

EVERY WEDNESDAY

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The GEM 2^d

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GUSSY'S BAD START IN LIVERPOOL!

(In his eagerness to get to grips with Baggy Trimble, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy forgets that there is a "little more" traffic in Liverpool than there is in the sleepy village of Rylcombe! Read "A Merseyside Mystery"—inside!)

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TOM MERRY & CO. AT LIVERPOOL! Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, set out on their journey to Liverpool in the highest of spirits, little thinking of the amazing adventures that await them there!

A MERSEYSIDE MYSTERY

A Splendid New Extra-Long Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's, dealing with their adventures in Liverpool.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Obliging Trimble!

"**B**E in Liverpool in fifteen minutes," remarked Tom Merry.

"Oh, good!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Just in time for supper and bed," said Blake, with a grunt.

"Well, it scarcely matters," grinned Tom Merry, peering out through the rain-splashed windows into the darkness beyond. "It's raining cats and dogs, so we couldn't go out, chaps.

"Let's hope our giddy hotel isn't far from the station," said Herries.

"Better stop and shelter in the buffet at Lime Street," remarked Baggy Trimble. "I'm hungry."

"Bai Jove! Are you evah anythin' else, Twimble?" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arey. "It is scarcely ten minutes since I gave you a packet of chocolate, you fat gwub-huntah!"

"Well, what's that?" sniffed Baggy Trimble. "Expect a measly packet of choes to stop a chap being hungry? Look here, Gussy, gimme that other packet and I'll buy you two more when we reach Liverpool."

"Wathah not, Twimble!"

"But I'm hungry!" roared Trimble.

"Then wemain hungwy, deah boy."

"If you're going to be mean, Gussy—"

"I am, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus serenely. "You must wemain hungwy until we weach our hotel, Twimble. I am certainly not goin' to weach down my coat fwm the wack just to get you that packet of choes, deah boy."

"Beast! Mean beast!"

"Thank you, deah boy! I much pwefer you to call me mean beast than Gussy, Twimble."

There was a chuckle in the lighted railway-carriage, and Baggy Trimble glared. When the fat junior was hungry—which was usual—he always looked upon it as the duty of his companions to feed him, and also to sympathise with him. Occasionally he did succeed in persuading them to do the former, but he never succeeded in persuading them to do the latter. There was always a plentiful lack of sympathy for Trimble.

"I'm fed-up with this trip to Liverpool already!" said Trimble, with a disgusted grunt. "I've only had a couple of snacks since we left St. Jim's this morning."

Baggy Trimble's "couple of snacks" would have satisfied the appetites of six ordinary schoolboys, but apparently they hadn't satisfied him. There was a doleful expression on his podgy countenance that should have touched the hearts of his companions, but Tom Merry & Co. grinned heartlessly.

"Yah!" snorted Trimble. "Who the thump wants to go nosing round dye-works and factories? Fatheaded idea, I call it!"

"Jolly sight better than mugging in the Form-room at St. Jim's, anyway," said Monty Lowther.

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And Tom Merry & Co. nodded. Whatever Baggy Trimble thought about it, they at least were eagerly looking forward to their stay in Liverpool. By the generosity of the industrial magnates of Liverpool parties of public school-boys from all parts of the British Isles had been invited to "look over" the works of the various factories there in order to see for themselves how things were made. There had been great eagerness on the part of the juniors of the Fourth and Shell at St. Jim's to "bag" a place in the "touring-party." Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, had been placed in charge of the tourists by Dr. Holmes, and all the juniors selected for this treat were feeling very pleased with the world in general and themselves in particular—all, that is, with the exception of Baggy Trimble.

His Form-fellows had looked upon his inclusion in the party as an extraordinary piece of good luck for Trimble, and an extraordinary piece of bad luck for themselves. Still, here he was in the party, and Tom Merry & Co. were performance obliged to make the best of things.

"Cheer up, Trimble!" said Tom Merry, with a grin. "This trip will do you a world of good. Broaden your mind, you know."

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"Impossible!" he said. "You see, Trimble hasn't got a mind—he's all tummy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble scowled.

"Look here, Lowther—" he began.

"Can't!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "I've looked at your chivvy half a dozen times to-day, old fat man, and survived; but there's a limit to all things."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" growled Trimble, with a baleful glare at the hilarious juniors. "But I've been thinking—"

"What with?" inquired the humorous Lowther. "A chap needs a brain to do that, doesn't he?"

There was a fresh outburst of laughter in the carriage that made Baggy Trimble glare homicidally.

"I've been thinking," he reiterated. "And I've got a really ripping idea."

"Bury it, then!"

"It's about your uncle, Lowther," said the fat junior, unheeding.

"Eh? What the thump do you know about my uncle?" demanded Lowther.

"Quite a lot!" grinned Trimble. "I happen to know that he's boss of one of those silly dyeworks we're going to look over in the morning."

"Oh, you know that, do you?"

"Yes," grinned Trimble. "The Head knows the old top, too, for your giddy nunky was an old St. Jim's chap, you know."

"You seem to know a fat lot about him, you nose-ey boulder!" chuckled Lowther. "But my uncle isn't the boss, old top; he's a big shareholder, though."

"Well, that doesn't matter," said Trimble. "The point is that your uncle lives at Wavertree, doesn't he?"

"True, old fat man."

"Well, my idea is this," said Trimble eagerly. "What's the good of staying at a blessed hotel where you can't do as you like, and where they don't give us enough to eat? Why not stay while we're in Liverpool with your uncle, Lowther—just us eight pals, you know? The rest of the chaps can stay at the hotel, of course."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, you cheeky fat rotter!" gasped Lowther.

"Oh, really, Lowther!" grumbled Trimble. "I thought you'd have jumped at the wheeze. I think it's a jolly good idea. Plenty of grub, and a good time, you know. You can tell old Railton that your uncle wants us to remain at the house, and then we shan't have to go fooling round the silly dyeworks with the other chaps. See?"

"Well, you—"

"I'll run along and ask Railton for permission now if you like," said Trimble. "He's in the next carriage. He'll agree like a shot, I expect, especially as it'll save hotel expenses for eight of us. Well, is it a go?"

And Baggy Trimble blinked inquiringly at Monty Lowther. Apparently, from his expression, he fully expected it to be "a go."

Lowther glared at him for a few moments, and then his eyes suddenly glimmered.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed, drawing a deep breath. "That's not a bad wheeze, you fellows!"

"What?" gasped Tom Merry. "You—you mean what that fat idiot suggests?"

"Yes."

"Planting eight of us on your uncle, Lowther?"

"No; only seven of us," corrected Lowther. "It wouldn't do to take Trimble, of course. I'm dear old nunky's favourite nephew, not his giddy biggest enemy."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say, Lowther—"

"Dry up, Trimble! My nunky won't be prepared for a siege, so we can't take you, old chap. We'll pay you for the idea, though. Give him that packet of chocolate to settle the account, Gussy."

"Bai Jove!"

"Look here," hooted Trimble, "it was my idea, and I'm jolly well coming, Lowther!"

"You're jolly well not, old fat man!" grinned Lowther. "I've too much respect for nunky to plant a fat worm like you on him!"

"But look here, Lowther," said Tom Merry, laughing, "you aren't seriously thinking of taking us lot along to your uncle?"

"Of course!"

"At this time of night?" gasped Tom.

"Exactly!" said Lowther. "Why the thump didn't I think of the idea before—"

"You rotter, it was my idea!"

"You dry up, Trimble! Well, what do you chaps think of the idea?" asked Lowther. "Dear old nunky's a jolly old sport, though I've not had much to do with him. Anyway, he'll make us welcome, and we'll have more freedom there than with the rest at an hotel."

"It sounds all right," grinned Tom Merry. "But I fancy your uncle will think it jolly cheek taking six of us there without warning."

"Rot! He'll be delighted; so will his housekeeper, Miss Miller. She's a decent sort, and won't mind a bit. And we'll easily get permission from—"

Lowther suddenly paused.

The Liverpool express was crowded, and in addition to the St. Jim's juniors there was another passenger in the carriage. He was a tall, middle-aged man with rather sharp features, clean-shaven face, and very black, keen eyes. Lowther had already noted that he seemed to take a curious interest in the conversation of the St. Jim's juniors.

And now, suddenly catching his eye, Lowther ceased speaking at sight of the expression on the man's face.

It was a startled, even savage expression, and he was leaning forward in his corner seat, eyeing Lowther with glittering eyes.

Monty Lowther was quite astonished.

But as the man caught Lowther's look he turned his head abruptly, and peered through the carriage window into the rainy darkness outside.

After another glance at the black-eyed stranger, Lowther went on speaking.

"We'll easily get permission from Railton," he declared.

"After all, what does it matter so long as we turn up when he wants us?"

"H'm!" murmured Tom Merry doubtfully. "But it's rather thick, you know, dropping on your uncle like that."

"Yaas, wathah! Hardly the wight and pwopah thing to do, Lowthah."

