-wow!"

"Lemine gerrat him!" roared Coker, scrambling up furiously.

The startled innkeeper rushed between. So did the rest of the audience. Coker was hustled back. Dig raised up Arthur Augustus, who rubbed his head and groaned.

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"Secure that villain!" panted Arthur Augustus. "He is a burglar—he has attempted to murdah me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's Coker!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! Cokah!"

"I'll give you burglars!" roared Coker frantically. "What were you doing in my bed, you young rascal?"

"Your bed, you uttah wottah? How dare you come in heah and wake me up, if you are not a burglar?"

"Can't a chap come into his own room?" asked Potter. "What are you doing in Coker's room, you young ass?"

"Sleep-walking, perhaps," suggested Greene.

"I was sleepin' in my bed, when that fealful wuffian attacked me with howwid fewocity—"

"But this is Mr. Coker's room," said the innkeeper. "You have no right in this room."

"For goodness sake, Gussy, get out!" said Blake. "What the thump do you mean by wandering into another chap's room in the middle of the night? Were you sleep-walking?"

"Sleep-walkin'?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Well, how did you get here?" demanded Herries.

"Is it—is it possible that that is Cokah's bed?" stammered Arthur Augustus. "Lowthah told me that—that—"

"Oh!" Blake understood at once. "This is one of Lowther's little jokes, is it?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Gussy wasn't satisfied with his share of the sofa," explained Monty. "I found him a bed. I believe in kindness to animals."

"You uttah wottah, you were pullin' my leg!" howled Arthur Augustus. "I did not know it was Cokah's bed. I supposed—"

"You've woke up the whole 'ouse!" growled the innkeeper. "Get back to your own room, you young idiot!"

"Weally, my good man—"

"Get a move on, I tell you!"

"Yaas; but, weally—"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Blake; and he dragged Arthur Augustus out of the room.

"Weally, Blake—" gasped D'Arcy.

"I'll give you the hiding of your life to-morrow, the lot of you!" shouted Coker, as he lighted his candle.

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Blake.

The innkeeper and boots departed, growling. Potter and Greene retired, grinning. Gussy was landed in his own room—in a heap on the floor—and Blake and Herries and Digby went back to bed. Tom Merry had lighted a candle, and by the candle-light Arthur Augustus regarded the Terrible Three with wrathful frowns. The chums of the Shell were grinning; a circumstance which increased D'Arcy's wrath.

"My leg has been pulled!" said Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "The innkeeper nevah gave you leave to give me that bed, Lowthah."

"Go hon!" murmured Lowther.

"I wegard you as a pwactical jokin' beast!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I owe Cokah an apology for takin' his bed. He is a wuffianly wottah, but I owe him an apology."

"Do you want any of this sofa?"

"In the cires, I am bound to apologise to Cokah for baggin' his bed. It is a vewy disagweeable task, because I dislike the chap, and wegard him with pwofound contempt. He has hurt my nappah vewy much. But I am bound to do the wight thing."

Arthur Augustus turned to the door.

"You howling ass, where are you going?" exclaimed Manners.

"I am goin' to pwoffah an apology to Cokah."

"Can't you leave it till the morning, image?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to be called an image."

"Look here—"

"Wats?"

Arthur Augustus went out on the landing, and groped to Coker's door. The much-tried Horace was getting into bed when there came a tap at his door, and it opened.

"Cokah!"

Horace Coker breathed hard and deep.

"That young scoundrel again!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Cokah—"

Coker seized a bolster.

"Just step in," he said.

"Vewy good. I have come heah, Cokah, because, under the cires, I feel bound to say— Yawwooop! Yow! Stoppit! Help!"

Smite, smite, smite!

Coker was getting in some active work with the bolster, and Arthur Augustus' apology was interrupted in mid-career.

Certainly, Coker did not know that Gussy had come to apologise. He did not know why he had come, and did not care. All he cared for, apparently, was getting in as many swipes with the bolster as he possibly could, with all the force that he could put into them.



Coker made a spring and landed in the Old Bus with a bump. The boat rocked and swayed and a wash of the Thames came over the gunwale, and there was a roar from the juniors. "You silly ass!" "Jolly near capsized us!" "Chuck him out!" (See page 12.)

Arthur Augustus staggered out on to the landing under a rain of swipes.

"Yow-ow! You wuffian! I came here to say—Whooooop! Oh, you feahful beast! Yawoooooh!"

D'Arcy fled for his own room, with Coker after him, still swiping. He rushed in wildly.

"Wescue, deah boys! Help! Oh ewumhs!"

Coker followed him in, still swiping with the bolster. The Terrible Three hurled themselves on Coker, and cast him forth, and there was a roar from the Greyfriars fellow.

"Come in and have some more!" called out Monty Lowther invitingly.

But Coker, it seemed, had had enough to go on with. He retired to his room, snorting.

"How did the apology work?" inquired Lowther.

"I wefuse to answah sillay questions, Lowthah."

"Coker seemed pleased, I thought."

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus turned in at last—on the edge of the sofa. It was not a comfortable abiding-place, and it seemed to Arthur Augustus that his stable-companion was all knees and elbows. But not for wealth untold would Arthur Augustus have abandoned that sofa in search of another bed that night. He slept at last, and dreamed that he was balancing miraculously on the verge of a giddy abyss. Soon after dawn he plunged into the abyss—and woke, and found himself on the floor. That morning Arthur Augustus D'Arcy set his comrades a good example of early rising.

CHAPTER 7.

Coker Comes in Useful!

HORACE COKER was late down that morning. By the time he showed up for breakfast, Tom Merry & Co. had finished, and were preparing the Old Bus for a further voyage up the river. The rain had stopped overnight; trees and bushes glistened with silvery drops; but the summer sun had come up hot and strong, and in the glorious sunshine the chums of St. Jim's were merry and bright, and forgot all their troublesome adventures of the night before.

Tom Merry, cheery and peaceable by nature, hoped to get off in the Old Bus before Coker came on the scene. He did not want any more trouble with Coker of Greyfriars. Even Gussy did not want to see him, having decided that an apology would be wasted on a ruffian like Horace Coker. But the Fifth-Former of Greyfriars wanted to see them. Coker's injuries and grievances were still unavenged, and it was impossible to leave them in that unfinished state, as it were. Coker had let the sun go down on his wrath and rise on it again. Even a substantial breakfast did not placate him.

He stood at a window and looked out at the shining river, and at the St. Jim's juniors getting their boat ready. And he frowned.

"They're getting off," he said to Potter and Greene.

"Let 'em!" said Potter.

"Sooner the better," said Greene.

"That's what you think," sneered Coker. "Do you suppose that I allow cheeky fags to cheek me? Me!"

"Dear old man, you're not at Greyfriars now," urged Potter. "You can't treat all the inhabitants of the United Kingdom as if they belonged to the Second Form at Greyfriars."

"You're talking rot, Potter!"

"Thanks!"

"I speak plainly," said Coker. "I was always a plain chap."

"You always were," agreed Potter cordially. "But I'm surprised to hear you say so. Still, good looks aren't everything, are they?"

There was a chuckle from Greene.

"If you're trying to be funny, George Potter—" roared Coker.

"Not at all," said Potter. "That's your department. You're funny enough for a party of three, goodness knows!"

Coker breathed hard.

"I won't wallop you now, Potter," he said. "I'm going to attend to those St. Jim's fags now. You heard what that young cad said yesterday. They've got a photograph of me sticking to the punt-pole. I can't allow them to keep that, can I?"

"Can you prevent them?" queried Greene.

"I'm going to make them hand it over," explained Coker.

"Then, after thrashing them all round, I will let them off."

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

"They're getting ready to start now," said Coker, glancing from the window again. "Come on!"

"Come on?" repeated Potter.

"Yes. I shall want you to back me up, of course."

"Pooh! You can handle seven chaps on your own, Coker," said Potter, with a private wink at Greene.

"Easily!" said Greene.

"All the same, you may as well come," said Coker, who perhaps had some doubts on the point. "They may have the cheek to resist."

"Oh, ah! Yes. I—I think that's quite possible!" gasped Potter. "They—they might! People are so cheeky sometimes."

"Well, come on. Hallo! They're getting on board. There's no time to lose!" exclaimed Coker. "Quick!"

Horace Coker rushed out of the inn. Potter and Greene rushed after him. Coker rushed on right down to the boat. Potter and Greene, perhaps mistaking the direction, rushed round to the back of the inn. There—out of sight of their great leader—they went for a walk.

Tom Merry & Co. were on board the Old Bus now. They had tidied the boat and cleaned it down, after its late experiences, and all was calm and bright. The juniors were preparing to start in cheery spirits, when Coker came rushing down the bank.

"Stop!" roared Coker.

"Hallo! Good-morning, old scout!" greeted Monty Lowther. "What on earth have you been doing to your face, Coker?"

"My face?" repeated Coker, taken aback, and passing his hand over his countenance.

"Yes, you've got something sticking on it!"

"Oh! Have I?" said Coker, again feeling over his face. "What is it?"

"A queer-looking thing," said Lowther, staring at Coker with an expression of alarm. "It looks like a—like a lump of putty—"

"I can't feel it!" snapped Coker.

"Why, you're feeling it now!"

"Eh? I'm feeling my nose—"

"Oh, it's your nose!" exclaimed Lowther, as if suddenly enlightened. "I see! My mistake! Blessed if I should have guessed that that was a nose!"

Coker glared at him speechlessly. He realised that he had been taken in.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, delighted with the expression on Coker's face.

"You—you—you—" gasped Coker.

"Good-bye, Cokah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Shove off, deah boys!"

Tom Merry pushed off.

"Stop!" roared Coker. "I haven't finished with you yet!"

"Your mistake, you have!" said Manners.

The water widened between the boat and the landing-raft. Horace Coker was not to be baffled so easily as all that, however.

"Come on!" he shouted to Potter and Greene, whom he supposed to be behind him. They were—only there was the inn between, and a hundred yards of village; and Potter and Greene were walking at quite a good rate with their backs towards Coker.

Coker made a spring.

His long legs easily covered the strip of water, and he landed in the Old Bus with a bump!

The boat rocked and swayed under the heavy concussion as Coker's feet crashed in, followed by Coker.

Arthur Augustus sat down quite suddenly. A wash of the Thames came over the gunwale, and there was a roar from the juniors.

"You silly ass—"

"Jolly near capsized us—"

"Chuck him out!"

"Potter! Greene!" roared Coker. "Why, where are those silly owls? I told them plainly to come! Potter! Greene! Here, hands off!"

"Look out there!" came a howl from a canoe on the river. Coker's jump, and his weight in landing on the Old Bus, had given the boat a powerful impetus, and it was rocking out wildly into the middle of the river. A young man in a canoe just shaved it, and he brandished his paddle at the St. Jim's crew in speechless fury.

Tom Merry jumped to the lines. Three or four of the juniors snatched up oars. They had no time to attend to Coker for the moment. The bright morning sunshine had brought out plenty of craft on the river, and the roomy Old Bus was rocketing among them after the manner of a bull in a china shop.

Arthur Augustus grasped a boathook to fend off. He

jabbed away a punt that nearly crashed into the boat, and the Old Bus plunged on at a skiff pulled by a stout old gentleman with a pair of sculls.

"Keep clear!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He jammed at the skiff to keep it clear. It was simply ill-luck that made the boathook land on the stout gentleman instead of the skiff.

The yell that that stout old gentleman gave as he collected the business-end of D'Arcy's boathook, woke every echo of the river.

"Look out!" shrieked Blake.

"I'm lookin' out, deah boy! I say, that old gentleman must be pottay!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What's the mattah with him?"

The stout gentleman was standing up in his skiff, regardless of peril, with an expression on his face that was absolutely frantic. He had grasped one scull in both hands, and was trying to get a good aim at Arthur Augustus, evidently with the intention of braining him on the spot.

Fortunately, Lowther shoved an oar at the skiff, and sent it rocketing away, and the stout gentleman sat down suddenly in it.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Put that boathook down, you thumping ass!" roared Blake. "Do you think we've got time to stop for inquests?"

"Weally, Blake—"

Fortunately, the Old Bus was under control now, and four oarsmen pulled, and Tom Merry steered, and the St. Jim's crew faded out of hearing of the stout gentleman's voice.

"The manna's on this wivah," said Arthur Augustus warmly, "are shockin'. I weally think that dweadful old person was twyin' to stwike me with that scull."

"What did you puncture him for, you ass?"

"Accidents will happen, Blake. Besides, I do not think he was actually punctured. Anyhow, a slight puncture in the wibs is no excuse for bad manna's."

Coker, in the general hurry, had passed almost unnoticed; Tom Merry & Co. had had no time to waste on their passenger. Now, as they pulled up the river, they gave their attention to Coker.

"We shall have to pull in, and put that idiot ashore," said Tom Merry. "We ought really to look for a lunatic asylum to land him in."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Pull back to the inn at once!" snapped Coker.

"What?"

"Pull back, I tell you! I'm not going up the river!"

"Looks to me as if you are!" smiled Tom Merry. "You came on this boat without being asked, and you've given trouble enough. Now you're going to sit quiet till we chuck you out!"

Snort, from Coker.

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MYSTERY NOW ON SALE! ADVENTURE

“I’m going to thrash you all round by way of a beginning,” he said. “I never stand cheek from fags. And I want that photograph that one of you took of me yesterday.”

“I’m going to send you a copy to Greyfriars next term,” grinned Manners.

“Hand it over!”

“Will you have it now——” began Manners.

“Yes.”

“Or when you can get it?” concluded Manners.

“Hand it over!” roared Coker.

“Dear man!” said Manners.

“Then I’ll begin on you!” said Coker.

And Coker began on Manners. Upon which, Lowther and Blake and Herries, being nearest, began on Coker. The hero of Greyfriars found himself, quite suddenly, squashed into the bottom of the boat, and three of the juniors took their seats upon him.