"Tosh! My dear man, I know my uncle. It'll be all serene," said Lowther confidently. "We'll be as welcome as the giddy flowers in May. Anyway, we'll do it, chaps."

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Ring off, Trimble, do! You're dead in this act!"

"But look here!" roared Trimble wrathfully. "I tell you I'm coming with you!"

"Nothing of the kind, old fat man. Well, I'll just run along and see Railton, chaps."

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "How far out does your uncle live, you fathead?"

"Only a tram ride out Wavertree way," said Lowther carelessly. "I've only been there once; but I know the name of the house, of course—Myrtle Lodge—and though I've forgotten the name of the road, we'll find it all right."

"Yes, but—"

"Now, don't start butting; just leave it to me," said Lowther. "Here goes, any old how!"

And Lowther was just about to leave his seat to pass out into the corridor when a sharp voice made him pause.

"Excuse me one moment, my boy."

It was the black-eyed stranger in the corner seat. As he spoke he half-rose in his seat, and the eyes of all the juniors turned to him.

"Pardon my interference," said the man, his thin lips twisting into a smile, "but I believe I can be of assistance to you boys."

"Well?" said Lowther.

The man seemed genial enough; but somehow Monty Lowther did not like the hard glint in his dark eyes.

"I could not help overhearing your conversation, boys," said the man smoothly. "It was of interest to me, because the gentleman you were speaking of is, I believe, a very old friend of mine. Am I right in concluding that the uncle you were speaking of is Dr. Morton Lowther, of Myrtle Lodge, Wavertree?"



Tom Merry & Co. had just entered the drive of Myrtle Lodge when the brilliant headlights of a large, closed car swept round a bend, just ahead of them. "Look out, chaps!" cried Monty Lowther. The St. Jim's juniors leapt to safety just in the nick of time. (See Chapter 3.)

Lowther stared.

"Yes," he replied.

"The famous scientist and chemist?"

"Yes."

The man smiled again. It was a smile of the mouth only, and not of those black, keen eyes.

"Then I feel justified in interrupting you thus," he exclaimed, with a soft laugh that grated curiously on the juniors' ears, "for you are obviously unaware that your uncle is away on holiday, my boy."

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"He went some days ago," explained the stranger. "A golfing holiday to—to West Kirby."

"My uncle doesn't play golf," said Lowther.

"He has but recently taken it up—under his doctor's advice," was the smooth answer. "I dined with him some evenings ago, and he told me his plans. I am glad now that he did, for this information will save you a fruitless journey to his house at Wavertree—especially on a wretched night like this."

"That's very good of you, sir," said Tom Merry, looking at Lowther, who did not speak. "It—it is a rotten night!"

"A wretched night, my boy. I am exceedingly glad to have saved you boys an unnecessary journey, for I understand that Myrtle Lodge is to be closed during Dr. Lowther's absence."

"What rotten luck!" snorted Trimble, in disgust. "That means it's off, Lowther."

"For you—yes," said Lowther, speaking calmly at last. "But not off for us, old bean. We're going to Myrtle Lodge to-night, all the same!"

The stranger seemed quite taken aback. His eyes held a glitter in them as he looked at Lowther.

"In spite of my information you still propose to visit Myrtle Lodge?" he said.

"Yes—thank you all the same," said Lowther coolly.

"You will not see your uncle!"

"I'll risk it, thank you!"

"The housekeeper will be away, and the house closed;

you will have your journey out to Wavertree for nothing, my boy."

"I'm chancing that, sir!"

"Very well. It is no concern of mine, of course," said the man, with another harsh laugh. "I felt bound to mention what I knew under the circumstances. If, however—"

The man broke off abruptly, and turning his head away he stared out of the window. To the other juniors it seemed that he wished to close the conversation, disgusted with Lowther's churlishness.

"Lowther, old man—" murmured Tom Merry.

Like the others, he was astonished at his chum, and he was feeling very uncomfortable indeed. The gentleman, after all, had "chipped in" out of motives of kindness—to prevent them making a fruitless journey on a wet night. And Lowther's manner and words bordered on rudeness, and were certainly ungrateful. Indeed, the juniors wondered how Lowther could treat a friend of his uncle's with such churlish disrespect.

"Lowther, old man—" Tom Merry was beginning again in a whisper, but Lowther interrupted him.

"Dry up, Tommy!" he said briefly. "We're going!"

"That's right, Lowther," grinned Trimble, in a whisper the stranger could not fail to hear. "Never mind that cheeky, interfering ass! Like his cheek, I must say—"

"Bai Jove! Twimble—"

"You ring off, Gussy!" sneered Trimble. "Lowther's taking me—"

"Lowther is not!" snapped Monty.

"Oh, really, Lowther—wasn't it my idea?" snorted Trimble.

"Yes, and you'll be paid for it, old top! Hand Trimble that chocolate, Gussy."

"Twimble is quite welcome to the chocolate," said Arthur Augustus. "But he must wait for it until we reach Lime Street, dear boy."

"I'm jolly well famished!"

"Then remain famished!" said Arthur Augustus calmly.

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"I refuse to weanch down my coat again—it is wumpled enough already. Twimble."

"Then I'll jolly well get it myself!" growled Trimble.

And getting to his feet, Trimble reached up to the rack for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's smart coat. Trimble meant to make sure of the packet of chocolate whether he went to Myrtle Lodge or not. To reach it he had to lean over the stranger, who still stared with glinting eyes out of the rain-splashed window.

But Trimble did reach it, and as he gave a vicious tug at the coat, Tom Merry yelled:

"Look out, you ass!"

Tom jumped forward just a second too late.

As Trimble tugged at the coat it came away suddenly—bringing with it D'Arcy's suitcase, which had been perched rather insecurely on the rack.

For a moment it seemed to balance on the edge of the rack, and then, just as Tom shouted, and the stranger leaned forward in sudden alarm, the suitcase toppled over with the coat.

Crash!

"Oh, my hat!"

The heavy suitcase struck the stranger's head, sending him sprawling down on his knees with a crash and a gasping yell. Then the coat fell over man and suitcase, enveloping them in a struggling heap on the floor of the carriage.

CHAPTER 2.

Unlucky Trimble!

"O H, great Scott!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Trimble.

The fat junior stared in great alarm at what he had done. Tom Merry & Co. jumped forward to aid the luckless fellow-traveller. He still grovelled on the floor, and the expressions he was using were not the sort that made Tom Merry inclined to raise a finger to help him.

Yet he did so—realising it was Trimble's fault.

As a friend of Dr. Morton Lowther, the stranger might have been expected to speak and act like a gentleman—even under such unpleasant circumstances as this. Yet he certainly was not acting like one—far from it. His language left a great deal to be desired. He fairly raved as the juniors helped him to his feet in the rocking railway carriage.

His hard face was black with ungovernable rage. For a moment he swayed, gasping, and then he made a savage blow with his clenched fist at Trimble before that unlucky youth, or anyone else, grasped his intention.

"Yarrooooh!"

Trimble howled, and rolled among the feet of the rest of the juniors, his head singing from the vicious blow.

"Here—none of that, you rotter!"

Just in time, Tom Merry dragged back the enraged man as he raised a foot to kick the prostrate Trimble.

"None of that!" repeated Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "Can't you see it was an accident?"

"Let me go, you young villain!" hissed the man. "The fat young fool! I—I!"

"Ow! Oh crumbs! Keep him off, you fellows!" howled Trimble.

Trimble scrambled up and fairly flew out into the corridor. The man seemed about to follow, but Tom Merry, Lowther, and Blake barred his path effectually.

"No, you don't!" snapped Tom Merry, his lip curling. "The fat idiot was clumsy, and he deserves booting for his carelessness. But that's no reason why you should act like a brute. You won't touch him again!"

The dark eyes glinted at them, and the man bit his lip hard. He turned and reached up to the rack for his own bag, controlling his savage temper with an obvious effort.

But he said nothing. The train was slowing now, and the next moment the express stopped in Lime Street Station.

The man grasped his bag, and, with a last savage look at the juniors, he tore open the carriage door and jumped out on to the platform.

"Nice gentleman, and no mistake!" grinned Herries. "I don't admire your giddy uncle's choice of friends, Lowther."

"Wathah not, bai Jove!"

"What utter rot!" snorted Lowther contemptuously. "Think I couldn't see what he was from the beginning? He's no gentleman, and he is certainly no friend of my uncle's."

"But he said—"

"He was lying!" snapped Monty. "I saw it at once; he was lying. I don't believe he knows my uncle at all, and I don't believe his yarn about my uncle being away on holidays."

"Then why on earth—" began Manners.

"Goodness knows why he chipped in with the yarn," said

Lowther, his face clouding thoughtfully. "Just cheeky impudence, I suppose. But I distrusted the blighter from the first, and I hope I let him see it."

"You did!" chuckled Digby. "Well, here we are at Liverpool."

The juniors swarmed on to the platform and joined the rest of the St. Jim's juniors as they tumbled from the various compartments.

"Hallo, there he goes!" grinned Herries.

Tom Merry and the others followed his glance, and they were just in time to see the dark-eyed man stop and greet another man, who was obviously waiting for him. He was a much younger fellow—short, and with a large, hooked nose.

The two stood talking for a moment, and then Lowther chuckled as the dark-eyed man pointed out the St. Jim's party to his companion.

"Telling him the sad tale," grinned Lowther. "Let's hope he gets plenty of sympathy."

"Hallo, they're going!"

The two men turned about suddenly and vanished among the hurrying crowd. And just then Mr. Railton came hurrying up, busily shepherding his charges together.

Lowther stopped him.

"Can I speak to you a moment, sir?" he asked.

"Well, Lowther?"

"Excuse me, sir," began Lowther meekly, "but I think you had a letter from my uncle, Dr. Lowther, yesterday?"

"That is so, Lowther."

"Was it from Myrtle Lodge, Wavertree, sir?"

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Railton impatiently.

"Then my uncle is not away on holidays, sir?"

"Not to my knowledge, my boy. I should think it hardly possible, as he stated his intention, in his letter, to show us personally over the dyeworks here. Why do you ask, Lowther?"

"Because I was wondering if you would allow us seven to stay with my uncle during our stay in Liverpool, sir?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Housemaster in surprise.

"That is an extraordinary request to make now. Why did you not ask before?"

"I only thought about it some moments ago," said Lowther ingeniously. "I remembered hearing you say you had still to arrange hotel accommodation for six fellows here. If we went to my uncle's it would save you the trouble, sir, wouldn't it?"

"H'm! It certainly would, Lowther," said Mr. Railton dryly. "But are you quite certain that your uncle would be pleased to accommodate seven schoolboys at a moment's notice?"

"Oh, quite certain, sir!" said Lowther eagerly. "He's a jolly good sport, and I know he would. That's quite all right, sir."

"H'm!" Mr. Railton rubbed his chin and cogitated. But it would certainly save him trouble, as Lowther had stated, and he knew he could trust Tom Merry & Co. to look after themselves. "You know your way to Myrtle Lodge?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. The Wavertree tram takes us right to the road."

"Very well. I do not see any reason why you should not take advantage of your visit here to see your relations, Lowther," said the master. "If, however, they cannot conveniently put you up, you must return without delay and report to me at the North Western Hotel. Otherwise you will report to me there at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Oh, good, sir! Thank you very much!"

Mr. Railton nodded and bustled away, and Lowther executed a dance of joy on the station platform.

"Well, I never expected it to come off," grinned Tom Merry. "You had a nerve, too, Lowther. But—but supposing your uncle is on holiday?"

"Rot! Doesn't what Mr. Railton says prove it, fathead?" said Lowther witheringly. "That rotter on the train was either a cheeky fool, or else he'd got some deep game on. I'm blessed if I can understand it!"

"It's my belief the brute's a swell cracksman," said Baggy Trimble. "And he tried to keep us away because he means to burgle the house to-night."

There was a chuckle at Trimble's belief, but Lowther's face was clouded and uneasy. He could not forget the man's black, glinting eyes, and he felt it inconceivable that the fellow had said what he had out of mere impudence, or for a joke. Had the fellow some reason in trying to stop them going to Myrtle Lodge?

But Lowther said nothing more then, and, followed by envious remarks from the rest of the St. Jim's touring-party, Tom Merry & Co. left Lime Street Station and made to look out for the Wavertree car.

They were waiting for it when the fat form of Baggy Trimble came hurrying up along the rain-soaked street.

"Just in time, you fellows!" he gasped, nodding towards

a tramcar that was rumbling towards them. "I say, it's all serene, you'll be glad to hear."

"Eh? What's all serene?" snapped Tom Merry.

"Railton's just given me permission to come along with you fellows," explained Trimble. "I told him I knew your uncle well, and that did it."

"You—your awful fibber!"

"Well, I had to tell him something, hadn't I? I say, what did you do with that packet of chocolate, Gussy? I haven't had it yet," grumbled Trimble.

The juniors looked at the cheery Baggy Trimble, and their looks spoke volumes. At the best of times Trimble's room was much preferable to his company, and just then his company was far from being desired by Tom Merry & Co. Indeed, now they were on the way to Myrtle Lodge, even the careless Monty Lowther was feeling inward qualms as to the wisdom of "planting" such a numerous company on his uncle's household at such short notice. Certainly his uncle was a "good sort," but there was a limit. And Lowther could not help wondering now if the proposed stay was a little beyond the limit.

But the thought of adding Baggy Trimble to the company made him shudder.

"You—your cheeky fat worm!" he almost shouted. "Who the thump said you could come?"

"Railton did, of course!"

"But I didn't, you fat idiot!" roared Lowther. "You're jolly well not coming!"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus. "It would never do to take Twimble, Lowthah. I am weally not at all snah that we are wight in goin'."

"Rubbish!" snorted Monty Lowther. "But Trimble certainly isn't coming. Clear, you fat rotter!"

"Oh, really, you know, Lowther. Wasn't it my idea?" hooted Trimble.

"Yes, it was!" agreed Lowther. "Hand Trimble that chocolate, Gussy!"

"Vewy well, deah boy, though I must remark that Twimble does not deserve it," said Arthur Augustus.

But he handed Trimble the packet of chocolate.

"And now, you fellows, hand Trimble your boots," said Lowther.

"What-ho!"

"Look here, you—Yarroooogh!"

Trimble jumped away as the juniors made a rush at him. Tom Merry & Co. chuckled and turned back just as a tram came to rest near-by. It was the Wavertree tram, and the juniors swarmed aboard, glad to get out of the pouring rain.

"Wait for me, you beasts!" howled Trimble. "Oh crumbs!"

The fat youth came panting up, the packet of chocolate clutched in his fat hand. Lowther stepped back off the footboard, and as Trimble rushed up, he grabbed him by the shoulders, and sat him down hard in the wet road.

"Yooop!" roared Trimble.

The bell rang, and as the tram moved on towards Edge Hill, Monty Lowther leaped neatly aboard again, and joined his laughing chums.

And Baggy Trimble sat in the glistening road and blinked after the departing tram with feelings too deep for words.

CHAPTER 3.

Mystery!

"PHEW! What a night!"

It was a night—a very wet and dismal night!

Tom Merry & Co. dismounted from the Wavertree tram, and the brilliantly-lit vehicle rumbled on its way, leaving the juniors in the darkness of the road.

As they turned up their collars and blinked about them, they one and all agreed that it was "a night." Not a soul was about, and the only sounds, save for the rumble of the departing tram, was the pattering of falling rain and the gurgle of water in the gutters.

The lights of the tram vanished, and Tom Merry & Co. stood and blinked at each other. They were not feeling very cheery—in fact, they were feeling rather dismal and more than a little apprehensive.

Lowther had been quite, quite confident that he could easily find his uncle's house—before they had started. But during that journey out he had seemed to be getting less and less confident.

And now his chums eyed him very grimly indeed. It was plain to them that Monty Lowther himself was feeling very uneasy in regard to his ability to find Myrtle Lodge. In fact, Lowther's chums were wishing themselves at the North Western Hotel, and heartily regretting that they had listened to Lowther's enthusiastic proposal.

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They were beginning to wonder if Lowther had led them on a wild goose-chase, and the sight of the vanishing lights of the tram made them feel curiously lonely and lost.

"Well," remarked Tom Merry rather grumpily, "here we are at Laurel Road, Lowther."

"The tram conductor said it's Laurel Road, at all events," said Herries, looking about him. "Let's hope he knows a bit more about it than Lowther seems to do."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally do twust Lowther is wight in thinkin' this woad is the wight one," said Arthur Augustus fervently. "I am beginning to wegwet that I agweed to accompany the thoughtless youngstah!"

"Same here! Well, Lowther," said Tom Merry, "what now?"

"Ahem!" Lowther coughed. "It—it's all serene, you fellows!" he said. "I think I know where we are now. I seem to remember that big house on the corner there—though it was daylight when I came here before, and things look different at night, somehow!"

"Does the house at the dashed corner look different?" said Blake, with heavy sarcasm. "I'm blest if you know where you are, Lowther—any more than we do!"

"This is Laurel Road," grunted Lowther, "and I distinctly remember that it was Laurel Road where we got off. Myrtle Lodge is in a road leading off from this—though I'm blest if I can remember the dashed name of it."

"Fathead!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther. "Come on, and don't grouse, for goodness' sake! We'll soon be sitting round the fire at Myrtle Lodge, I tell you."

"H'm!"

"Let's hope so!"

Lowther's chums seemed to be very doubtful indeed about that. They followed Lowther very reluctantly as he led the way along Laurel Road. It was a nice quiet road with large houses on both sides dimly seen through swaying, rustling trees. They came suddenly to another road leading off from Laurel Road.