“Keep him there!” said Tom Merry.

“Lemme gerrup!” roared Coker.

“Sit on his head, deah boys!” said Arthur Augustus. “I will pwod him with this boathook if he gives twouble.”

Coker was going to give trouble; there was no doubt about that. Coker was a hefty fellow, and as he struggled and heaved the three juniors sitting on him swayed and rocked. Then Arthur Augustus introduced the boathook into the argument.

“Whooooop!” roared Coker. “You young demon, if you prod me again—— Yaroooooh!”

“Have some more, deah boy!”

“Wow-wow! Keep off!”

“Bettah keep quiet, I considah!” chuckled Arthur Augustus. “I can keep on pwoddin’ as long as you keep on wigglin’, Cokah, and I am suah you will get tired first!”

Coker was tired already. He remained quiescent, but with an expression on his face that a wild Hun might have envied.

“This is all very well,” remarked Monty Lowther. “But I can’t sit on Coker’s head all day. I hate a wooden seat!”

“Grooogh!”

“Let’s tow him behind,” suggested Dig. “We can tie the tow-rope to his ears—plenty of room!”

“You—you—you——” spluttered Coker.

“I’ve got it!” exclaimed Lowther. “You know, some fellows have a horse to tow a boat. But a donkey can do the work all right. Let Coker tow the boat!”

“Hurrah!”

“I won’t tow the boat!” roared Coker.

“Oh, yes, you will, if we ask you nicely,” said Monty Lowther. “Pull in, you chaps; why should we bother to row when we’ve got a donkey to tow us?”

“Yaas, wathah.”

The St. Jim’s crew pulled in to the tow-path. The boat bumped on the rushes, and Blake jumped ashore with the rope.

“Now hand out Coker,” he said.

Coker was a little difficult to hand out. He started struggling again. Arthur Augustus promptly prodded with the boathook, but in the confusion of the wild and whirling struggle the prod did not reach Coker. A yell from Herries showed whom it reached.

“Keep cleah, Hewwies, while I pwod him——”

“You dangerous idiot——”

“Weally, Hewwies——”

“Gerraway, you dummy!” shrieked Herries.

“But I am pwoddin’ Cokah——”

“Yarooooh!” roared Manners.

“Bai Jove! I wish you fellows would not keep on gettin’ in the way of this boathook when I am pwoddin’ Cokah. Heah, keep off, Manners—wharrah you up to, you uttah ass?”

Without explaining what he was up to, leaving Arthur Augustus to guess, Manners seized the swell of St. Jim’s and brought him down in the boat with a crash. Coker, thus relieved of two foes at once, struggled furiously. But Tom Merry and Lowther, Digby and Herries were too many for him. Grasping Coker by every available coign of vantage—his ears, his neck, his hair, his arms, and his legs, the juniors got him ashore and landed him in the rushes in a yelling, struggling heap.

Then Coker was held down while Blake tied the tow-rope on him, taking care to secure Coker’s arms with the knotted rope.

“That’s all right,” said Blake. “Let him get up.”

Coker got up.

“Now go ahead, Coker!” said Tom Merry with a breathless chuckle.

“Do you think I’m going to tow your silly boat?” raved Coker.

“Just that.”

“I’m not!” roared Coker. “Take this rope off.”

“We’ll walk with you and cheer you up,” said Lowther. “Hand me out that boathook. Thanks! Are you towing, Coker?”

“No!” roared Coker.

“You know what they did to the donkey that wouldn’t go!” urged Monty Lowther. “Gee up!”

“I—I—I’ll——”

Prod, prod, prod!

Coker spluttered wildly, and struggled to free his arms. But his arms were too securely tied for that. Coker was not bright in the intellectual line, but he was bright enough to realise that argument was not possible with a boathook. He towed.

Monty Lowther and Blake walked with him—to cheer him up, or at least to buck him up. The rest of the crew boarded the Old Bus again, and Tom Merry steered, with a smiling face, while Coker towed.

CHAPTER 8.

Sacked!

THE Old Bus in the course of its travels had often attracted attention in one way and another from other craft on the river. But certainly it had never attracted so much attention as it attracted now. Horace Coker, at the towing-rope, seemed to exercise a fascinating effect on people going up and down the Thames. Various craft were towed in various ways—sometimes a horse, sometimes a donkey, sometimes a man or a boy, sometimes a fair and fluffy flapper. But a towing-man with the rope tied on him, fastening his arms, and a face like a thunderstorm was something new. And when Coker slacked, and Lowther prodded him with the boathook to buck him up, Coker yelled, and his yells seemed to interest the river folk, too.

Not a craft passed the Old Bus without stares being turned on Coker, sometimes puzzled, sometimes astonished, sometimes with laughter. Coker liked, as a rule, to be in the middle of a picture, the cynosure of all eyes. But he did not enjoy it now.

At all events, if he enjoyed it, his looks belied him. There was no trace whatever of enjoyment in Coker’s looks.

People on the tow-path stopped to look at Coker. Little boys followed him, inquisitive and interested. Coker hoped that a policeman would be met with. As a rule, Coker hadn’t much of an opinion of the police. But he would rather have met a policeman now than a long-lost brother. Fortunately, there were no signs of the Force on the tow-path.

A skiff ranged alongside the Old Bus, and a young man called out to Tom Merry, jerking his thumb towards Coker:

“What’s that game?”

“It isn’t a game,” answered Tom Merry seriously. “Haven’t you ever seen a boat towed before?”

“Not like that!” grinned the young man. “What is he tied on to the tow-rope for?”

“He finds he pulls better like that.”

“My hat! A new gadget, what?”

“Just that!” agreed Tom Merry.

“Yaroooooh!” roared Coker at that moment as, having slacked down, he received a prod.

“Well, it beats me!” said the young man in the skiff in amazement. “Does the chap like being prodded on like that?”

“It’s his way,” said Tom cheerily. “He simply wouldn’t consent to tow on any other terms.”

“Great Scott!”

The young man in the skiff glided off, with the impression that the Old Bus was being towed by a born idiot or a lunatic. The crew of the Old Bus grinned cheerily at one another. On the tow-path Coker glared with a homicidal glare at Blake and Monty Lowther.

“Will you let me go?” he hissed.

“Not only that; we’ll jolly well make you go!” answered Monty. “Gee-up!”

“You young villain——”

Prod!

Coker howled, and plodded on, tugging the Old Bus on her way. With the persuasive help of the boathook he made quite a good speed, and another towed boat was overtaken. It was a nicely-painted boat, with two pretty girls in it, and an old gentleman with a white moustache and a white hat. They were being towed by a whiskery old boatman, who plodded along stolidly. Coker, overtaking him, called to him:

“Hi, my man, help!”

The boatman looked round.

“Help!” howled Coker. “Get me loose! I’ll give you a quid if you’ll make these cads let me go.”

“Well, my eye!” said the old boatman in amazement.

“Two pounds!” gasped Coker. “Make ’em lemme go.”

“You let that young man alone,” said the boatman, turning on Blake and Lowther. “You untie him! Do you ‘ear?”

"Untie him if you like," said Monty Lowther blandly. "You take the responsibility if there's anything that happens." Monty Lowther, unseen by the raging Coker, tapped his forehead significantly.

"Oh!" gasped the boatman. "Mad, is he?" "Mad!" roared Coker. "Who says I'm mad? I'll give you mad! Untie me, you fathead, and I'll give you three pounds."

"Who'd believe that he'd only got threepence about him at the present moment?" said Blake thoughtfully.

The old boatman's concern for Coker vanished with remarkable suddenness.

"Ere, you git clear with that there rope," he snapped.

"Get me loose; I'll give you a fiver!" howled Coker.

"Oh, dror it mild," said the boatman.

"Keep those lines clear!" bawled the old gentleman in the white hat. "Do you hear me, Snooks? Don't get those lines tangled."

"Help me!" roared Coker. "I say, sir—you in the boat—help me! I'm tied up."

The old gentleman stared at him, and his white hat almost fell off in his astonishment as he saw how Coker was fixed.

"Bless my soul!" he said. "What an extraordinary thing!"

Why don't you ask your friends to untie you, my good fellow?"

"They ain't my friends!" roared Coker. "Tell your man to untie me, sir—"

"Time we got on, I think," murmured Monty Lowther.

"I think so," agreed Blake.

Snooks had got his line clear, and Coker was urged on by his young friends. He howled and raved to the gentleman in the white hat.

"Help! Help me! Are you deaf?" he bawled. "I—I say, you young ladies, tell your man to help me."

The two girls stared at Coker blandly.

"Why is he tied like that, please?" one of them called out to Monty Lowther.

"It's a shame, if he doesn't like it," said the other young lady.

"It's the only way he will pull," said Monty Lowther, coming down the bank a little to address the party. "You'd hardly believe it, but he hasn't towed the boat at all until to-day. We've done all the work ever since we started."

We've made up our minds that he's going to take a turn. That's only fair."



When Coker slacked and Lowther prodded him with the boathook to buck him up, Coker yelled. Coker liked, as a rule, to be in the middle of the picture, the cynosure of all eyes, but he did not like it now! (See page 13.)

"Certainly that seems fair," said the gentleman in the white hat. "I think we had better not interfere, my dears."

"Oh!" ejaculated the picnicker. "Is that how it is? Yes. I know these riverside loafers! Make him earn his money."



"He must be very lazy," said the first young lady.

"In towing a boat, everyone should take his turn," said the other. "Quite right."

"I tell you—" roared Coker. "I say— Yoooooooooop!"

Coker marched on. The old gentleman in the white hat shook his head and his white hat seriously after Coker, evidently shocked at his laziness. A fellow who never did any of the towing, and who had to be made to take his turn like this by his friends, was an uncommon example of idleness. Naturally, it did not occur to the gentleman that Coker did not belong to the party at all. Monty Lowther had not mentioned that.

Horace Coker looked more like a Hun than ever as he tramped on furiously. It really seemed that there was no help for him.

A little later the towing-man came on a party seated along the bank, enjoying ginger-beer and cakes. Again his hopes rose, and he yelled for help. The picnickers stared at him, surprised—as everybody seemed to be at the sight of Horace Coker that morning.

"Help!" howled Coker. "I say, make these rotters let me loose!"

"Gee-up!" said Lowther.

"Yoop! Keep off! Help! Call a policeman, will you?" howled Coker.

One of the picnickers felt called upon to intervene. He stepped out into the towpath.

"You let that chap go!" he said.

"He hasn't earned his half-crown yet," said Monty Lowther. "After being paid a half-crown, and spending it in drink, a fellow ought to be made to do his job, oughtn't he?"

And he went back to his friends, heedless of Coker's ranting yells. The Old Bus glided on, and Coker turned a homicidal look on Monty Lowther.

"You told that chap I've been drinking!" he spluttered in a choking voice.

"Not at all," said Lowther, in surprise. "I said that after a fellow has been paid half-a-crown, and spent it in drink, he ought to be made to do his job. So a fellow ought! As a general proposition, I think that's undeniable."

"You made that chap think—"

"I can't help what every chap along the river thinks, Coker. I've got enough to do keeping you to your work and prodding you with this boathook."

"Yaroooooh!"

"And you've got to keep order," added Lowther severely. "We can't have you howling at passers-by like a wild Hun. I don't know what manners are like at Greyfriars, but it's not good enough for St. Jim's. Next time you yell at anybody, look out for the boathook!"

"We can't have you disgracing us, making scenes along the river in this style, Coker," said Blake argumentatively. "You must see that for yourself."

Coker choked.

There was a hail from Tom Merry in the boat. "I say, we're getting along to Sonning Lock. Do you think we can trust that fellow to get us through the lock, or shall we sack him?"

"Sack him, I think," grinned Blake. "I fancy it would make a bit too much of a stir to go through a lock in this style."

(Continued on page 27.)



The SUNKEN RACER!

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By GILBERT CHESTER.

CHAPTER 1. WRECKED!

"THE fastest car in the world, gentlemen! There's nothing to touch her. And she's boxed up in the hold aft—down amongst the tinned beef and Chicago pork."

Mr. Verrinder, chairman of the Apollo Motor Company, held his listeners' attention in the smoke-room of the Sylvania.

"Yes," he went on, flicking the ash from his cigar, a self-satisfied smile on his rubicund features. "She's swept the board at home and on the Continent. Now we'll see what she can do in America. Bet you Johnson sweeps the board with her at Huronopolis."

Huronopolis lay not far from the American coast, and a gigantic new race track had just been erected there. The inaugural opening had attracted many famous entries, amongst them Verrinder's Silver Apollo, of whose international reputation he was justly proud.

"I saw her race at Brooklands. She's some car!"

The strong-featured, good-looking young man in the corner broke into the conversation. He had not spoken before, and Verrinder turned to eye him sharply. There was something familiar in the keen, blue eyes, the firm, square-cut jaw, and well-knit figure of his fair-haired fellow-passenger.

"Why, it's Fenton!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Didn't know you were aboard. Still, you're right. There's nothing like her in existence." His tone was not exactly friendly, though his manner was polite.

Fenton relapsed into silence.

He would give anything, he told himself, to handle that car, for speed was a mania with him. Satiated with all the ordinary forms of excitement, his whole being craved for some new and original sensation, and, since he had plenty of money, he was always prepared to gratify his whims.

An enthusiastic amateur, he had entered and driven privately-owned cars in various British and Continental races, experiencing varied success. Fearless of danger, he baulked at no risk, had met with many sensational smashes, and was ready to meet with more. But up to the present he had won no classic event, for all his daring at the wheel.

Known in the world of motor-racing as "that madman, Fenton," he had the reputation for dare-devil driving rather than for skill, and, although this contemptuous label was by no means

deserved, manufacturers fought shy of him. They were ready to sell him fast sporting models, but when it came to entrusting him with their super-excellent "star" racers, they drew a sharp and decisive line.