"This it?" demanded Blake.

"No!" said Lowther. "I'm certain it was much farther down than this!"

They pressed on again, lowering their heads before the driving rain. They were regretting more than ever now that they had agreed to accompany Monty Lowther. They tramped on for another ten minutes—though it seemed like an hour to them—but they came to no other road leading off from Laurel Road—if it really was Laurel Road. The houses were getting fewer and further between now.

Tom Merry stopped.

"Look here, Lowther," he snapped. "I've had enough! I'm about drenched through, and this dashed bag feels like a ton weight. I vote we get back, and blow you and blow Myrtle Lodge!"

"Yaas, wathah! My clobbah will be wuined at this wate, and I am feahfully tired, deah boys. I vote we bump Lowthah and go stwaight back to the hotel."

"We would have been having dinner now, or sitting before a cosy fire," grunted Herries. "Bump the fat-head!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Look here—" Lowther was beginning to feel desperate. "Look here—" he was just saying, when a burly form loomed up before the juniors—a figure in a glistening cape and glinting helmet.

"Oh, good!" gasped Tom Merry. "Here's a bobby!"

The policeman stopped as Tom Merry stepped up to him and asked a question.

"Yes," answered the constable, after a moment's reflection. "I know the house. A gentleman name of Lowther is—"

"That's it!" said Lowther eagerly. "Oh, thank goodness! Is it far—?"

"You're coming from it, lads," said the constable. "It's in the first road on the right after leaving the tram-lines. Third house on the left as you turn the corner. Leaf Road the name is, and it's a fifteen minutes' walk from here."

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors thanked the constable and turned back with feelings too deep for words.

They waited until the constable was out of earshot, and then they told Lowther what they thought of him.

"It was the first road we came to, after all!" snorted Blake. "Oh, you—you—"

"You burbling idiot, Lowther!"

"You sap-headed chump!"

"You born idiot!"

"Yaas, wathah! You weally are the limit, Lowthah!"

Tired and exceedingly exasperated, the chums of St. Jim's trudged their weary way back to that first turning. They reached it at last, and then they made for the third house on the left. The sight of a dim light through the bushes and trees of the drive made their spirits rise a little.

It proved to be Myrtle Lodge right enough—the light from a match showed the name carved in the stone gatepost.

"Oh, good egg! All serene now," said Lowther in deep relief.

He led the way through the open gateway, and they were just starting down the drive when something happened.

The hum of a motor-engine suddenly struck their ears, and the next moment the brilliant headlights of a large closed car swept round a bend in the short drive.

"Look out, chaps!"

Just in time, Tom Merry & Co. sprang for safety into the bushes lining the drive as the dazzling lights of the car swept past them.

And as it did so a muffled cry seemed to come from the dark interior of the car—all of them were certain of that.

Then the car was out into the rainswept road, roaring away into the night.

"Bai Jove!"

Under the dripping trees of the drive the juniors stood, startled and motionless.

Then Monty Lowther spoke, and his voice trembled slightly.

"Did—did you fellows see that?" he stammered.

"See what?" said Tom Merry. "I heard a cry. It seemed to me like a cry for help."

"I thought so, too," said Blake. "But—but it couldn't have been, of course."

"Hardly," agreed Tom, though his voice sounded doubtful. "It must have been somebody shouting to the driver from inside—giving him an order, I suppose."

"It wasn't—it wasn't, I tell you," said Lowther thickly. "I saw something—something moving in the car. It looked like two fellows struggling together."

"What rot!" said Tom Merry uneasily.

"Your eyes were playin' you twicks, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Let's get on."

Lowther said nothing, and he was very quiet as they walked down the drive to the house. The light was still burning at one of the windows on the ground floor. They mounted the steps, and Lowther felt for the bell and rang it firmly.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, with a sudden start. "The light's gone out!"

"It was in the library—I remember that," said Lowther. "It's rather queer—the light going out just as we ring the bell."

It did not seem queer to the rest of the juniors, however, and they expected the person who had switched out the light to open the door in answer to their ring.

But though Lowther rang again and again, nothing happened at all. The house remained in darkness, and no sound came from within. And Tom Merry & Co. began to think it queer then.

"Looks as if your nunky doesn't want visitors to-night," said Herries. "Better clear out, old chap."

"I'm doing nothing of the kind," said Lowther through his teeth.

And he gave a terrific and prolonged ring at the door-bell. Then the juniors waited again, with growing impatience and uneasiness. But nothing happened; and, after several minutes, Lowther gave a muttered exclamation, and almost unconsciously he grasped the knob of the outer door. It twisted in his hand, and, to his surprise, the door opened.

"My hat!"

Lowther walked into the vestibule, but his chums hesitated.

"Hold on, Lowther!" murmured Tom.

"Come on!" snapped Lowther.

He found the inner door was also unfastened, and the next moment all seven of the juniors found themselves standing in the dark hall of Myrtle Lodge.

Even Lowther hesitated then, and as he hesitated a movement sounded in the hall. The next moment the juniors were blinking in the electric light that flooded the hall.

"Oh, good!"

Lowther gave a thankful gasp of deep relief as he saw who stood at the electric light switch at the far end of the hall.

It was the tall figure of an elderly gentleman, with white hair and a heavy white moustache and beard, and, though the tall form was stooped a little, the eyes were keen and bright.

He stood scanning the drenched and bedraggled juniors in astonishment.

"Uncle!" cried Lowther. "Don't you remember me?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the old gentleman, giving a sudden start, as if he had suddenly recognised the junior. "What does this unexpected visit mean, Montague?"

He took Lowther's outstretched hand, and scanned the rest of the juniors with a keen eye. Lowther introduced them, and as he shook hands the juniors could not help feeling that his glance was far from welcoming.

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They felt exceedingly uncomfortable, and wished themselves far away. So far Dr. Morton Lowther showed no signs whatever of the kindly good nature Lowther had led them to expect. Possibly he had not yet got over his surprise, however.

He did not invite them to take off their drenched coats, or put down their bags, and the juniors felt too chilled at his reception to do either.

"What does this mean, Montague?" demanded the doctor a trifle harshly. "I have received no intimation that you were coming, my boy. And at this hour of the night—"

"I am sorry, uncle," mumbled Lowther, his face puzzled and not a little distressed. "But we have only just arrived in Liverpool, and I only thought of coming at the last moment. Mr. Railton had trouble in arranging rooms for such a large party at the hotel, and I—I thought perhaps that—that—"

Lowther faltered at the steely look in his uncle's eyes.

"Am I to understand that you have brought these friends of yours here in the hope that we can accommodate them here?" he rasped, frowning.

"Ahem! Yes, uncle," said the unhappy Lowther. "You see—"

"It is quite impossible, Montague!" exclaimed Dr. Lowther harshly. "I am sorry, my boy, but it is out of the question. Save for one maidservant, I am quite alone in the house. My housekeeper has gone away for a few days. You had better return to town as speedily as possible, and obtain hotel accommodation."

"Oh!"

"Moreover, I am very busy indeed this evening," resumed Dr. Lowther, with an impatient shrug. "I have already been interrupted by unexpected visitors some minutes ago, and I ignored your ring at the bell because I did not wish to be again interrupted."

The hapless Monty Lowther flushed crimson. Certainly, if the housekeeper was away, and no rooms prepared, it would be inconvenient for them to stay. That much was understandable. But what Lowther could not understand was his uncle's attitude. It was harsh and unwelcome, to say the least of it.

Tom Merry and the others were feeling exceedingly uncomfortable. They were, naturally, amazed, having been given to understand by Lowther that his uncle was a genial, kindly, and good-natured old gentleman, who would make them boisterously welcome.

"I—I'm so sorry, uncle," gasped Lowther. "We—we'd better go now, then; and—and we'll come to see you to-morrow instead."

"I am afraid I shall still be busily engaged upon my scientific researches to-morrow, Montague," was the cold reply. "It is most unfortunate, but it is impossible for me to receive visitors to-morrow at all."

"Then—then—"

"You may come the following day, if you wish, Montague," said Dr. Morton Lowther. "By then I shall hope to be in a position to entertain you."

Hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his feet, the unhappy Montague allowed himself to be piloted to the door. The old gentleman held the door wide, and the juniors shook hands dazedly, and stumbled through, almost falling over themselves in their confusion.

"Good-night, boys!"

The outer door closed on them, and the next minute the light of the hall was switched out. The juniors stood in the rain and darkness, feeling quite dazed.

"Well," said Blake feelingly, as he rammed on his cap, "well, I'm blowed!"

"Here we are again!" mumbled Manners with dismal humour. "Out in the cold and dreary streets once more—homeless and friendless."

"And wet," added Herries bitterly. "Lowther, you—"

Words failed Herries.

"Go on," said Lowther bitterly. "Rub it in. As if I can help it. How did I know the old hunks would be in such a rotten humour. I'm blessed if I can understand him at all. He was a jolly old sport—what I saw of him before, anyway."

"Oh, rats!" said Herries crossly. "And we might have been sitting before a cosy fire now at the North Western."

"Oh, don't grouse," said Lowther.

"Don't grouse, eh?" snorted Herries warmly. "I like that. After bringing us all this way on a wild-goose chase. We told you it wouldn't do, didn't we? You wouldn't listen, and insisted on bringing us."

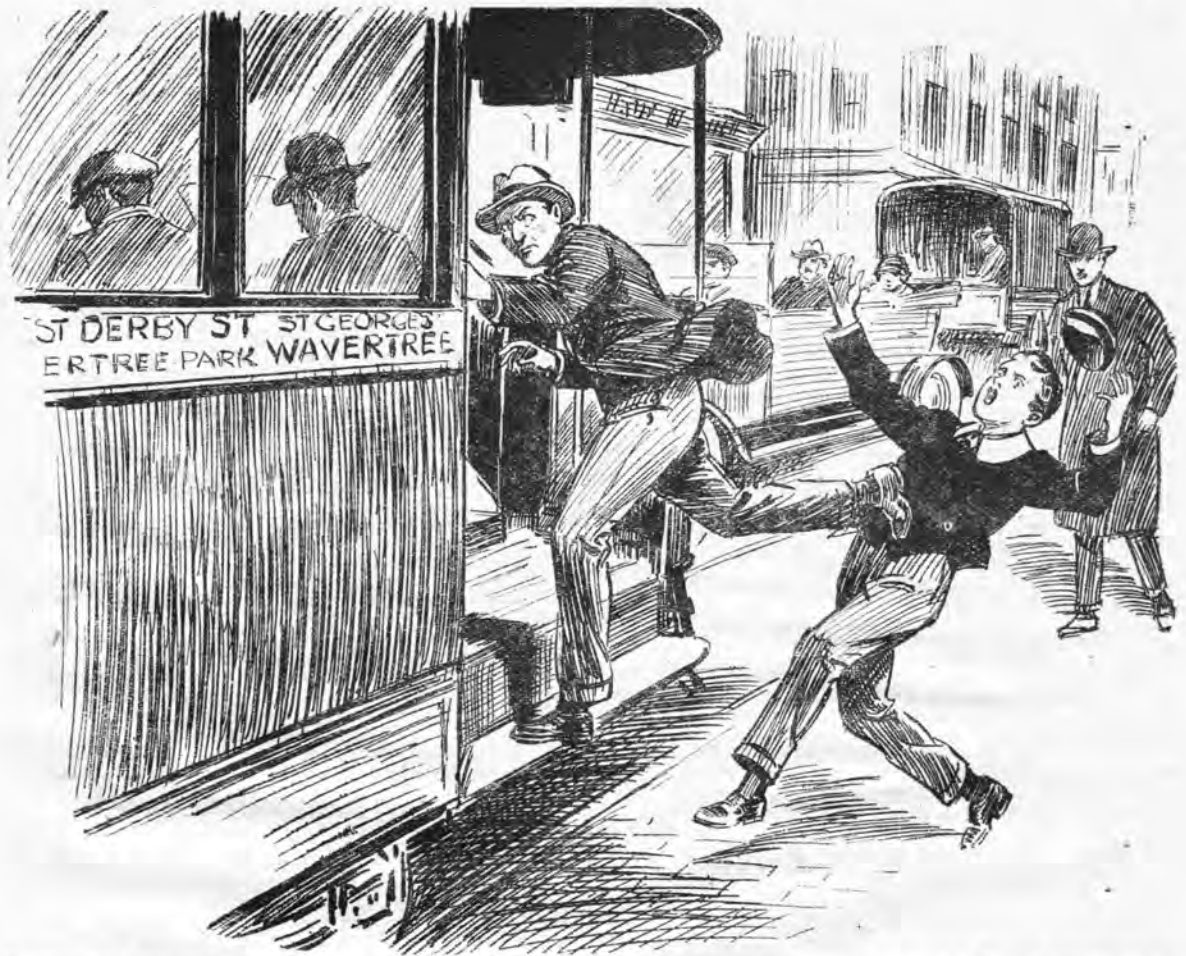
"Oh, dry up! Look here," said Lowther grimly, "what about ringing again, and asking—"

"Bai Jove, Lowther—"

"You burbling ass!"

"Oh, bump the silly ass, and let's get back!" snapped Herries.

"Hear, hear! Bump him!"



As Monty Lowther made for the moving tram a short, hook-nosed man intercepted him, and leaped deftly on to the footboard. Even as he leaped, Croat steadied himself and, before Monty could grasp the brass handle, his foot shot backwards, the heel taking Lowther full in the chest. (See Chapter 4.)

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here! Oh, crikey!"

In the grasp of many hands, Monty Lowther was seated down hard in a puddle at the bottom of the steps, and his chums tramped on down the drive, and left him there, gasping. But he did not sit there for long; it was decidedly wet and uncomfortable in that puddle. He jumped up quickly, and went distally after his chums.

And when, after a twenty minutes' wait for a tram, Tom Merry & Co. were rumbling towards, Monty Lowther was the most gloomy and quiet of the party. Though they had groused, and bumped Lowther for his error of judgment—if it could be called that—his chums realised quite well that he could scarcely be blamed, and they could not help being sorry for him.

But Lowther was not thinking of that. He was thinking of his uncle's strange attitude. He felt convinced that something was wrong at Myrtle Lodge—that some strange mystery hung over the place. He felt suspicious and uneasy, though he could not have explained to himself why. He could not get out of his mind that brief, shadowy glimpse he had caught of the two figures in the closed car—figures he believed to have been at grips. His chums had seen nothing, and they had ridiculed the idea. Only Lowther now believed that it was a cry for help they had heard as the car had vanished into the night.

And there was something else in Lowther's mind. He could not help connecting the dark-eyed man in the train with his vague suspicions.

Why had he attempted to stop them going to Myrtle Lodge that evening? He did not seem the kind of man to tell such an obvious fabrication for a foolish joke, after having heard the juniors' stated intention of going there. What was his object in doing so?

The whole thing baffled Lowther; but of one thing he was quite assured—there was something seriously wrong at Myrtle Lodge; and that his uncle's churlishness, the strange motor-car, and the man in the Liverpool express were in some strange manner connected.

CHAPTER 4.

Lowther Acts!

LUCKILY, Tom Merry & Co. easily managed to obtain hotel accommodation, and they turned out the following morning, cheery and bright, none the worse for their drenching of the night before.

For the first part of the morning the juniors were free to do as they liked, and Tom Merry & Co. spent the time on the landing-stage watching the busy shipping, which was a never-failing source of interest to the St. Jim's juniors.

Then they joined the rest of the St. Jim's tourists for the arranged inspection of Mason & Lowther's Dyeworks.

It had been understood from the first that Dr. Lowther himself was to conduct the party over the world-famous works, and both the works-manager and Mr. Railton were mildly surprised and perplexed when the scientist failed to turn up at the appointed time.

Nor did he send any message to account for his absence, and when the works-manager rang up Myrtle Lodge on the phone he could not get any answer to his ring.

Having regard to their previous night's interview with the old gentleman, Tom Merry & Co. were scarcely surprised, however.

Yet all admitted that it was queer that the Exchange could get no answer to their ring from Myrtle Lodge. This fact filled Monty Lowther, at all events, with fresh misgivings.

And during their tour of inspection of the works the juniors made a discovery that added strength to Lowther's vague suspicions.

In Mr. Croat, the under-manager of the works, they recognised the man they had seen the previous evening—the hook-nosed man who had met their dark-eyed fellow-traveller of the Liverpool express at Lime Street Station.

That a member of the firm should be on friendly terms

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with the man who had tried to prevent them going to Myrtle Lodge struck Monty Lowther as significant.

Yet it only added to the mystery—if mystery there was.

Only Monty Lowther scented mystery in it, however, and his face was darkly clouded as the St. Jim's party emerged from the gates of the works at last. Most of the party had been keenly interested in all they had seen, but Lowther had been impatient and inattentive. He had been thinking of his uncle's strange behaviour, and his mind was working with strange thoughts and vague apprehensions.

"Well," he exclaimed quietly, as the juniors crowded out from the gates, "what do you fellows make of it?"

"Jolly interesting," remarked Jack Blake, "I'd no idea there'd be so much to be seen."

"You fellows know quite well what I mean," said Monty Lowther, compressing his lips. "You saw that fellow Croat?"

"Yes, we saw him," smiled Tom Merry. "My dear man, you're worrying your little head about nothing. Just because we happened to see him talking to that merchant last night—"

"There's other things, too," said Lowther grimly. "There's something wrong—I only wish I could feel there wasn't. But—"

"Wubbish, deah boy! You're imaginin' things, Lowther."

"Looking for giddy mare's nests, old chap," said Manners.

"It's queer your uncle sent no message this morning," said Tom Merry. "But you know how he was last night. He's busy with his experimenting, and has probably forgotten all about his promise."