So hitherto Fenton had never sat behind the wheel of a speedster of first rank. If he could only get hold of such a machine, he told himself, he would "start something or bust!" But the manufacturers nursed their pet chassis on cotton wool. There was nothing doing.

But a few moments later the smoke-room emptied; only Verrinder, Fenton, and an American motorman named Canfield remained about the table.

Canfield seemed to be dozing. After a shrewd glance at him, Fenton leant across to the manufacturer, grim purpose about the humorous lines of his mouth.

"About that car, Mr. Verrinder. I'd like to buy her. What'll you take for her, cash down?" Restless impatience danced in his keen eyes.

Verrinder gasped at the impudence of the proposal.

"They say you're mad, and you must be!" he exclaimed, when he had recovered from his amazement. "Why, that engine's a masterpiece, and the money doesn't exist that would buy her. Sorry, but there's nothing doing."

"Then let me handle her at Huronopolis," Fenton begged. "I won't let you down, I promise you." He watched the other anxiously.

"Sorry to disappoint you," Verrinder returned impatiently. "But I'm not out to have her smashed up. I couldn't consider such an idea for an instant. And that's final."

He rose abruptly, a sign that the conversation was at an end, and swung on his heel to leave the smoke-room.

Fenton looked glumly after the manufacturer's broad form. His line of vision lay across the table and the nodding American, and it seemed to Fenton that Canfield's narrow eyes were open, for he caught a sudden gleam between the puffy lids.

But Verrinder had scarcely taken half a dozen steps before a terrific rasping noise rent the air. The alleyway reeled beneath the shock, and both Fenton and the manufacturer were flung violently off their feet. At the same time the lights went out, plunging the great vessel into darkness.

There was a rush of feet, a babel of shouts and screams, followed by the yelling of sharp orders as the ship's officers took charge of the situation, while alarm bells sounded continuously through the confusion.

"What the deuce has happened?" Verrinder's voice came through the gloom. "A boiler gone up?"

"Biffed something, I reckon," Fenton answered, and, with Verrinder, groped his way to the deck, where a thick fog enveloped everything.

"Hit a sunken derelict. Side ripped clean open, right along!" an officer told them as he hurried by. "We're settling fast!"

Some auxiliary dynamo got going after a moment. An arc lamp, rigged on a spar, cast its dull glare across the mist-cloaked deck. Rushing to the side, Fenton saw the officer had spoken truly. The big liner was heeling over, going down by the bows.

It was the Sylvania's last voyage!

Swarming to their work, the crew swung out the davits, while, marshalled by the officers, the excited passengers made ready to take their places, as loud-mouthed stewards ran to and fro, seeing that no one was overlooked.

But Verrinder paced the deck frantically, clenching his fists and muttering incoherently. The departing lifeboats meant nothing to him.

Down in the hold lay that priceless racing car. And the Sylvania was sinking—sinking with the precious freight that he valued above life itself. This—and only this—obsessed his frenzied mind.

The first officer rushed by, and Verrinder seized him by the arm.

"My car! Down in the hold! You must save it—somehow!"

"We'll be under the sea in five minutes!" the officer snapped. "Get to your place in the boat, sir, and don't worry me."

"That car must be saved!" Verrinder broke in.

But the officer flung him off, and Fenton, who had kept by the frantic motor manufacturer, grabbed him by the arm.

"Don't be a fool!" he ordered peremptorily, forcing the hysterical Verrinder to the side, where he jerked him bodily into the boat.

The next instant the seamen lowered away, and Verrinder, storming and protesting, vanished from view. Then Fenton glanced round the canting deck, looking for another boat, but saw nothing except empty davits.

The boats had gone, save a few on the port side, where it was impossible to launch them, owing to the angle of the vessel. The crew and passengers remaining would have to depend on lifebelts and hen-coops.

"Excuse me, sir. But you've forgotten your belt."

Fenton swung round, to find his mechanic, Anstey, at his elbow. The mechanic, short and stocky, had a cork belt in his hand. He had already buckled on his own.

"You're an ass!" Fenton exclaimed with an appreciative grin. "Thought you were in one of the boats, you idiot! Still, I might have known."

"Yes, sir, you might," Anstey returned quietly. "But be quick. We're going!"

As he spoke the arc light went out with a sizzling hiss. The deck reeled under their feet, as the ship shook from stem to stern in a last convulsive shudder. Then her stern slewed upwards, and she plunged with a slow, sliding movement into the depths of the sea.

CHAPTER 2.

Fenton's Deal!

FOR what seemed an infinity of time Fenton fought, trapped in the gloomy depths. His lungs were nigh to bursting. He hung powerless in the vortex, swinging to the caprice of the liquid walls about him.

At last, when it seemed that the end of all things had come, the irresistible force of suction spent itself, the welling waters raced past his throbbing ears, and he shot up into the outer atmosphere, gasping and choking.

"Anstey!" he shouted, spitting the salt water from his mouth.

"Here, sir!" a voice answered through the gloom.

Another form appeared out of the fog, and together the two men set themselves to swim with slow, even strokes, groping in the murk for the boats, and guided by loud hails that came across the water.

At length, breathless and exhausted, they were hauled aboard one of the little craft which came suddenly out of the fog. Then, while Fenton and Anstey squatted panting in the bottom of the boat, the sail was hoisted, and they set out for the American coast, which lay no great distance off.

Verrinder was not among the passengers who landed with Fenton on Long Island, and the amateur wondered what had become of the grief-stricken manufacturer. His dreams of conquest shattered by the Sylvania's fatal plunge, Verrinder's hopes of victory at Huronapolis were over, and with them all chance of snatching a British triumph.

What was Verrinder going to do now? Had he another car up his sleeve? And if so, could he get it to America in time to compete in the forthcoming races?

Then a newspaper reporter located Verrinder in New York, forced an interview from him, and gave away his whereabouts.

Curious to learn the Apollo programme in face of the disaster, Fenton hunted Verrinder up at the hotel on Manhattan, where he was staying.

"No, I haven't another car anywhere near equal to the Silver Apollo," Verrinder declared. "We're hurrying another chassis over here. But I don't expect much from it. And as we're the only British entry, the Americans are going to walk away with the cup."

He burst out into a long harangue, bewailing his loss, and cursing the hard fate that had brought his plans of victory to naught.

"I was a fool to trust that bus to a sea voyage!" he concluded vehemently. "I've been kicking myself ever since I landed. Racing in America's not a commercial proposition for European firms, anyway, owing to the tariff. We ought

to have let Huronapolis severely alone, as our British rivals have done."

"You were a chump not to take my offer when I made it," Fenton returned, with a shrug of his muscular shoulders. "You'd have my cheque in your pocket, and it would have been my property that lay at the bottom of the sea. As it is—"

"As it is, the bottom's dropped out of our racing programme," Verrinder flung back irritably. "She was one of the wonders of the world. You'll never see her like again."

"They'll salvage the ship—"

"Too deep. Over thirty fathoms down. I've been into that already. They say it can't be done. The car's gone—for ever!"

Fenton's keen blue eyes narrowed in thought for an instant. Then pulling a cheque-book from his pocket, he got out his fountain-pen, and, with a deliberate movement, removed the cap.

"Look here, be a sport and have a gamble," he said. "You say the car's gone? Right-ho! I'll give you five hundred for her as she lies—down at the bottom. Is she mine?"

Verrinder stared blankly at his visitor's wiry figure. Some moments elapsed before the astounded manufacturer realised the fact of the amazing offer.

"You're mad!" he cried, with a contemptuous gesture. "Or else you're trying to be funny. I've neither the time nor the wish for fooling, let me tell you, and—"

"I'm in absolute earnest, Mr. Verrinder."

"Then I'll take your cheque, you young fool! If you want to fling your money away, you can. It's a bet!" And the manufacturer held out his hand in earnest of the bargain.

Fenton took the proffered fingers in his strong grip, then sat down and wrote the cheque, which he handed to Verrinder, getting the latter's receipt in return.

"There—a madman's cheque!" he laughed, putting the receipt in his pocket. "But it's good—which perhaps is more than that car will ever be again."

With a cheery nod to his companion, he took up his hat; and, leaving the hotel, went out to find a post-office, where he despatched a wire.

It was addressed to the race officials at Huronapolis, and was an entry for the Huronapolis Cup.

"Well, it's a darn good thing for us that infernal Apollo is down among the fishes. I saw her race in Yewrope, and she sure had gotten me scared stiff. I'd a hunch that feller Johnson was goin' to lift the cup with her."

At the sound of the high-pitched, nasal voice, Fenton turned abruptly, and, peering through the tobacco-laden atmosphere of his hotel, saw Canfield and another man seated together.

"He might do it yet, if that guy Verrinder wasn't asleep," the other remarked, with a significant wink. "I had a word with the diver that went down to inspect the wreck."

"I don't get you!" Canfield retorted. "Verrinder himself told me the car was in the stern part of the ship. And her boilers went up when she plunged. Blew the hull to smithereens, and everything under the aft hatch with it. That's the report."

"Sure," the other returned coolly. "But the Sylvania broke in half as she went down. The fore part of the ship's intact. And that's where the car was stowed, although Verrinder don't know it."

"There was a mistake made in checking the stowage," he went on. "There was another car in the cargo, and they got the two packing-cases mixed up. But one of the sailors happened to spot the error. I had the story out of him, and slipped him fifty iron men to keep his mouth shut, in case that Britisher should get wind of the thing and get busy."

"And you did right, 'Tonio,'" Canfield leant forward to slap his companion, an Italian New Yorker, on the back. "If we win this race—as we shall with that Apollo out of the way—it'll mean big business for Stetzman's. We can't afford to have any risk of those Britishers salvaging their racer."

After a moment the two men rose and left the room, but Fenton had heard enough. Canfield was head of the Stetzman Motor Co., an American firm of car manufacturers, and the conversation just overheard spoke for itself.

Fenton lay back in his chair, and for a brief interval gazed thoughtfully up at the thin wisp of smoke rising from his cigarette.

Since clinching his suddenly conceived bargain with Verrinder he had come to regret his hasty deal, for he had subsequently learnt that all hope of saving the Apollo racer was foredoomed to failure, owing to the havoc wrought by the bursting boilers.

But a sportsman to his finger-tips, he had accepted his apparent defeat with good-natured indifference. After all, he told himself, he had taken a gambler's chance; and it was the gambler's instinct that he must blame for the loss of £500.

Now he viewed the matter from a very different angle.

From Canfield's words it was plain that all was not yet lost. There was a chance, and possibly a good one, of retrieving the lost motor. And since a fortnight would elapse before the Huronapolis Cup was run, there was just the possibility that Canfield might get an unwelcome surprise.

A fortnight was not long, but much might be done in that time by a resourceful and determined man, with plenty of money behind him.

For a moment Fenton thought of advising Verrinder of the good news. But on second thoughts he dismissed this idea. Verrinder must have known at the time of the deal that the car was, so far as was humanly possible to gauge, a worthless mass of twisted metal. Yet he had deliberately withheld this information from the purchaser.

Besides, if Verrinder had a chance to recover the car, he would probably try to throw obstacles in the way of Fenton's driving it. The American law was peculiar, Fenton reflected; and although Verrinder had no legal rights on his side, he might cause sufficient delay by injunctions and other lawyers' devices to prevent the new owner from handling the famous bus at Huronapolis.

No; he would give the manufacturer an eye-opener. Fenton thought, so decided to keep his news to himself. There was humour in the situation—humour too priceless to spoil.

For the next couple of days the young racing man busied himself with visits to various salvage firms. But his inquiries yielded him little encouragement. The Sylvania lay in deep water; there were awkward currents in her vicinity. The salvage, if possible at all, would be a long and difficult job, they said.

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None of the salvage people seemed keen on the undertaking, and Fenton's hopes were at a low ebb when he encountered Smithson, the last salvage expert upon whom he called.

"There's only one man who can help you," Smithson said. "And he's a newcomer in the business—a fellow called Brett. He's got some diving suit or other of his own design. I should try him."

So to Brett Fenton went, only to find the inventor laid up with a broken leg.

"I'd be glad enough to help you, Mr. Fenton," the invalid answered, when he heard the story. "It would be a good advertisement for my tackle if we brought this thing off. But you see how I'm placed just now. I shan't be able to get around for another three weeks, and then it will be too late for your purposes."

"Can't you let your chaps have a go at it?" Fenton suggested, anxious to clutch at any straw. And he looked at the inventor appealingly.

"Well, I can hire you an outfit, if you like, and lend you a man," Brett replied in a dubious tone. "But the fellow I have in mind—a diver, called Seaman—isn't used to my suit. And I can't promise you'll get results. Still, if that's understood, I'm ready."

"Will do me," Fenton responded promptly, and he proceeded to arrange terms with the inventor.

Fenton left Brett's house, his hopes revived by the interview. As he turned down the street he walked on thin air, and so excited was he that he did not notice the dark-skinned man who came out of a neighbouring telephone-box just in time to witness his departure from the inventor's gate.

The stranger, who was, in fact, the New York Italian, "Tonio," halted, his eyes on Brett's front door. Then, returning to the phone-box, he rang Canfield up.

For some minutes the pair talked volubly over the wire, and when "Tonio" rang off he hastened to an adjacent stationer's, bought a notebook, and finally presented himself at Brett's house.

Posing as a reporter, he got an interview with the inventor, who, anxious to get as much publicity as possible for his diving-suit, admitted that he had come to an arrangement with Fenton. By the time the spurious Pressman left he had complete details of the projected venture.

"This fellow, Fenton, needs watching," Canfield declared, when his henchman returned with the news he had gathered. "There's a story going around that Verrinder sold him that Apollo. Verrinder's been boasting about the deal to acquaintances of his—thinks it shows his 'cuteness' in selling another feller a pup."