"I wish I could think so," said Lowther. "But I can't. There's something queer going on."

"What rot!"

"You fellows can think what you like, and do what you like," snapped Monty Lowther. "But there's something on, and I'm going to find out what it is. My uncle wasn't himself last night, or he would never have treated us as he did. He's in deep trouble, or something. Anyway, I'm going up to Myrtle Lodge again."

"You can't go until to-night, then," grinned Blake. "We're booked to visit the soap works at Port Sunlight this afternoon."

"I'm not," said Lowther. "I'm going to Wavertree."

"This afternoon?" gasped Tom.

"No, now!" said Lowther grimly.

"But what about lunch, as?"

"I want no lunch. You fellows go on when the charabancs come along. I'll stay—" Lowther paused suddenly, and a glint came to his eyes. "Look behind you," he added, in a whisper.

The juniors turned and looked, wondering. It was noon, and from the gates employees of the works were swarming. But behind the juniors, scarcely a couple of yards away, a man was standing—a short, hook-nosed man. It was Mr. Croat, the under-manager.

As the juniors looked at him he struck a match and lit a cigarette. Then he walked on among the crowd.

"He was listening," said Lowther, his lip curling.

"He stopped to light up," said Tom Merry, though even he felt a bit doubtful. "Monty, old chap—"

"Here's the chara's!" interrupted Herries. "Come on, let's get a giddy front seat."

There was a rush forward of the St. Jim's tourists as two large charabancs drew up at the works entrance. They had brought them there, and had now arrived to take them back to their hotels for lunch.

Monty Lowther's eyes gleamed, and swift as light he slipped back into the shelter of the gateway—not even his

own chums seeing him remain behind. From his hiding-place Monty saw his party board the two large cars, laughing and chatting cheerily.

Apparently his own chums had not missed him yet, for after much laughter and changing of seats the juniors drove off with a mighty cheer.

Lowther emerged from his hiding-place with a sigh of relief. Then quite suddenly he stopped.

A few yards away stood Mr. Croat, and the hook-nosed under-manager was eyeing him closely.

Lowther's lips set hard, and he walked past the man without a glance at him. Trams were clanging past at the end of the street, and Lowther walked towards the spot. He looked back after a while, and he was scarcely surprised to see that Croat was behind him.

To make sure, Lowther turned abruptly down a side street, and, after walking for a minute, he looked back again. Croat was walking fifty yards behind him.

The hook-nosed man was obviously following him—Lowther felt certain of that now. Why?

It took the junior some time to find his way to the tram-lines again, but when he did reach them his eyes gleamed at the discovery that Croat was still behind him.

"That settles it!" muttered Monty, setting his teeth. "I was right—there's something queer going on. The brute's following me, and I think I can guess why. Here goes, anyway!"

A Wavertree tram came rumbling past him, and Monty Lowther ran alongside, intending to jump on.

But someone else was before him.

Monty heard running footsteps, and then a short, hook-nosed man ran past him, and leaped deftly on to the foot-board of the moving tramcar.

It was Croat, and, gritting his teeth, Lowther made to follow. He was scarcely a second after the under-manager, but even as he leaped the man ahead steadied himself and, before Monty could grasp the brass handle, Croat's foot shot backwards, the heel taking Lowther full in the chest.

The junior doubled up, and fell sprawling in the roadway.

At the moment the conductor was up on the top deck, and the car rumbled on its way, while Croat ran lightly up on to the top deck.

Badly bruised and shaken, Monty Lowther scrambled up, panting. But the car was far ahead now, and Lowther limped to the pavement, his eyes glittering. To the few pedestrians who had seen him fall it had seemed an accident; but Lowther knew it was no accident. The man had back-heeled deliberately, with the obvious intention of preventing the junior boarding the car.

Lowther dusted himself down, and wiped his bruised hands with his handkerchief.

If anything had been needed to give solidity to Lowther's vague suspicions it was what had just happened. Croat had heard him say he was going to Myrtle Lodge, and he had followed to make sure. And then he had acted, obviously with the intention of reaching Myrtle Lodge before the St. Jim's junior.

That seemed the only possible solution to Monty Lowther.

Scarcely had the tramcar with the under-manager aboard disappeared out of sight when Lowther signalled to a passing taxicab. Giving his uncle's address, the junior leaped into the taxi, and the next moment it was racing in pursuit of the tram.

It caught up with the tramcar just as the latter was rumbling up Edge Hill, and as the taxi flashed past Lowther caught a glimpse of Croat seated in the enclosed upper deck.

"Oh, good!" murmured Lowther. "I've done the brute, after all!"

In a very short time the taxi had turned into Leaf Road, and as it drew up before Myrtle Lodge Lowther paid the driver and entered the drive.

As he walked down the drive Lowther scanned the house closely, and suddenly he stopped dead—scarcely able to believe his own eyes.

At the library window he caught a swift glimpse of a man—evidently drawn to the window by the crunch of gravel on the drive. It was not his uncle; the face was younger and clean-shaven, with sharp features and black keen eyes.

It was their fellow-traveller of the Liverpool Express—the man upon whom Trimble had dropped the suitcase.

"My hat!" gasped Lowther.

The figure had vanished now, and, after staring at the window for another moment, the St. Jim's junior set his teeth hard and walked boldly up to the front door, and rang.

CHAPTER 5. Captured!

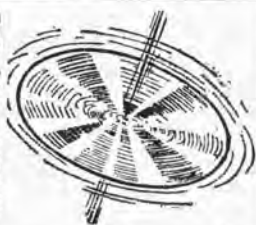
MONTY LOWTHER'S heart was beating fast. What was the meaning of the strange sequence of events he had no clear idea. He only felt convinced that something was wrong, and he meant to find out what it was.

Somehow he felt a queer sense of dread—a strange, dim

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foreboding that danger threatened his uncle. He felt no resentment against the old gentleman for his unaccountably chilly welcome the previous night. Lowther felt certain there was some good reason for it—that his uncle was worried and was not himself; that something was seriously wrong at Myrtle Lodge.

Lowther had had very little indeed to do with Dr. Morton Lowther, who was a lonely old man, with little liking for company—even the company of his own family. He was solely taken up with his scientific experiments, and took little interest in anything else.

But Lowther had been taken to Myrtle Lodge by his guardian, Mr. James Lowther, J.P., M.P., and Monty's impression had been that Dr. Lowther was a genial, kindly old gentleman.

And now, as he rang the bell of his uncle's house, Lowther felt a firm and convincing impression that his uncle was in danger, and that enemies surrounded him.

The junior rang and waited. No answer came, and the whole house was silent. Had Lowther not seen that figure at the library window he would have imagined that the house was empty.

Setting his lips, Lowther rang again and again. And then, realising it was useless, he went down the entrance steps, and walked away noisily down the drive.

But he had not given up by any means.

He had a strange feeling that eyes were watching his departure; but he did not look round, and when a turn in the drive hid the house from sight, Lowther dived suddenly into the bushes.

With the stealth of a trained scout he worked his way through the bushes back to the house. He stopped at last beneath the library window, and then he cautiously raised his head over the sill and peered into the room.

What he saw made him catch his breath.

The room was in a state of the most hopeless disorder. A large desk and a writing-bureau stood in the room, and the drawers had been taken out, and were lying on the carpet, their contents—papers and documents chiefly—scattered far and wide over the carpet.

From the look of the splintered woodwork, it was very clear that most of the drawers had been forced. From the bookshelves and bookcases books had been dragged, and lay in heaps among the scattered papers.

In the midst of the chaos was the stooped figure of Dr. Morton Lowther. He stood by the window, as if he had just turned away from it, and his grey-bearded face held an anxious, almost savage expression.

His look startled Lowther more than the look of the room did. It quite frightened him.

But the junior was also puzzled. For his uncle was alone in the room; of the sharp-featured man he had seen at the window some moments ago there was no sign.

"I saw him, though," mused Lowther to himself. "He's somewhere in the house."

The junior watched breathlessly, his mind full of dim doubts and questions. Why had his uncle refused to admit him? That he had seen him he felt sure, and the other man certainly had. The junior scarcely knew what to think; he felt quite dazed.

He watched the old gentleman suddenly turn from the window, and, crossing to the cabinet in one corner, he started taking drawers out, searching through them almost feverishly.

Lowther stared in for some moments, and then a sudden step on the gravel drive made him dive for the shelter of a bunch of laurels.

The next moment a familiar figure came striding quickly down the drive. It was Croat, the under-manager.

Lowther's eyes gleamed at sight of the man, for he had forgotten him temporarily. He felt a sudden eagerness to know if his uncle would answer the man's ring.

But apparently Croat did not ring. Lowther heard three sharp raps at the front door, and scarcely a minute later he heard the front door open and close.

Looking through the window a moment later the junior saw his uncle and the under-manager enter the library together.

Lowther bit his lip hard, and then, with sudden decision, he went softly round to the front door, and tried the knob. The door was unlocked, and Lowther found himself standing in the hall the next moment.