"Well, boss—and supposin' this guy makes out on the job?" "Tonio" asked, running his lean fingers through his shock of jet-black hair.

"He is not goin' to make out," Canfield replied harshly. "You got to see he don't. Get that, 'Tonio?'"

The Italian showed his white teeth as he grinned in comprehension. But a moment later, he shook his head.

"It's dangerous," he objected, with a lurch of his narrow shoulders.

"Dangerous—nix!" the American motor man retorted contemptuously. "All you got to do's to butt in with a motor-boat. If there's a rough house, who's to know it ain't a bunch of boot-leggers, fishing up liquor that's been sunk in drums, and buoyed? There's often trouble off-shore, that way. And you can fix things easy."

"Well, maybe—" the Italian began dubiously.

But Canfield leant suddenly forward, to speak in an excited undertone.

"Wait awhile. I've a better idea. That Apollo's a mass of engineering secrets. It 'ud be worth our while to get a look at her. I tell you what—" And his voice fell in a low, tense whisper.

When Canfield had finished speaking the Italian nodded in complete understanding.

"I got you, boss," he said. "That notion's fine. I guess it can be done."

"It can be done, and what's more, it's going to be done!" Canfield thumped his plump fist on the table. "And there's going to be no failure, either. Remember, I know too much about you, my friend. If Fenton gets that car to Huronapolis, I'll spill the beans. Then it'll be you for the electric chair!"

Next day, Brett was moved to the country, and Fenton did not see him again. So when the Apollo's new owner set out to sea aboard a tug, with Brett's underling, Seaman, aboard, he had no idea that details of the salvage trip were known outside the parties immediately concerned.

The tug had a big barge in tow. In a short time she floated above the Sylvania's last resting-place. And here the diving tackle was made ready, the pumps tested, and soundings made.

Fenton and Anstey, who had accompanied his employer on the trip, watched Seaman get into his diving-suit. The diver went about his preparations methodically; then the helmet was screwed down over his saturnine face, and he disappeared into the green waters.

In a short time he re-appeared, and, climbing on to the deck, signalled for them to remove his helmet.

"It's no good!" he announced. "The fore-part of the ship has slipped off the ridge where the other diver located her. She's fallen into a deep hollow, and is out of reach. You'll have to give up the idea!"

A look of intense disappointment flashed across Fenton's face, and his eyes fell gloomily to the deck. Here was the end of all his hopes; he had wasted time and money for nothing.

"You didn't touch bottom, eh?" he demanded suddenly, his eyes on the diver's heavily-weighted boots.

"I didn't! I just got a foothold on the stern. She's bust to bits. I tell you, you can't touch bottom."

"You're a liar, my friend!" Fenton thought to himself, for, sticking to the diver's leaden soles, were traces of weed and sand.

But why did Seaman lie? There seemed no object in the falsehood unless—unless—

"Very well," he said quietly, and, leading Anstey aside, whispered: "This chap's been got at!"

At a sign from the diver, the hands began to clear up the tackle, and while Seaman slowly divested himself of his diving suit, the tugmaster went up to Fenton.

"Shall I turn back, sir?" he asked, assuming the trip abortive.

"Certainly not," Fenton answered briskly. "We're stopping here!"

"Why—what do you mean?" Seaman demanded suspiciously, starting up from the box on which he was seated.

Fenton smiled imperturbably.

"I mean, my friend, that I'm going down myself."

CHAPTER 3.

Foul Play!

"YOU'LL drown yerself—that's all!" And Seaman flashed an insolent look at the young fellow.

"That's my look-out," the latter returned coolly, and, with the help of Anstey and the tugmaster, began to put on the diving-suit, with its 20 lb. soles, and its 40 lb. breast and back pieces, while Seaman fumed and argued.

But Fenton paid no heed. In a few moments, the ball-shaped helmet was screwed into place, and, after testing the electric lamp and telephone, he stepped awkwardly for the ladder.

Then the pumps began working, and he could feel the air current swirl about his head as the window-pieces were screwed into place. Then, when all was ready, he grasped the short ladder, and swung himself on to it.

Rung by rung he descended, feeling for air tube and life-line as he went. The green waters closed over his head, he let go the ladder, and weighted by the lead sank rapidly.

At last his feet grounded on something firm, and, switching on the electric lamp, he found himself at the bottom of the sea.

A dark mass loomed up some yards ahead. Working his way towards it, he found himself alongside the liner.

She lay over at a comfortable angle, her giant funnels broken away, and leaning against her big side. As the salvage people had reported, she was broken in half. But there was no sign of the deep hollow Seaman had mentioned. On the contrary, the sea bed was flat, and the forepart of the liner lay close to the stern half, well within reach.

Signalling through the telephone, Fenton had himself hauled up a short distance, manœuvring till his feet rested on the sloping deck. It did not take him long to locate the forward hatch, the cover of which was burst from its seating by air pressure when the vessel sank.

He took stock of the situation, then signalled aloft, and in a few minutes gained the ladder.

"Where's Seaman?" he demanded, when, dripping, he stood on deck, his window-pieces open.

"Gone!" Anstey answered. "Took the motor-launch, and left. Said he wasn't responsible, and wouldn't stop to see you drowned."

"But I want another pair of hands down there," Fenton exclaimed, in annoyance. He had meant to bring pressure on the diver, now that the fellow's treachery was exposed.

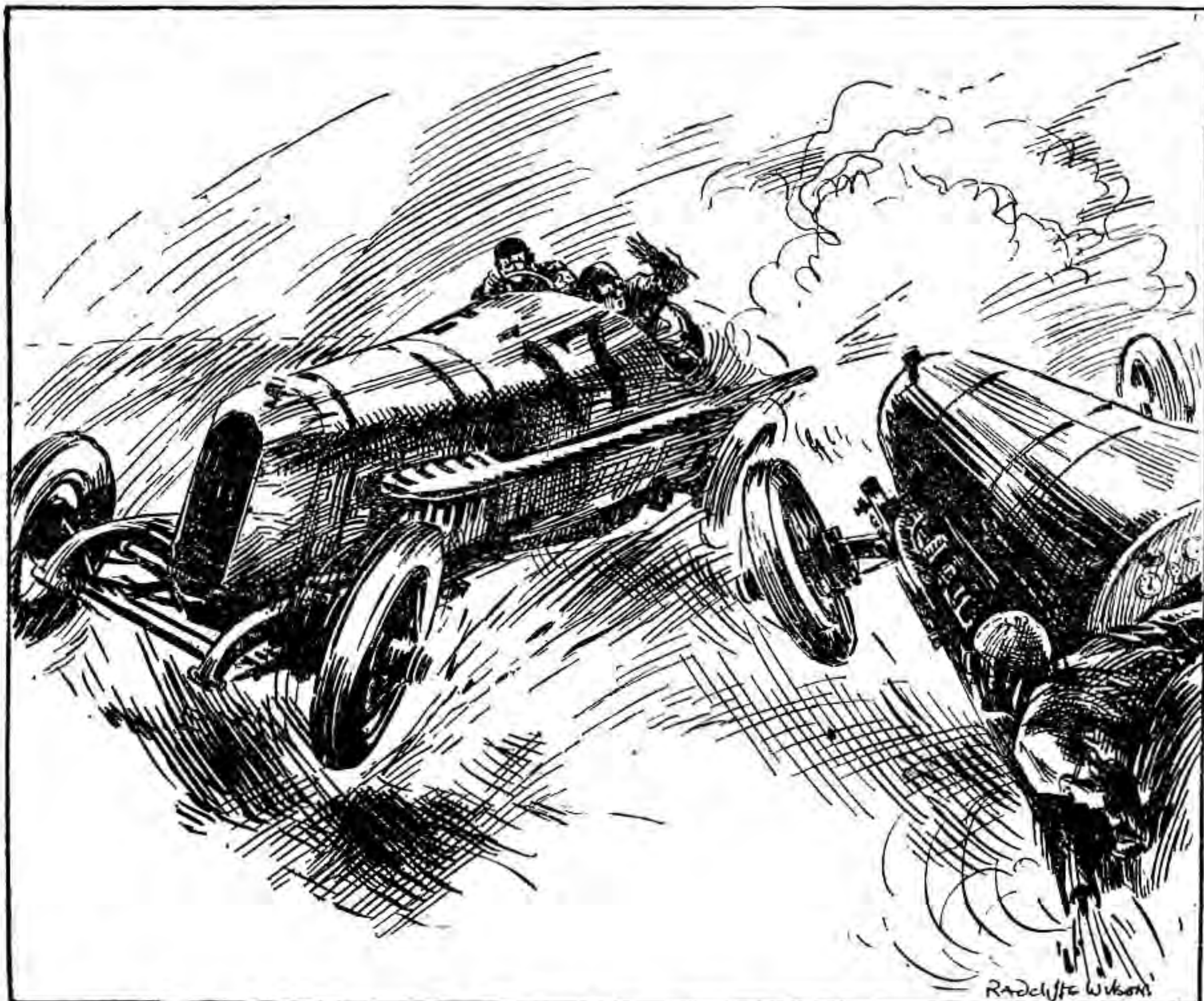
He eyed the assembled hands expectantly. But on one volunteered. The men were not divers, and did not relish a descent into those cold, green waters.

"What about me, sir?" Anstey suggested. "If you think I'd be any use, I'm willing."

"Good for you!" Fenton exclaimed, and in a short time the mechanic stood ready in the spare diving-suit they had brought with them.

Lowered to the bottom, the pair set to work with crowbars and hatchets, cutting through the wreckage of the splintered hatch. Then, clearing away a number of small boxes, they quickly located the big packing-case that housed the Apollo racer, by means of the marks stencilled upon it.

Several times they had to rise to the surface for a breather, but at last their preparations were complete, a derrick



Fenton felt the Apollo swing to the impact, and his heart leapt as the tail slewed outwards till a back wheel jumped upon the very edge of the banking. (See page 22.)

was rigged up between barge and tug, and a heavily-weighted hook and cable were lowered into the sea.

Fenton and Anstey went down again, and, with a jack, raised the packing-case sufficiently to get a pair of chains round it. Then the hook was fixed in position, and Fenton gave the signal to haul away.

But after shifting slightly, the case came to rest, while the cable strained in vain. Owing to the angle at which the vessel lay, there was no clear, upward thoroughfare. The case had fouled the upper edge of the hatch opening.

"Confound it!" Fenton muttered, and clambered round the case, looking to see how best it might be freed. But as he did so, the pressure on his head and shoulders suddenly lightened.

Flashing on his lamp, he gazed about him, and, after a moment, guessed the cause of this peculiar circumstance. Since one side of the deck was higher than the other, a quantity of air had become trapped above the hatchway, in the angle made by the deck and uppermost side.

Raising his hands, he unscrewed a window-piece, and found that his supposition was correct. The atmosphere was tolerably pure, and he could breathe quite freely as he stood, waist high in the water.

He could still feel the slight air current from the pumps above puffing

gently pass his ears. Then, without warning, it suddenly ceased.

Surprised, since the men on the tug could not possibly know of the air-pocket, he gave a quick hail through the telephone. But there was no response. Then instinctively he turned towards Anstey, whose legs were visible under the hatch edge.

Anstey was swaying in a curious, drunken fashion. Before Fenton could make a move towards him, the mechanic collapsed upon the surface of water-logged packing cases, his body coming into full view as he fell in a heap.

Hastily closing his helmet, Fenton stooped into the water, grabbed his companion round the waist, and tried to drag him into the air-pocket. But Anstey was terribly heavy, weighed down as he was, and it took all Fenton's strength to pull him in against the pressure of the dense water. But he managed it somehow, and, raising the mechanic, got his helmet above the water level.

Half-suffocated, he opened his own helmet, then did the same to Anstey's. The mechanic was black in the face; he was nearly gone.

Some terribly anxious moments followed as Anstey fought feebly for breath. But at last he recovered and was able to stand up.

"The pump stopped," he explained. "There's something wrong. I thought I was a goner, for sure."

Fenton nodded. He tried the phone

again, but without success, and his companion also failed to get any reply on his instrument. Then Fenton gave a tug at the life-line. But it went slack in response to his pulling.

"Something's very wrong upstairs," he breathed tensely; "and we're boxed in down here, with nothing but this scrap of air to depend on. What the dickens can have happened?"

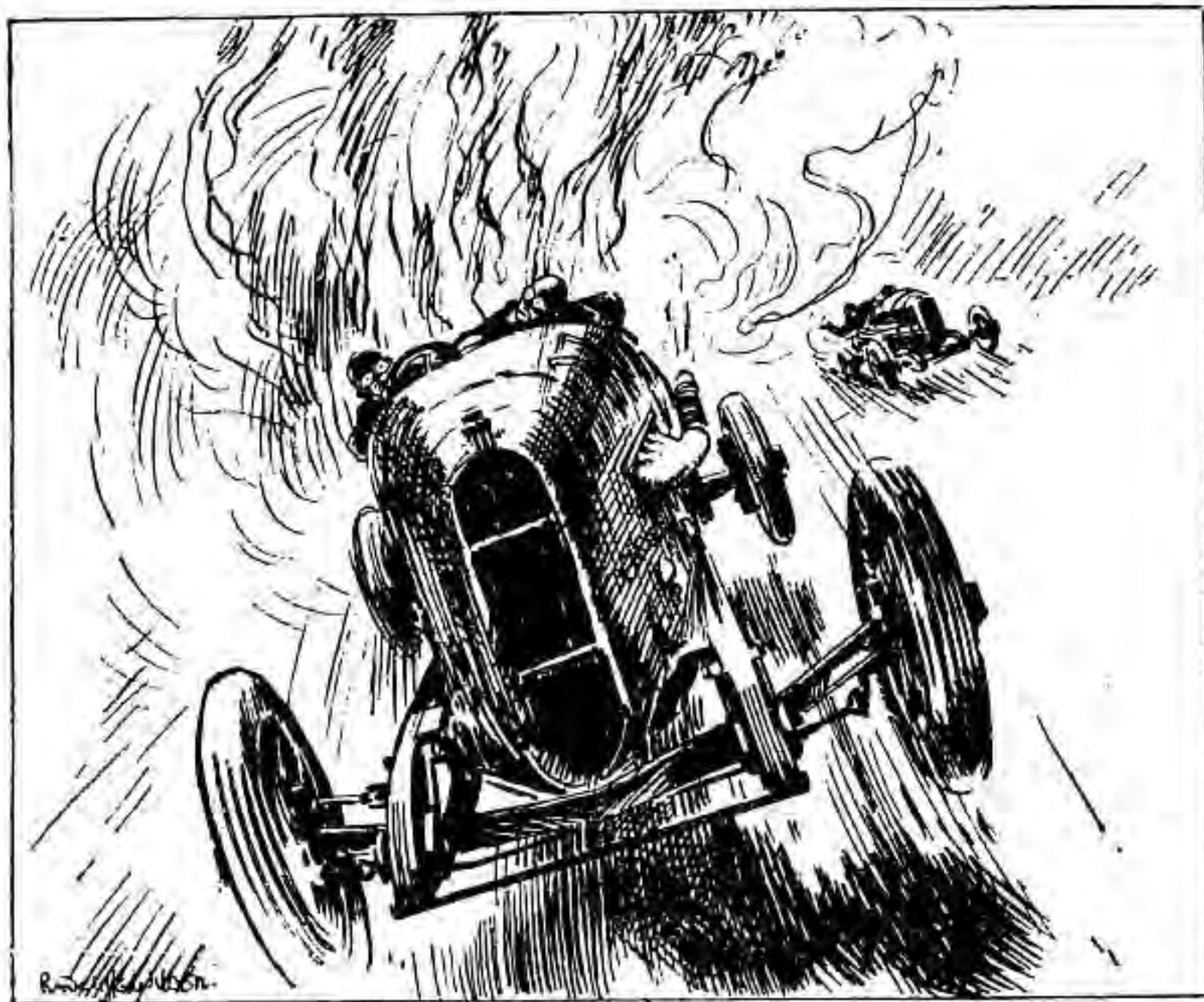
The two looked at one another anxiously.

Thirty fathoms of sea-water lay above their heads. With the pumps idle, the phone silent, and the life-lines out of action, they were cut off from the world above as surely as though they were buried beneath a mountain of solid earth!

For a long moment both stood silent, afraid to breathe the terrible suspicion that flashed through the mind of each. Treachery!

"There's only one thing for it," Fenton was the first to speak. "We must screw up our windows, duck under the hatch, kick off our leaden soles and weights, and chance a hob to the surface. The air in our suits should carry us up."

"And suppose the tug's gone?" Anstey queried, paling. "Suppose we turn over, face down, when we reach the top—if we do reach it? We mayn't be able to turn face upwards, and then—" He broke off with an eloquent gesture.



"Gosh! Look behind you!" Anstey glimpsed the blazing stream astern and grabbed Fenton fiercely by the elbow. The driver turned, saw the leaping mass of fire in his wake, and set his lips grimly. (See page 27.)

"It's a slim chance, I know," Fenton answered, shrugging; "but it's all we've got. There's no good wasting time, anyway. We'd better try it out."

As he spoke, he raised his hands to screw up his open window-piece, and, to render the task easier, bent his head. But the next instant his hand fell abruptly, and he gave a start.

"Look!" he cried, seizing Anstey by the wrist and pointing downwards into the water.

Below the hatchway loomed something dark—something that presently resolved itself into a pair of legs shod with diver's weights.

"They've come down after us!" the mechanic added, with a sigh of profound relief.

But Fenton shook his head.

"There were no other diving suits aboard. Wait a moment."

Then a second pair of legs appeared. Two divers had come down, and were apparently engaged in an inspection of the packing-cases.

"If they're friends they'll look for us right away," Fenton remarked, watching the movements of the leaden soles.

But apparently the strangers had no thought for the submerged victims. They kept by the packing-case, and it was quite clear from their manoeuvres that they were hunting for the cause of resistance to the upward pull of the cable.

Fenton and his companion watched tensely. Then one of the divers waddled to the hatch edge, stooped, and stood upright in the air-pocket.

At sight of Fenton and the mechanic his form stiffened, and his hand moved to his belt, where a hatchet hung. Fenton could see his dark orbs gleaming maliciously through the glass of his helmet, and read murder in their gaze.

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" Fenton muttered; and plucked his own hatchet from its sheath.

The other backed, and ducked to dodge under the hatchway, trying to attract his companion's attention. But Fenton guessed the design, and, before the fellow

could execute it, had seized him round the waist.

The stranger jabbed furiously with his hatchet, but Fenton countered the blow smartly with the hook of his own weapon, and for a few seconds they battled desperately together.

Then the diver's eyes fell on the open window-piece of Fenton's helmet, and, throwing all his weight into the effort, tried to drag him down in to the water, where he must drown.

The trick nearly succeeded. So sudden was the wrench that Fenton swayed violently forward and nearly fell. But the weight of his heavy soles saved him, and the next instant he had the fellow in a firm lock.

Then the battle began again, the two men wrestling frantically together, while Anstey, encumbered in his awkward outfit, hovered on the fringe of the combat, vainly trying to get at Fenton's assailant in the cramped confines of the little air-lock.

But the swaying of the life-lines and air-tubes had attracted the attention of the man outside. Ducking under the hatch, he came to the rescue of his comrade. Anstey closed with him resolutely, and another fierce struggle began, while Fenton and his adversary battled on.

Fenton could see the evil face of his opponent through the helmet windows; could sense his heavy breathing as he gasped and panted in the shining copper dome.

But the very fury of the man's assault told against him. Slowly but surely he gave way before Fenton's iron hold.

The scoundrel felt himself beaten, and, relaxing suddenly, dropped on to the floor, clawing at Fenton's legs as he went. Grabbing at the other's life-line, the motorist tried to stop him from crawling out of the trap. But the fellow's hands were free, and in a trice he whipped out a knife.

Swoosh!

The keen blade swept downwards at Fenton's heart, and in the nick of time the young man grabbed his foe's wrist. The knife missed its mark, to hover trembling an inch from Fenton's

breast, while the would-be murderer fought desperately to wrench his arm free.

It was life or death now!

Bearing on the wrist with all his might, Fenton slowly bent the arm round. Feeling for the other's air-tube, he drew it inwards till it met the keen blade.

With a frenzied effort, the diver tried to roll free, but Fenton's strong fingers held him, and the heavy weights about him impeded his freedom of action.

Snick!

The knife sawed through the armoured tubing, and a cloud of bubbles streaked upwards from the water. The next moment the scoundrel wallowed, gasping, in the shallow liquid.

Heaving him to his feet, Fenton wrenched open the fellow's window-piece, then, lurching across to Anstey, tackled his opponent from behind. In a few moments he, too, was hors de combat, his air-tube severed by a shower of blows from Fenton's knife.

Bereft of their air supply, the two villains panicked. Before they realised that they were safe in the air-pocket, Fenton and his ally were masters of the situation, and had cut the life-lines of their enemies.

Cowards at heart, the evil pair were paralysed. They knew themselves imprisoned in the liner's hold, thirty fathoms down, and, half-crazed with fear, wailed piteously for mercy.

"You'd have murdered us in cold blood if you'd had the chance," Fenton said sternly. "It would serve you right to stifle here, or drown. Still, we're not murderers, and if you tell the truth it's on the cards that you'll get out of this alive."

He peered into the first diver's face, but kept his knife ready.

"Who put you on to this job, and what's happened up above?"

"I don't know, mister," the man answered. "We were hired by a wop called 'Tonio. Who's behind a him, we don't know. He's got a gang up top holding up your crew. We jumped the tug, there was a bit of gunning, and we came down here, with orders to salvage that case."

"And how many are with this dago?" Fenton demanded. "Careful, now! Remember, if we are killed, you'll probably stop here and die. If we win out, we'll rescue you later. The air ought to last another hour or so."

"There were six of us altogether, mister, all armed. My mate and I left our guns on the deck by the ladder. One fellow will be working the pumps. The wop an' the other two are holdin' the crew."

"Very well. You'd better pray we get through safely." And, signing to Anstey to stand guard, Fenton removed the other divers' life-lines, exchanged them for Anstey's and his own, and snapped his window-piece shut.

The two Britsers screwed up the nuts, keeping a sharp eye on the captives. But the fight had gone out of them, and they made no hostile move as, holding their breath, Fenton and Anstey ducked out of the air-pocket.

Fortunately, the crooks' helmets were not equipped with telephones; there was no chance of their warning their friends above. So, pulling sharply at the life-lines, Fenton and Anstey gave the signal, and, after a brief moment, felt themselves drawn slowly towards the surface.

Would the trick serve, they wondered, or would the crooks discover the truth and "out" them before they could get rid of their diving weights? The next few moments would show!

An instant later Fenton's hand grasped the ladder. His feet grounded on the lower rungs, and he climbed slowly out of the water, nearly choking for want of air.

Halting on the ladder, he unscrewed his window-piece, and, glancing sharply to his right, saw Anstey emerge up a second ladder.

Then his eyes swept the deck, where two of the tugmen stood at the windlasses, a crook menacing them with his automatic. The rest of the crew had been driven on to the barge, and two crooks held them at bay with revolvers. The fourth ruffian was at the pump.

At a shout from the first crook, the tugman working Fenton's windlass left it, and, coming to the side, assisted the Britisher to climb on deck. The second tugman went similarly to Anstey's aid.

As Fenton gained the deck, he muttered quickly to the tugman from the hollow of his helmet, then stepped out towards the gunman, at whose feet lay the divers' guns.

His features hidden in his helmet, Fenton advanced unrecognised. Suspecting nothing, the crook lowered his gun as the diver reached him. With a quick wrench, Fenton twisted the weapon from the fellow's fingers, and, with a powerful swing, brought it crashing down on his head.

The crook went thudding to the deck, and simultaneously the tugman leapt forward, caught up the guns, and joined Fenton.

With an oath, the second crook sprang from the pumps, but as he came Fenton raised his weapon and fired. The ruffian flung up his arms with a dull cry, spun round, and collapsed on the boards.

Then, as the remaining crooks swung round, hesitating between the captive crew and the tug, the second tugman secured a weapon, and the surviving ruffians found themselves facing three levelled revolvers.

"Put up your hands," Fenton bawled from his helmet.

And as the evil pair responded to the order, the tugmaster and his companions jumped forward. The next instant they bore the two crooks helpless to the deck.

Saved!

With a gasp of relief, Fenton signed for his helmet to be unfastened, and, a few moments later, strode forward to view the captives. But, as his glance fell on the taller of the pair, he started.

It was the New York Italian he had seen in Canfield's company. This must be 'Tonio the Wop, to whom the crook diver had referred.

Now he knew to whom they owed this outrage. Canfield was the enemy, and had struck his first blow.

So be it, Felton thought. The sequel to the struggle would be fought out at Huronopolis!

CHAPTER 4. A Great Race!

THE great oval motordrome at Huronopolis was alive with dense crowds of sightseers, who, swarming on the inside of its white concrete track, shoved and jabbered excitedly as they waited for the start of the Huronopolis Cup, the star event of the inaugural meeting.

Before the densely-packed grandstand, and under the fluttering line of gaily-coloured flags that marked the starting-place, stood a row of powerful-looking racers, their streamline bodies splashed with the large whitewash figures denoting their numbers in the forthcoming contest.

Except for Verrinder's blue-coloured Apollo, the new chassis brought over post-haste from England, the entrants lined up were all American; and of the latter, four crimson-painted cars represented the Stelzman team.

The starter, flag in hand, had just taken his place at the line, ready to

dispatch the twenty competitors on their 200-mile journey round the great saucer, with its five-mile lap.

With a swift glance at the timing-box, he ran his eye shrewdly down the waiting row of pulsating racers, whose side-members whipped to the bark and cackle of their noisy exhausts.

"All ready?" he queried, stepping forward to where, at the very end of the line, 'Tonio the Wop sat at the wheel of his crimson Stelzman, his shock of hair banded by the elastic of his goggles. "Sure," the Italian answered, with a grin.

Barring mechanical trouble or a smash, the race was a gift, he reckoned. Stelzman's star performer, he viewed his rivals with easy contempt. Verrinder's Silver Apollo had been his only dangerous competitor; but it was resting, thirty fathoms down, at the bottom of the sea.

Although Fenton and his mechanic had fought free of the ocean depths, they had not hoisted the racer to the surface, and, when a mist had sprung up, obscuring the surface of the water with its damp blanket, salvage operations had been brought to an abrupt end.

Sooner than bother with their prisoners, to whom were quickly added the two divers—for Fenton had rescued them, in accordance with his promise—the young Englishman had bundled his captives into a boat and turned them adrift to shift for themselves.

Next day the Wop had questioned a member of the tug's crew, only to learn that attempts to get the sunken racer up had proved abortive. So, to make assurance doubly sure, Canfield's henchman had gone out to the wreck and sent down a diver. The latter found the packing-case, fallen back into the hold; identified it by the stencil marks, and later had destroyed it by explosive.

So the scoundrel had long since wiped Fenton and the Apollo out of his reckoning.



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Entries 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 HE MEANT WELL!