"I'll settle the matter once and for all!" he muttered through his teeth. "If there is anything wrong, then I'm going to get to the bottom of it."

He dropped his cap on to a settee, and then walked boldly across the hall to the library door. Giving a sharp knock first, he turned the handle of the door and entered the room.

Standing together talking, the under-manager still wearing his hat—a strange fact that Lowther noted even at that moment—were his uncle and Croat, and they stared at Lowther in dumbfounded alarm as he entered.

For a moment there was silence, and then the old gentleman's keen eyes glittered.

"Montague," he snapped, in a hard voice, "what is the meaning of this intrusion? Did I not tell you that I should be very busy to-day? I thought I made it quite plain that you were not to come here."

"I'm sorry, uncle," said Lowther. "But I simply had to come. I felt so certain that—"

"You should not have come against my expressed wish!" snapped the old gentleman. "You must leave this house at once, as I am very busy indeed. Mr. Croat here has come on a matter of the utmost importance—"

"So important," said Lowther deliberately, "that he has left his manners behind him, and has forgotten to remove his hat."

"Montague—"

"I don't care!" said Lowther impulsively. "There's something wrong, uncle. That brute tried to prevent me coming here. He kicked me off the tram, and might have injured me seriously. I—"

"Nonsense, Montague! Mr. Croat is an old and valued member of the firm. I am quite sure his forgetfulness is in no way a sign of disrespect to me. As for kicking you—rubbish! Kindly leave the house, boy. You may visit me to-morrow, when I shall possibly have the time and leisure to entertain you."

Lowther did not move.

He was staring, with startled, unbelievable eyes at his uncle. Now he was face to face, with more time to take note, he felt that his uncle's features looked strangely unreal and almost grotesque.

The eyes, black and piercing, seemed to fascinate him.

In Lowther's worried mind came a sudden amazing suspicion. He wondered how he could imagine such a thing, and yet—

"Uncle," he exclaimed, striving to steady his voice, "have you heard from my father lately?"

"No," said the old gentleman impatiently; "I have not! But we can discuss—"

"You don't often write to him, uncle—"

"I have little time for letter-writing, Montague. But we can discuss family matters to-morrow—"

"We can discuss them now, also," said Lowther, whose heart was beating fast. "You appear to have as short a memory as Mr. Croat, uncle. I lost my father some years ago—a very queer thing for my uncle—my father's brother—to forget!"

Lowther's tone was quiet, and his voice steady; but his heart was now thumping madly, and his thoughts chaotic. There was a sudden silence in the room—a silence that could almost be felt.

Croat and the old gentleman had exchanged startled glances, and into the latter's eyes had come a sudden dangerous glint. But even as they stood thus Monty Lowther acted.

He stepped forward swiftly, and snatched at the beard on the chin of the elderly gentleman.

It came away in his hand, and with it came the heavy, white moustache.

Revealed was a clean-shaven face—the sharp, hard face of the man who had travelled on the Liverpool Express!

He staggered back with a sharp cry.

"So—so that's it!" panted Lowther. "Bowled out, you scoundrel!"

They faced each other—Lowther panting and trembling; the exposed impostor breathing hard, his face convulsed with fury.

"Where is my uncle, you villain!" said Lowther, almost shouting in his fear and anxiety. "What has happened to him?"

"The door, Croat!"

It was a sharp order from the impostor, and Croat sprang to the door. As yet Lowther had not thought of himself—of danger. But now he stepped back, gasping.

"Now, you cub, you interfering little whelp!" snarled the impostor.

He flung himself at the junior, and, fully alive to his danger now, Monty Lowther stepped swiftly aside, and shoved out a leg like lightning.

The tall man stumbled over the leg, and went crashing down.

Lowther jumped for the door, and as Croat faced him, the junior lashed out with all his force.

Crash!

The short, hook-nosed man crashed into the door, sending it shut with a heavy slam that echoed through the house.

Lowther tore open the door and flew out into the hall.

Croat, after crashing into the door had slid helplessly against the wall, hugging his aching jaw; but before he had recovered himself the impostor was past him, racing after the schoolboy.

By this time Lowther was almost at the inner vestibule door, but there the junior's luck deserted him. On the polished, glass floor his running feet slid from under him suddenly, and he crashed down, half-stunned and sickened with the sudden jolt.

The next moment the tall man was upon him, pinning him down.

"Quick, Croat!" he shouted. "Look lively, you fool!" From the library Croat came dashing, his eyes glinting venomously. Half-stunned as he was, Monty fought savagely, now, however, kicking and struggling to free himself.

But the odds were overwhelming, and in a very short time the junior was flat on his face, with the impostor's knee pinning him down again, and with wrists twisted together behind him.

"Get a cord, Croat!" snapped the rascal, his hard face showing bitter rage. "The young cub's come here looking for trouble, and he's found it."

The under-manager was looking scared now, but he went away and returned with a length of cord. After trussing up the junior, Croat stood up.

"Well, what now, Fenz?" he said, a trifle shakily. "This young cub chipping in makes things awkward."

"It's a confounded nuisance!" muttered the man, glowering at the prostrate junior. "Who put you up to this, youngster? You suspected something or you wouldn't have come—"

"I shall tell you nothing," said Lowther thickly. "Where is my uncle?"

"You'll know that soon enough," said Fenz grimly. "Tell me this: Do any of your friends suspect anything? Do they know you are here, boy?"

"You'll get nothing out of me, you scoundrel!"

"So that's your tune! Well, it matters little!" declared Fenz, with a shrug. "You came poking your nose into what does not concern you, and you must suffer for it."

"Shove the young cub in the cellar!" suggested Croat.

"And have his confounded friends swarming here in search of him!" sneered Fenz. "Don't be a fool, man! We'll put him where there'll be little risk of them finding him. It's a nuisance, but it can't be helped. Help me to shove him in the ante-room there, and then you'd better fetch Ikey and the car here."

Croat nodded, and together the two men dragged Monty Lowther's helpless form into an ante-room off the hall. Then, having gagged him, they went out, closing the door behind them.

Lowther, lying bound on the floor, groaned in deep despair.

What did it all mean?

His vague suspicions, then, had been only too well-founded. He had proved to be right. Something was wrong—very much wrong.

Yet what use was the discovery to him now?

That incident of the car the night before had a deep and ominous significance to him. He felt certain now that he had seen figures struggling together in the darkened car, and he knew the cry had been a cry for help.

He understood why Fenz had attempted to dissuade the chums of St. Jim's from visiting Myrtle Lodge. He understood the meaning of their unwelcome greeting when they arrived at the house. The old man who had greeted them and turned them away was not his uncle at all, but the rascally Fenz in disguise.

That much was certain.

But what lay behind it all?

The hapless prisoner wondered dully as he lay listening to the faint sounds of movement from the far library, and his heart felt like lead within him. Where was his uncle? That something terrible had happened to him he felt only too assured. And the thought made him tug madly at his bonds with savage desperation.

CHAPTER 6.

Trimble on the Trail!

"IT'S all rot!" said Trimble.

"What—"

"All bosh, bunkum, and tosh!" said Trimble, in disgust. "Soap-works—Bah! Who wants to see soap-works? Who takes an interest in dashed soap—eh?"

"Not you," agreed Jack Blake. "You never did, old chap. Soap and you were always deadly enemies. Dirt and you have always been pals, but soap—never!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" said Trimble. "Trying to be funny, I suppose? Yah! I'm not jolly well going, anyway!"

"He's been a stranger to soap for so many years," said Digby, "that he's afraid to meet any now."

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"Yaas, wathah! Twimble must certainly visit Port Sunlight. Seeing the soap made will possibly rid him of his tewwible fear of it, bai Jove!"

"Let soap so, anyway," chuckled Blake.

"Yah!" Trimble glowered round at the grinning juniors in the lounge of their hotel. "Yah!" he retorted. "I tell you I'm jolly well not coming! Lowther's dodged off, hasn't he? And Railton said it was all right."

"Yes; but—"

"Why should Lowther be allowed to dodge off and have a good time at his dashed uncle's," demanded Trimble warmly, "while everybody else has to go tramping round soap-works? Bah! I'm fed-up with Liverpool!"

"Better than lessons at St. Jim's, anyway," grinned Digby. "You silly ass—"

"I'm not getting enough to eat," grumbled Trimble.

"Yes, I suppose you miss the study cupboards at St. Jim's," remarked Blake sympathetically. "But if you'd really like a jolly good feed this afternoon, Trimble—"

"Eh? What—"

"Cakes," said Blake enticingly. "Tons and tons of cakes. Cakes of all sizes, Trimble. And you'll be able to scoff as many as you want to scoff, old man."

"Eh? Where's that?" asked Trimble eagerly.

"At Port Sunlight—where we're going this afternoon, old chap," said Blake. "I expect they'll let you eat just as many cakes as you'll want to eat, Trimble. Cakes of toilet-soap; and scouring-soap—all sorts and sizes of cakes!"