A bluff, good-natured old countryman was on his first visit to London. "Eh, but this is a big place, this 'ere Lunnon," he muttered to himself, as he made his way past the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, and on to Buckingham Palace. His attention was taken by the sight of two sentries. A frown gathered on his brow as he watched the red-coated figures passing each other without addressing a single word. At last, unable to control himself, he stepped up, and as they passed once more he said: "Come, lads, can't you make it up?"—A tuck hamper has been awarded to Miss Ida Turnbull, 33, Donkin Terrace, North Shields.

SOUNDED GOOD!

Little boy entering grocer's shop: "A pound of first present indicative active, please." "Wot d'ye mean?" demanded the grocer. "Well," continued the little boy, "we had a grammar lesson this morning, and teacher said first present indicative active was 'am, and mother wants a pound."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to John Reid, Middle Bridge, Blair Atholl, Perthshire.

LIKE MISTRESS, LIKE MAID.

A certain woman having had a few hot words with her husband, had occasion a few hours later to send her servant to get some fish for her dinner. "Jane," she said, "go to town as soon as you can and get me a plaice." "Indeed, I will, ma'am," said Jane, "and I may as well get one for myself, for I can't put up with the master any more than yourself."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Frank Whyte, Canning Road, Palmyra, via East Fremantle, West Australia.

A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

A man went for a day's fishing, taking his lunch with him. About half-past one his son, panting heavily, reached him and said: "Mother wants those sandwiches back." The man replied: "She can't have them; I've eaten them. Why?" "Oh, nothing," said the boy, "only to-morrow you will have to clean your brown boots with bloater paste."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Thomas Wilkins, 5, Ellison Street, Stoneycroft, Liverpool.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY,

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

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 814.

"A minute to go!" the starter announced, holding his watch; and the twenty competitors gripped their wheels in readiness.

Then a sharp crackle burst out to the rear, there was a hurricane yell from the spectators, and a long, aluminium-painted car slid neatly into position beside the wop's Stetzman.

At the wheel sat Fenton, Anstey at his side, and on the long, louvered bonnet was daubed in whitewash the number, 17.

The wop jerked back in his seat, his dark eyes bulging out of his head. And well might he stare! For No. 17 was the number allotted to Verrinder's Silver Apollo—the car that no longer had existence.

As the Apollo ran into line, Canfield slipped quickly through the whirling clouds of exhaust smoke, and, gripping 'Tonio by the arm, dragged him down till the Italian's car was on a level with his mouth.

"You bonehead!" he cried in a fierce whisper. "That's the Silver Apollo, the car you swore you blew up. Fenton's done it on us."

"But it can't be, boss!" the wop exclaimed incredulously. "It's another car of the same model. I tell you—"

"Time!" The starter's stentorian voice cut through the din.

"And I tell you it is!" Canfield retorted. "You'll have to race as you've never raced before. If all else fails, use this. There's a phosphorus bullet in every cartridge."—And as he spoke he slipped a revolver, fitted with a Maxim silencer, into 'Tonio's hand.

Flick! The flag fell with a jerk, and Canfield sprang back quickly as the line of cars shot off the mark. But in the confusion, smoke, and excitement, the passing of the revolver was unnoticed, the more so as the weapon was wrapped in a canvas tool-roll.

The twenty-one racers were moving now, roaring and spitting as they got off the mark in ragged order. The wop dashed off the line with a lightning bound, and Fenton, snicking up into second as he went, followed, his bus abreast of the Italian's.

For a brief moment the two drivers lay level, side by side, as their screaming machines gathered way. And Fenton caught the wop's malicious eyes upon his, in them a fierce gleam of baffled fury and unbounded amazement.

But the next instant the Stetzman pulled ahead, and Fenton cut in on its tail, as his top meshed with a neat click.

The race was on. The great battle for which his soul had yearned these many months was to hand. Two hundred miles ahead lay the goal.

The first few laps passed quickly, while the crowd of racers straggled out around the huge lap, as the faster chassis separated themselves from their slower rivals. 'Tonio's Stetzman was leading, with the new Apollo second, and Fenton third. The field streamed behind in ragged order.

Fenton settled down for the thirty-five laps remaining.

Unknown to Canfield and his allies, he had raised the packing case in the mist, after getting rid of his unwanted captives. The racer had been lifted from the wooden casing, and the latter, weighted with coal from the tug, had been carefully lowered again, and dropped into the hatch through which it had come.

Bribing the tugmen, Fenton had assured that his enemies got a lying tale; so when 'Tonio had the packing-case dynamited, he only blew up a wooden shell and a quantity of coal.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 814.

But this the Italian did not know, since his diver had returned to the surface before exploding the charge.

Running his car ashore at a small coastal town, Fenton removed it to a quiet village inland, where, with a small knot of expert mechanics, he took down and went over every part of the chassis. When the bus had been greased and re-assembled, he tested it out on a lonely stretch of forest roadway, and, safe from the further attentions of his rivals, had quickly restored the car to its former tune.

Now he had sprung a surprise upon not only Verrinder, but upon the crooks in the Stetzman camp, and upon the public as well. But, as a grim jest, he painted a phrase in Latin on the bonnet. "De Profundis," it read, and neither Verrinder nor Canfield failed to miss the point.

"De Profundis—From the Depths!" Canfield snarled savagely as he read the legend on the Apollo's bonnet. "That's to tell us it's the sunken racer, and not a duplication. Curse the fellow! He must be a derved wizard!"

But the leaders of the field were going now, going at speeds of over 100 miles per hour. And 'Tonio still held the lead, though the new Apollo had fallen back, to give place to its silver twin, which roared on without a falter.

Thirty laps—twenty-five—twenty! The tail mounted slowly as they encircled the giant track, mounting the steep banking that marked its outside edge where the corners lay. Eighteen—fifteen—twelve! And still 'Tonio's Stetzman held its place, with Fenton lying but a few yards in its smoke-laden wake.

The grand-stand, the banking, trees, sheds, the crowd—these whirled past in a half-glimpsed blur as Fenton crouched behind his 20-inch steering-wheel, which danced and tremored beneath his numbed fingers as he urged his roaring racer onwards.

Eleven! The grand-stand flashed past once more, and the Silver Apollo nosed up the banking to pass a slower-moving Stetzman, all out on the precipitous slope, but lapped by speeding Apollo.

The Stetzman was well up the steep, travelling quickly, and, as Fenton fished for a pass, it did not give way. So he felt with the wheel for a grip on the concrete slope, and coaxed his leaping racer towards the crest, driving in above the cavouring Stetzman below.

The two racers ran level for a brief moment, Fenton manoeuvring, with something in hand, but hardly a foot to spare. His near-side wheels, as judged by American reckoning, danced on the very brink of the banking, and a yard—little more—lay between the Apollo and the crimson car beneath.

Then, little by little, the Apollo began to nose ahead.

Bang! With a sharp report the Stetzman's inner front tyre deflated in a burst, and the big racer slewed upwards in sympathy.

R-r-r-p! Fenton stamped on the gas, and the Apollo shot forward, headed for the open and safety. But of escape there was no chance.

Up came the rocketing Stetzman, out of control, and its plunging side dashed in, to take the Apollo's rear dumb-irons with a rending crash.

Fenton felt the Apollo swing to the impact, and his heart leapt to his mouth as the tail slewed outwards till a back wheel jumped upon the very edge of the banking. Then, as he looked over, the aluminium bus slid free, to a rasping sound of tearing sheet metal. The rubber bit the concrete and the racer shot forward, at an angle down the

slope, while the Stetzman rolled over in a burst of flame.

With a sickening lurch the Apollo swayed and slithered on the track, while Fenton fought desperately for control, flinging in every trick he knew to bring the leaping monster to the straight. For a long, tense moment the issue hung in the balance. Then he nursed the rocking racer to obedience, and, cutting in to the limit line, let her have her head.

On and on, round and round, with the wind shrieking by his ear-rolls, the rails whizzing past in a tick-tack of senseless Morse. The white concrete ahead flew up to meet him, as the thundering speedster swallowed up the track miles, un-gorged by the ceaseless meal.

A thrill, monotony, and never-ending strain. Would the blood-red splurge ahead never draw nearer? Would 'Tonio and his Stetzman—for the splurge was the leader—never lose their place?

Feeling with his controls, Fenton played with his screaming engine as does a musician with his instrument. And from the whirring mass of metal—a thing alive, a thing of soul, for all its machine-shop fashioning—came never a falter. And though he strained his ears to listen for the slightest quaver, the smallest note of pain, he could not hear it.

A blazing mass by the rails, the mangled Stetzman flashed by, and by again. But Fenton's nerves were as his engine—of steel and without a flaw. Small shame to him had his heart failed him, after the dread ordeal under the banking. But not for nothing had he been dubbed "Madman!" And in his "madness" was no speck of fear.

The laps, reckoning in "futures," had fallen to five now, and still 'Tonio held his position. Four laps to go, and four hundred yards to win from the fast-flying speedster ahead!

Fenton gritted his teeth and coaxed his bus to her uttermost, gaining slightly, and halving the distance as he forged round upon his next lap.

Slowly, how slowly, the gap narrowed! Two more laps to go, and the interval fell to half a furlong. But 'Tonio's mechanic had turned, and the wop knew his danger. He was straining every nerve to hold his lead, and the streaking Apollo fought him for inches during the succeeding circuit.

But as the last lap started Fenton bent forward, his eyes glued on his adversary. The gap was lessening perceptibly, and he sensed, rather than heard through the roar of his engine, that the Stetzman's motor was missing. And as the lap went on the American racer drew closer and closer. At the third mile barely ten yards separated its tail from the Apollo's bonnet.

Bent almost double, Fenton gripped his wheel, while Anstey forced the fuel pressure upwards. Slowly but surely the British speedster forged through, and the American fell level as the steaming radiator ploughed past its back-axle.

Away on the lone side of the track Fenton made his pass, the finish ever nearer, while 'Tonio, his red-rimmed eyes blazing hate and horror, glared fiendishly as his speeding rival crawled by.

But the instant the Apollo had won by him his hand shot down to the seat beside him. The next instant it flew up again, and in his fingers was the gun.

With a dull, sneezing cough the weapon spurted a stab of fire and something whizzed into the cylindrical petrol slung over the Apollo's rearward axle. And a flash of flame shot out as the incendiary bullet bored through the sheeting.

(Continued on page 27.)

A RIVER RESCUE

A Tale of RIVER-WISE NED



Here is another splendid story of the Thames, complete in this issue. For adventure and thrilling heroism, it will be hard to beat.

By **ROLAND SPENCER.**

CHAPTER 1.

Wanted—Seafaring Men.

THOSE who have travelled by rail from Wivenhoe to Brightlingsea, in Essex, will recollect how close to the River Colne, where it is a tidal creek, the railway runs. Ned Derry, the youngest barge skipper in the London river, and his two mates, Jim Cartwright and Tony Parr, were remarking on this as they sat in the third-class compartment and watched the water.

The chums' sailing barge, the Estuary Belle, was lying at anchor near Brightlingsea, and Ned had had a trip with his two mates into Colchester to secure a freight for Maldon.

"This train is a slow 'un, Ned," remarked Long Jim Cartwright. "And she's jolly well pulling up. What's on, I wonder?"

"There's some sort of a bustle aft," answered Tony Parr, poking his head out of the window. "Look, there's the guard running along, shouting something. There's a well-dressed, red-faced man puffing along astern of him. What on earth's the bother?"

The guard drew near, and the chums heard his words:

"Any sea-farin' men there?"

The chums were out of their compartment like a flash.

"Seafaring men, did you say?" asked Ned. "Here you are—three admirals from a sailing barge. What's up?"

The red-faced gentleman was now up in line, and he seized Ned by the shoulder.

"You a seaman?" he gasped.

"Skipper of the Estuary Belle, London sailing-berge, at your service, sir," replied Ned, touching the glazed peak of his pilot cap.

"Then, for Heaven's sake, get that drifting sloop out there to safety. It's my son's boat, and she's been rammed by a motor-yacht. The cowards in the motor-yacht left the sloop to sink and my son's lying senseless in the cockpit. Quick! You'll know what to do!"

"She's not very deep in the water yet, sir," remarked Ned, as the train moved on again. "We'll bare down the creek, and when we get below the yacht, we'll swim out and bring her in. We won't let your son drown."

Ned and his pals ran to well below the drifting yacht, which was now settling in the water, and then charged down the bank.

"Into the drink, now, chums!" cried Ned, plunging in and striking out. "We'll intercept the yacht all right."

A short, sharp swim brought the chums up to the yacht and they were not slow in tumbling into the well. One side of the boat had been stove in, and the water was swashing about above the bunks in the cabin. But there was no sign of the owner. He was not aboard.

"Must have been taken by the motor-yacht," said Ned. "Anyway, we'll save this spanking little sloop."

The pump and a bucket were got to work. Ned himself put out a sweep, and, labouring hard and controlling the tiller with his legs, he managed to steer the now almost sinking yacht into shallow water, where she took the ground. There the chums put the bower-anchor over on to the mud and slackened off a few fathoms of chain. Then they waded ashore to where the stout gentleman was waiting.

"There's no one aboard her, sir," said Ned. "Your son must have been taken on the motor-boat, so he'll be safe."

The big red face of the gentleman blanched.

"He—he's not there! Then where—why did that motor-boat make off instead of towing the sloop in?" he asked haltingly.

"Must have been in a great hurry, sir," said Tony Parr comfortingly. "Your son is evidently with the motor-boat, so I shouldn't worry about it."

The yachtsman's father mopped his brow.

"Well, I suppose he'll wire to me to say he's all right when those in the motor-boat land him somewhere. It's lucky I was out in the fields near where it happened. It's lucky, too, that the train stopped where it did, and that you three were aboard. You'll claim salvage money for saving the yacht, of course?"

"Of course not, sir!" cut in Ned. "A little thing like we've done is nothing. We're glad we've been able to save her from sinking in deep water."

"Then there's my card, my lad. You are true Britishers, you three. My son

and I will be pleased to entertain you at the Lodge whenever you like to come. I must get home now and wait for my son's wire. Many, many thanks. Will you come with me?"

"We're in a hurry, sir, thank you," replied Ned. "There's a freight waiting for us for Maldon. Wet clothes are nothing unusual for us, and won't hurt us. I'm Derry, of the Estuary Belle, and our permanent postal address is 'care of Edgar Brunt, of Sidwell Row, Shadwell.' We'd like a postcard saying that your son is safe. It'll be re-directed to us, wherever we might be."

The gentleman jotted down the address, shook hands with the chums, and, laughing with relief, now that the first shock was over, said good-bye. Ned and his two pals set off at the double along by the river towards Brightlingsea.

CHAPTER 2.

New Work for the Belle.

THREE days passed and the Estuary Belle was at Maldon, at anchor in mid-stream, having had her cargo unloaded.

Ned had been shopping, and Tony Parr and Long Jim were waiting on the barge, kettle boiling and table laid, all impatience for their skipper's return. At last River-wise Ned appeared. He was in a hurry, and Tony Parr lost no time in going off in the barge boat to fetch him.

"You got the sardines, Ned?" asked Tony, as he rowed the heavy barge boat back towards the Belle.

"Yes; but I've had a letter——"

"You got sardines in tomato-sauce, of course——"

"I tell you I've had a letter, you gormandiser. It's from——"

"And the rolls? Sardines aren't worth eating without rolls."

"Will you close your trap and let me see a bit of the scenery, Tony? I tell you I've had a letter from Mr. Pendcombe——"

"Who on earth is Pendcombe? 'Nother hide merchant who wants a cargo shifted? Tell me—oh, tell me the worst, skipper! Not snelly, wet hides again?"

"You'll get hides with a vengeance, Tony, if you don't stop rotting! You're getting fat, greedy, and lazy. You're getting fat, greedy, and lazy."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 314.

Pendcombe is the red-faced gentleman whose son's yacht was rammed in the Colne—"

"Well, what does he say? Son all right? I hope he didn't catch cold or anything nasty like that—"

Bump!

No, it wasn't Tony's head against the gunwale of the boat, but the gunwale of the boat against the barge.

"You have been a time, Ned!" protested Long Jim from the deck of the Belle, as he hitched the painter of the barge boat on to the sprit vang. "You haven't forgotten the doughnuts?"

Ned howled.

"Will you two dummies let me talk about this letter I've received!" he yelled. "That young man who was rammed in the sloop has disappeared from the eyes of man. The police say he's drowned—must be. There's no trace of the motor-boat, and they've dragged the Colne at old Mr. Pendcombe's expense; but they say the body must be under the mud or washed out to sea. Pendcombe's half-mad with grief, according to his rambling letter. He appeals to us to help him, us being river-wise, and gives a description of the motor-boat. Says he fears his son has not with foul play and thinks he's probably still living. I think so, too, for it was thundering funny that motor-boat making off instead of towing the sloop into shallow water.

"Pendcombe offers to pay all expenses—to charter the Belle, in fact, with the idea of finding out where that motor-boat is, so that we can get to the bottom of the business. Now, do you dummies realise that jam-tarts, sardines, and doughnuts are insignificant things compared to this?"

Tony Parr and Long Jim said they would agree to the insignificance of the eatables when they had partaken of them, so, after a right royal feed in the cabin, the Belle was prepared for sea while Long Jim went ashore to send off a wire to Mr. Pendcombe saying that they were weighing for the Colne at once.

That night, her big mainsail and top-sail bellying with the fresh, north-westerly wind, the Belle ran down the river. Ned was at the wheel, and Tony Parr and Long Jim were sleeping sweetly below, anxious to get in as much sleep as possible before their tricks at the helm.

It was a dead beat in the teeth of a freshening breeze up the Colne; but soon after dawn the Estuary Belle, with her decks all wet and her daring company rather tired, dropped anchor just off Brightlingsea.

Mr. Pendcombe was waiting for the chums ashore, and, after a grip of the hand for each, he took them by car to his house, Denley Lodge, so that they could all have a talk and work out a plan of action.

CHAPTER 3.

An Ambush.

IN the library of Denley Lodge, Mr. Pendcombe introduced the chums to a weasel-faced man, Howard by name.

"The private investigator I have on the case," explained Mr. Pendcombe. "He sent me his card as soon as he heard of my son's disappearance. We'll all search together."

Ned, when he could do so unobserved, weighed up Howard pretty thoroughly. The man looked shrewd, but there was that about the shape of his mouth and the glance of his eye which Ned didn't like. Why, the young barge skipper could not explain.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 814.

Mr. Pendcombe drew out a big roll of all the latest estuary charts and ordnance survey maps.

"Now, let's get to business, lads," he said.

"Well, about these charts, sir," began Ned.

"Yes?" queried Mr. Pendcombe eagerly.

"Roll 'em up and put them away. We'll pay attention to the ordnance plans. What we want to do is not explore places where boats are kept, for signs of the motor-boat, but to explore places where boats are not kept. To wit, the backwaters and marshes of the Colne, Blackwater, and Crouch.

"To do the job as quickly as possible. I propose you and Mr. Howard have the touring-car, and, if we may, my pals and I will use your two-seater. I have a driver's licence."

"Certainly, certainly! By all means!" replied Mr. Pendcombe eagerly. "Now, where shall we start?"

"Well, you take the left bank of the Blackwater, and we'll take the right bank. The Blackwater's the best river for hidden-away guts in the marshes."

Ned Derry was watching Howard out of the corner of his eye. He noticed that the man had winced slightly.

"There are more creeks on the northern side," said the investigator, speaking, as Ned thought, with a forced calmness; "so you fellows, being used to the creeks and tides and so on, ought to do that side, I think."

"Right-ho!" said Ned. "You and Mr. Pendcombe take the right bank. Now, don't forget to explore thoroughly. You'll probably have to wade through the mud at parts. We'll be off right away, and you ought to be off as well, sir."

"We will! Help yourselves to the two-seater, will you? We have further to motor than you, so we'll get right away now. I take it we search amongst the reeds and what not on the saltings, to see if the boat is concealed anywhere. Your idea is that if there has been foul play the motor-boat would be kept out of the way?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Pendcombe! Besides, the police have the matter in hand, and if the boat were visible anywhere they'd have her for you. Mr. Howard could tell you that."

"Quite right, Derry," said the investigator, in a patronising way.

Mr. Pendcombe and Howard set off in the touring-car which had been left at the gate, and Ned turned to his pals.

"Crumbs, you got a move on, chum!" said Tony admiringly. "But we've got a job to explore all those marshes. We'd better follow Mr. Pendcombe's example and get off, too. We've got the stiffer nut to crack—the north bank."

"We're not going there, my pippin!"

"What?" exclaimed Long Jim and Tony Parr together.

"We kill a bit of time here," continued Ned. "Then we explore the south bank of the Blackwater—"

"You scatter-brain! That's where Mr. Pendcombe and that detective chap have just gone!" shrieked Long Jim. "Expain yourself, or you'll get bumped, me lad!"

"Hold off!" cried Ned. "Listen, you chumps! What did Howard want to take the right bank for, instead of us?"

"Now you're suggesting things."

"Yes; and on that suggestion, which is that Howard is really an agent of the villains in the piece and his job is to keep us away from the right place, we're going to work. He, himself, can easily bamboozle Mr. Pendcombe to miss the hidden motor-yacht, even if they get near her. It's a long shot, I know, but we've nothing better to work on. We

speed off in an hour's time, and we leave the car concealed with the coastguards at Stangate Wick. Then we shadow Mr. Pendcombe and that weasel of a 'tee. We explore thoroughly the places they miss or pass over quickly. Got me?"

"Jupiter, chum, this'll be smart for a chump like you if it works out all right!" said Long Jim. "I hae ma doots, though."

"Then everything is satisfactory. If Jim doubts it, we're on the right track. Let's have a stroll through the grounds."

After the arranged space of time, the little two-seater belonging to the missing young man was humming along merrily. Ned was driving, and his chums were hanging on as well as they could.

They had not gone far along the road to Colchester when they came up against their first problem. This was a rounded log, suddenly rolled out from the hedge at a lonely part of the road.

Ned saw the danger, opened the throttle full, and the little car simply leapt forward. It was not quick enough to miss the log without swerving, however, and the off wheels of the car went into the ditch. The under part of the chassis took the ground, and the car stopped suddenly.

"We're aground!" yelled Long Jim; but the chums continued their journey—over the windscreen—and brought up with a series of three distinct thuds in the nettles of the ditch. Roughs were grabbing at them before they knew exactly what had happened.

The chums managed to sort themselves out, and then they fought like true mariners. Lashing out savagely, blindly, with set, grim faces they held their assailants at bay for some minutes. But force of numbers and swinging sandbags told, and at last they were overcome and lying senseless in the ditch.

CHAPTER 4.

The Prisoner of River View!

THE roughs, blue-jawed, neckerchief-clad wasters, five in number, bound the chums with cord.

Then they heaved them into a motor-lorry that had drawn up, lifted the two-seater bodily, and put that in, too, slammed up the backboard, laced down the rear curtains, and off the whole lot went.

Ned felt his senses returning after a while. He was dreaming that the Belle was at sea in rough weather, that Tony Parr, at the wheel, had been compelled to put the barge about suddenly, without giving warning, and a block of the mainsheet had given him a hefty clout on the head.

The fuddled dream gradually resolved itself into the jolting and bumping motor-lorry, the two-seater bouncing about on its tyres, and Tony Parr and Long Jim lying bound and senseless by his side.

Ned was about to try to saw through his bonds on a steel upright of the side of the lorry, when the vehicle drew to a standstill.

"Not so much talk now," said a cultured voice from the driver's seat. "Those young river-rats may have come round!"

A man fumbled with the trapping of the rear curtains.

"No bloomin' fear, guv'nor," he said, peering in. "Dead to the world fur a good bit yet."

Ned had let his head fall back again, shamming insensibility in the hope of hearing something.

"Yank 'em out of it, then! This has been smart work, boys. It's a good job my man who is gulling that old fool Pendcombe could give us the wire as

they passed in their car. We shouldn't have been in time to make the capture if he hadn't."

Ned was taking in all that was said. So it was a plot, and there were high stakes for the villains to play for. They were thorough, to, these plotters. Another cultured voice answered the first one.

"Bender's telephone message saying what he had heard the cubs talking about at the Lodge is the chief thing. Without that we should have let them go, thinking they were being gulled, too. We must get the yacht out into deep water and sunk to-night. What these young fools deduced might be deduced by other people."

Yes, thought Ned, the stakes were indeed high. But what on earth would happen to him and his chums? Would they be left alive to give evidence?

As he pondered this thought, the two-seater was heaved out of the lorry and ungentle hands hauled the bound lads forth by the feet. Then they were carried into a big, lonely house, which, Ned saw through a slightly-opened eyelid, was on the river-edge of an extensive marsh. The spire of a church in the distance gave Ned his position. He had often used that spire as a landmark when making up the River Blackwater. And he had before seen this house from the water. It was built close up to the

water, a deep channel leading up to the private landing-stage.

The chums were thrown into a cellar of the house, and when the door at the top of the brick-built stairway had slammed, Ned rolled to his chums and tried to rouse them. After half an hour's bumping at Tony with his shoulder, that irrepressible young mate opened his eyes.

"Wha-a-a-t?" he began; and Ned told him the news.

When Tony was completely in his right senses he whistled.

"Gosh, Ned, we've struck a snag all right," he said. "I don't mind being capsized in good, honest water, but hang being upset on the nasty, hard land—in stinging nettles, too."

"Well, shut up about all that, Tony," said Ned. "How're we to get out of this? That's the question."

"Yes, how? Ask me another, skipper."

Long Jim came round soon after, and the three held a conference as to their next move.

"These cords off our wrists and legs first," said Jim Cartwright sensibly. "Then perhaps we can see about doing something."

The chums worked hard sawing their wrist-bonds against a sharp corner of brickwork. They were free at last and sat up, rubbing some life back into their limbs. Then they explored.

They might have saved themselves the trouble, for the cellar was quite proof against all their efforts at escape. Also, in the middle of a consultation as to the strength of the door, the subject of their talk opened, and three armed men came down.

"Ho, so ye're up! Had a nice sleep?" asked one of the men, his ugly face grinning in the glimmering light of the lantern.

"Yes, we're up," said Ted coolly. "What we want to know is, what's up, and what's to be done with us?"

"Ye'll find out soon enough. Ye're wanted above, nah!"

The man led the unresisting chums up the cellar stairs and into the hall of the house. There they were handled roughly, their wrists bound behind them again, and out they went into the fresh night air and on to the quay beside which they noticed the missing motor-yacht moored. Then the chums heard a cry for help from the barred window about fifteen feet high in the wall of the solidly-built old house. They looked up, but their captors only laughed.

"Pretty fine sort o' 'elp you kin give 'im!" said one of the men, with a guffaw.

The lads were handed down the iron ladder of the quay into a boat and rowed out across the river to a powder-hulk moored in a gut the other side of



The roughs, five in number, bound the chums with cord. Then they heaved them into a motor-lorry that had drawn up, lifted the two-seater bodily, and put that in, too! Then away the whole lot went! (See page 24.)

the water. Once there, they were hauled forth. Their bonds were cut and they were bundled up a "Jacob's ladder" hanging over the side of the hulk.

"This has torn it!" said Ned fiercely, when the chums were imprisoned below decks. "We're to be kept out of the way for a time. We can be kept here, on this lonely old hulk, for as long as the principal villain of the piece wishes. Crumbs, chums, we're for it!"

"I reckon you're right, lad," said Long Jim. "They don't mean to do for us, though, or they'd have sunk us in the middle of the river or something. How we're going to get out of this pickle, goodness knows! You were smart in spotting that 'tee chap's real motive, Ned. Couldn't you be smart enough to get us out of this?"

"Trust your uncle if he gets an idea," said Ned. "For the present, let me think. First of all, we are pretty sure that old Mr. Pendcombe's son is a prisoner in that house we were taken to. It was doubtless he who cried for help. Our job is to escape as soon as we can, get back to the house, and—

"Pull the walls down and so release the prisoner," said Long Jim sarcastically. "Man, he's in a little, walled-in cell or something, with a heavily-barred window. And before we could get the police on the job for a raid—why, they'd have him shifted."

Ned was thinking hard.

"Pull the walls down, you say, Jim," he said quietly. "Well, let's make a get-away from this old hulk, and we'll do it."

Ned—or so his chums often said—didn't talk through his hat very often, but he could talk through the back of his neck very well. At great pains they again pointed this out to their skipper. But Ned only grinned and maintained a golden silence.

CHAPTER 5.

The Belle to the Rescue.

THE result of Ned's silence was, before long, a whoop of delight. "What's the stunt now?" asked Tony Parr, with a hint of acidity in his voice.

"Here's a box of matches left in the fo'c'sle by someone. Up with a floor-board or two. There's bound to be a drop of bilge water in the bottom of the hulk. Damp these filthy blankets and make a smoke up through the ventilator. Then we'll holler 'help!' The watchman will either open up the fo'c'sle or run for it. This hulk's a store for explosives, you know."

"Gee whiz! What a stunt! We're to pretend there's a fire, of course. We'll see if it works, anyway."

"If the watchman bunks we can smash out through the sliding hatch without being heard," went on Ned excitedly. "If he opens the hatch we can nab him and fight for it. Here goes. Only damp the blankets or they won't take fire at all. Crumple up that old newspaper to get a start for the fire."

Now action had been commenced, the chums lost no time. Soon they had a column of dense smoke curling up through the ventilator on the foredeck, and were bellowing like frightened bulls for help.

Help came in the shape of the watchman, who threw open the hatch in a panic. Ned gave him the full benefit of

a smoking, damp blanket, and the man retreated, choking.

"Help, help!" yelled the chums; and the man poked his head into the reeking fo'c'sle again.

Ned clutched at the man's shoulders, and the other two gripped him by the neck. Then they hauled him into the fo'c'sle, and, while Tony Parr and Long Jim grappled with the man, Ned pitched the smouldering blankets overboard.

"Up you come, lads!" he cried. "Sorry we've had to deceive you, gaoler. We'll have to leave you in the fo'c'sle. It's stuffy, we know, but it could do with a good fumigation. It was good of you to let us out. Chin-chin!"

Slamming over the hatch and securing it with a piece of stick they found handy, the chums jumped over on to the soft mud of the gut and squelched up to harder ground, just as the grey of dawn was creeping over the hills to the north-east.

"How shall we get over the river to the house, Ned?" asked Tony Parr.

"We're not going over now. We have to pull the bars of young Pendcombe's prison out, and there's only one person amongst our circle of friends who can do that."

"And who's that?"

"Our lady-love, the Estuary Belle. Off we get to her and back to the house opposite before our escape from the hulk is discovered, lads. With luck, we'll be back here at high water to-night—that's eleven o'clock, and we'll have to take that ebb tide down the river again pretty smart, when we've got young Pendcombe."

"Well, you've done wonders, so far, skipper," said Tony Parr, "so I place my trust in you completely. Lead on, Macduff. Spout out the scheme as we go."

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Ned did, and by the time the chums were across Mersea Island, with a view of the Estuary Belle just becoming water-borne by the incoming tide, Tony and Long Jim were wildly enthusiastic about the scheme.

They all got aboard the barge by boat from East Mersea, and had a much-needed feed in the cabin. Then they dropped down-river on the ebb and came to anchor near West Mersea, to wait for the flood tide in the early hours of the night.

By ten o'clock p.m., they were opposite the big, solid old house.

It was a pitch-dark night, and for that the chums were thankful, for if they had been spotted their goose would have been cooked for them for sure. They showed no lights and went ashore to scout.

Apparently the lonely old house—River View, by name—was either wrapped in slumber or practically deserted. Not a light could be seen. No sound was heard within the thick walls. Ned hauled out a fishing-line with an ounce lead weight on the end. Then he made casts with the weight to get it through the barred opening of young Pendcombe's prison.

At last the weight went in and a white face appeared at the bars. So dark was the night that the face could only be seen very faintly.

"Hallo, below!" whispered the prisoner.

"Hallo to you!" breathed Ned. "Are you Harry Pendcombe?"

"Yes. Are you rescuers?"

"Ay, ay! If you keep quiet and haul on this fishing-line when we give the word. It'll raise a stouter line, and that line will raise a luff tackle purchase, which you must make fast. Then we'll haul up a barge anchor, and you've to put one of the flukes round the bars of your prison cell. Got all that?"

"Yes, rather. Good lads, whoever you are. Harry up!" said young Pendcombe faintly. "Then: 'What's the stunt?'"

"To pull out the bars of your prison with our barge," answered Ned. "By the way, you'll have to look slick in getting out and over the quay-side once we've got you free for there'll be a bit of a clatter when our hefty anchor falls down on the paving of the quay. We intend to slip cable and make a present of our anchor to the beggars who have kidnapped you. Fair exchange is no robbery."

"You're a nib, whoever you are!" answered the prisoner. "Trust me to step lively once I get a chance."

In dead silence the chums hauled the anchor and chain of the Belle over the quay. Then they sent up the double block of the tackle, fixed the anchor to the lower block, and cautiously tailed on to the fall of the rope.

The blocks had been well greased, so, without a squeak, and only a gentle "clink" now and again as the links of the chain jerked, the heavy anchor was raised till the tackle was chock-a-block, or hauled up as far as it would go.

There was a gentle puffing and grunting above as the anchor was jerked about at the bars of the cell, then young Pendcombe whispered, breathlessly:

"All secure. Get ahead with it!"

Ned and his pals ran softly back to the Belle, and passed the slack of the anchor chain round the girth of the barge at the waist. Getting the chain from the cell window to the barge as

taut as possible, they shackled the links, so that the barge had a big loop of chain round her.

"Golly, Ned, what a stunt!" chuckled Tony Parr. "It's bang high water now, and as the tide sinks the old Belle will either be left hanging up by her anchor chain or those bars will come out with a rush. I'm sorry for the bars, that's all!"

"Ay, ay, if we're not disturbed for the next hour," replied Ned, "the bars will go, right enough. All secure now, so off you go to the corners of the house, you two, and don't be afraid to use your fists if anyone comes round. They've no right to be up so late at night, and a little sweet sleep will do 'em good. I'll stand by the Belle and see that the chain keeps on the sacking on the edge of the quay."

The tide dropped, and the Belle dropped, too, tantening in the chain. The barge sank with the water in a series of jerks. At last she felt the great strain on the chain, and she hung up at the quay-side for another hour or so.

Suddenly there was a jerk, and down soused the old, heavy barge to her water-line. There was a sudden clatter, followed by a mighty crash on the quay, and almost instantly three figures came running for the Belle.

Young Pendcombe, Tony, and Long Jim leapt aboard as Ned knocked out the shackle in the chain and so parted the Belle from her favourite anchor.

"Gosh, the bars are pulled out, and about fifty tons of masonry as well!" gasped Tony Parr with relish.

Shouts sounded out on the quay, and Ned bawled his orders.

"Tawps! halliard! Draw out the sheet. Leggo mains! brails. Up with the fores!"

The wheel grated over as Ned gave his old ship every spoke to port, and the gap between the quayside and the barge got wider and wider.

"Fresh nor'-westerly wind!" snapped Ned. "Luck's with us again. I'd back my luck anywhere. We're well away now."

The pursuers were by this time shouting loudly and running about on the quay.

"The motor-boat in the gut!" gasped Pendcombe, his heart missing a beat at the thought. "I forgot about her. We'll be caught, after all."

"Oh, no, we won't!" chuckled Long Jim. "Ned took the precaution of putting a couple of gallons of grade one sea-water in the petrol tank. She'll only catch us if she can run on Derry's Famous Mixture—fifty-fifty of sea-water and petrol."

Young Mr. Pendcombe, despite his weakness, gave Ned a slap on the back and called him a genius.

The barge got clear. We do not propose to print what the cultured voices of the chief villains said when the motor-boat conked out after the small drop of pure petrol in the petrol pipe was used and Ned's famous mixture was discovered.

Suffice it to say that the cultured voices belonged to Harry Pendcombe's cousin and uncle. Another uncle of Pendcombe—a very rich and aged man, practically on his death-bed—had chosen Harry as his heir. The report of Harry's death would result in the old man making Harry's cousin the heir to the wealth. Hence the desire to keep Harry in hiding till after the rich old man had passed away.

But the villains reckoned without River-wise Ned, his two mates, and the old Estuary Belle. The stout old barge, as if conscious of the service she had rendered, footed it speedily to the Colne, and the four adventurers were soon at Denley Lodge.

There, they found Mr. Pendcombe in the library, his red face in his hands, with Howard, the "private investigator," and Bender, the butler, beside him. The disappearance of Ned and his pals, as well as Harry, had quite upset the old man's balance.

However, his son, Ned, Tony, and Jim, soon put his mind at rest, and the "private investigator" in the local lock-up.

The plotters were all arrested, the Belle's anchor recovered, and then there were high jinks at Denley Lodge for the next week or two, River-wise Ned and his pals being the honoured guests of Mr. Pendcombe and his son.

THE END.

***** "THE SUNKEN RACER!" (Continued from page 22.) *****

A mile! The post! And—"
"Gosh! Look behind you!" Anstey glimpsed the blazing stream astern, and grabbed Fenton fiercely by the elbow.

The driver turned, saw the leaping mass of fire in his wake and the roaring Stetzman beyond. Then his lips set grimly and he faced round in cold determination.

Not for this had he won the splendid racer from its ocean bed. A mile! triumph—and the fiery furnace behind! The cup—or death!

A jumble of fancies, queries, and heart-searching wracked Fenton's brain.

The flags! The finish! A hundred yards, and the heat unendurable!

A hundred feet! Was it victory? And then—

With a sickening lurch the car swayed sideways as the rear tyres burst under the shooting flame, and slewed heavily in a path of zigzag eccentricity.

Crash! Fenton and Anstey shot outwards as the smashing speedster rolled over and fell clear, as the Stetzman plunged full into the splintering wreck upon its path.

Bruised and bleeding, they staggered up, saved by their crash helmets, and, through a blurred mist, eyed the holocaust of blazing ruin, ten feet beyond the line.

The Apollo had won!

Fortunately neither Fenton nor Anstey was seriously injured. As often happens in high-speed crashes, they had been shot out of the car too quickly to attempt to save themselves, and so had fallen naturally.

Tonio the Wop was not so lucky. Pinned beneath the wreckage, he perished, and with him legal proof of Canfield's guilt.

It only remains to add that the Apollo's engine was salvaged practically uninjured, and that, with Verrinder's hearty endorsement, Fenton now handles Apollo products whenever a gruelling contest takes place.

THE END.

(You must turn to page 2.)

***** "SEVEN BOYS IN A BOAT!" (Concluded from page 15.) *****

"Yaas, wathuh!"

"Well, he's brought us a good distance," said Monty Lowther. "I think perhaps we might give him a shilling. Will a shilling satisfy you, Coker?"

"I—I—I—"

"Does that mean 'Yes' or 'No'?"

"I'll smash you!" roared Coker.

"That isn't the way to speak to your employer, my man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On second thoughts," said Lowther, "I shall not give him a shilling. He's a slacker, and his manners are horrid. This will be a warning to you, my man, to be more civil, and use better language, next time you are employed to tow a boat up the river."

Coker did not answer that. He seemed to be struggling on the verge of a fit.

"Well, he's sacked," said Blake. "Let's do the job thoroughly. He's a rude, rough, ungrateful rotter, and I shouldn't wonder if he cut up rusty when we let him loose. And we can't leave him our tow-rope."

"You wait till I get my hands free!" gasped Coker. "Oh, you just wait! I—I'll smash you! I'll spifficate you! I'll pulverise you! I—I'll—"

"I knew he'd cut up rusty," said Blake. "Chuck that sack out of the boat, Dig—the one that had the potatoes in it."

"What on earth for?"

"Ain't we going to give Coker the sack?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

The whole crew crowded ashore to give Coker the sack. In the grasp of seven pairs of hands, Horace Coker raved and roared, but he could do nothing else. The tow-rope was taken off him; the potato-sack was drawn down over his head and arms, and secured round his waist with a string. From the interior of the sack came a muffled roar.

"All aboard!" sang out Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I dare say somebody will let you out of that sack later on, Coker," said Monty Lowther. "You can keep the sack."

Another muffled roar.

"Probably you will be able to sell it for sixpence—perhaps a shilling—you can keep the shilling!"

The Terrible Three took the tow-rope, and Blake took the rudder, and the Old Bus rolled on towards the lock.

Looking back from the lock, Tom Merry & Co. had a weird view of a figure staggering in a sack. Coker burst the sack at last, and a red and dusty face appeared to view. Then the Old Bus was in the lock, and the St. Jim's crew lost sight of Coker. From Sonning Lock they towed on towards Reading in a happy and genial mood, hoping that Coker was feeling equally happy that bright and sunny morning. But they could not help realising that the probability was that he wasn't!

THE END.

(No reader can afford to miss next Wednesday's grand story of Tom Merry & Co. on the river. The story is entitled "Tracked up the Thames!" and is by famous Martin Clifford. In the meantime, do not forget that there is a 50,000 word St. Jim's story in the "Holiday Annual.")

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