"You silly ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared at the expression on Trimble's face. "You silly ass!" gasped Trimble. "I thought you meant—"

"I know you did, fat man. That's because your thoughts always dwell on grub and never on soap," explained Blake. "Now do run away, Trimble! Your face makes me tired!"

"Look here," said Trimble. "I want you fellows to tell old Railton that Lowther's sent for me. It'll be all right then. Railton knows what pals Lowther and I are, you know. Tell him Lowther rang up for me—his uncle expressed a wish to meet me."

"Bai Jove!"

"Don't rub it in too much, you know. Just say that. It's best just to keep to exact facts," explained Trimble. "Otherwise he may smell a rat."

"You—you fat fibber!" gasped Blake. "You expect us to tell Railton whoppers just to—"

"Well, you'll have to tell him something, won't you?" said Trimble. "He's bound to miss me and ask where I am. If it was all right for Lowther it'll be all right for me—being such a pal of Lowther's, you know. Anyway, tell old Railton Lowther wired for me at the express wish of Dr. Lowther. See?"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at Baggy Trimble.

"Well, you fat rotter!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You silly ass! What do you take us for? You'll keep away from Myrtle Lodge, you silly chump! You can't go butting in where you're not wanted like that!"

"I shall be wanted, though," grinned Trimble complacently. "You leave it to me. Think I can't see why you silly chumps were turned down last night? You were a dashed disgrace—like a lot of drowned rats! No wonder the old chap kicked you out!"

"Why, you—"

"I shall go decently dressed—not like a dashed tramp!" explained Trimble calmly. "A credit to Lowther, and St. Jim's, you know. Anyway, I'm going!"

"You'd better not," said Tom Merry.

"You dry up, Merry! Now, Gussy, old fellow, I want you to lend me your best topper."

"Bai Jove! I shall do nothing of the kind, Twimble!"

"If you're going to be mean—"

"I am, Twimble!"

"Lend me your coat, then—"

"Bai Jove! I shall lend you nothin' whatever, Twimble."

"But I want them!" snorted Trimble angrily, as if that was reason enough why he should have them. "I can't visit a gentleman of Dr. Lowther's standing badly dressed, can I? I want your best topper and your coat and stick and gloves, D'Arcy."

"Oh, my hat!"

"A fellow must go suitably dressed," snorted Trimble. "I'm not asking to be kicked out—"

"You're going to be, though, whether you like it or not," said Jack Blake grimly. And he jumped up and lifted his boot behind Trimble. "Take that, and—Hallo, he's gone!"

Trimble had gone—fairly flying out of the hotel lounge. Blake rejoined the grinning juniors, and reseated himself.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus, breathing hard. "That fat worm has a most fearful nerve, you know. I

weally twust he will not dare to go makin' a nuisance of himself at Myrtle Lodge, you fellows."

"He won't now he knows we won't make it right with Railton," chuckled Tom Merry. "He won't dare to risk it, Gussy."

"Wonder how Lowther's got on," grinned Digby. "Blest if I'd have gone again after last night—uncle or no uncle," grunted Herries.

"I don't know," said Tom Merry slowly. The junior captain of St. Jim's was frowning thoughtfully. "Lowther thinks there's something wrong at Myrtle Lodge. I've been thinking—"

"You got it, too!" grinned Manners. "Now, don't you start hunting for mares' nests, Tommy."

"I'm not," said Tom quietly. "Only—well, after all, it does seem a bit queer that—"

"Gweat Scott!"

It was a sudden excited exclamation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of the Fourth at St. Jim's had just strolled over to the window. He was now staring with goggling eyes down into the street below.

At his startled exclamation his chums jumped up, and as they did so Arthur Augustus gave another horrified gasp and fairly flew out of the hotel lounge.

"What the thump—"

"Something outside," said Tom Merry.

Gussy's second-best topper spun off his head and went rolling over the wet street.

"Oh, gweat Scott!" shrieked the swell of the Fourth.

Trimble had obviously expected Arthur Augustus to go after his rolling headgear; but Arthur Augustus, after a moment's hesitation, decided to go for Trimble instead.

He made a rush at the fat junior, who was just starting up the stairs and grasped him round the waist.

"Leggo!" howled Trimble. "You'll have me— Oh crumbs!"

Crash!

Locked in a deadly embrace the enraged Arthur Augustus and the yelling Trimble rolled over and over at the bottom of the steps.

Arthur Augustus seemed to have quite lost his usual serene repose, and he pommelled away at the fat junior heartily.

"Here, none of that, you little rips!"

The tram conductor came charging down the stairs, and he grabbed at the two struggling forms and wrenched them apart.

"You—you little rips!" he gasped, holding the two juniors apart with an effort. "Fight on 'ere, would you? Here, off you gets!"

The tram was on the move now, but a ring soon brought it slowing down again. The irate conductor bundled both



**JUST
STARTING**

The TRAIL of ADVENTURE!

by
Lionel
Day



They wanted to hang Jack's dog—wanted to kill the only pal he had in the world, so he "hopped it" from his bullying uncle's house, and, together with his faithful wolf-dog, sought the trail of adventure. . . . And his adventures will fairly thrill you, chum! Read about them yourself

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The juniors swarmed to the window. Then they understood, and they chuckled explosively.

Down in the street below, apparently just waiting for a tram, was a fat familiar figure. It was Trimble, and Trimble was dressed to "kill" in a natty winter coat, a beautiful shiny silk hat, a pair of smart shoes, and an equally smart pair of gloves. He also sported a slender, elegant walking-cane.

No wonder Arthur Augustus had been excited. For the hat and the coat and the shoes and the gloves and the cane all belonged to Arthur Augustus.

Trimble had wanted the things, and he had got them.

"Now for fireworks!" chuckled Blake.

"Hallo, here's a tram!" said Digby. "Gussy will—"

"There he goes!"

The juniors watched, highly entertained, as the tram rumbled to a standstill, and Trimble stepped loftily aboard. And at that moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came rushing out of the hotel vestibule, cranning a topper on his head as he did so.

"Bai Jove! You feahful wottah!" he shouted.

He made a rush after Trimble just as the tram started. Grabbing the brass upright, Arthur Augustus leaped aboard, and as he did so Trimble, who was just about to climb the stairs, turned.

"Oh crikey!"

With a startled gasp, Trimble made a desperate swipe at the headgear of Arthur Augustus with his walking-cane.

juniors off it, giving the raging Arthur Augustus a parting cuff as he did so.

The tram rumbled on its way, and Arthur Augustus gave the gasping Trimble a ferocious glare, and then he rushed at him.

"Yarroooooh!"

Trimble jammed D'Arcy's best silk hat more firmly on his head and fairly flew for his life, with the irate Arthur Augustus in mad pursuit.

In the ordinary way the aristocratic Arthur Augustus would have shuddered at the very thought of "scrapping" in public; but the sight of the fat and fatuous Trimble wearing his best articles of wearing apparel had proved too much for his lofty serenity.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

At the hotel window Tom Merry & Co. roared as Trimble, covered from head to foot in mud, came racing past, yelling, and with Arthur Augustus in hot pursuit, carrying a battered and muddy hat in his hand.

It was sheer luck that saved Trimble—good luck for him and bad luck for the hapless swell of the Fourth.

Out from a side-street near St. George's Hall, emerged a youth, pushing a hand-cart piled high with empty fruit-baskets. Trimble missed the cart by a hair's-breadth, but Arthur Augustus was not so fortunate.

He struck the side of the cart with terrific force, driving every scrap of wind out of his body.

But that was not all. The sudden terrific jolt loosened the ropes that held the baskets secure, and as Arthur Augustus staggered back from the impact a shower of empty baskets rattled round his innocent head.

"Yawwooooh!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Gwoooogh! Oh, bai Jove!"

Trimble heard the howl of Arthur Augustus, but he neither looked round nor halted. A tramcar had just slowed down across the street, and leaving Arthur Augustus to settle the matter with the irate porter, Baggy Trimble leaped aboard and was soon rumbling away from the sad scene.

CHAPTER 7.

A Bid for Liberty!

MONTY LOWTHER moved his position and groaned as the ropes that bound him cut into his flesh. For an hour now he had lain there, tormented and sick at heart. His limbs were cramped and aching, and every movement caused him agony. Moreover, the gag which Fenz had tied round his mouth caused him horrible discomfort.

He had heard the opening and closing of the front door, telling him that Croat had gone to fetch the car, according to Fenz's orders. But not once since then had Fenz come near him; though he had heard faint sounds from the library, and once he had heard the rattle of crockery from the kitchen, telling him that Fenz was helping himself to a meal.

The whole astounding affair was beyond the junior. Where was his uncle, and where was the housekeeper and the other servants; if any? The house was quite a moderate establishment; yet Monty knew there must be one maid at least kept in addition to the housekeeper.

Had the impostor dismissed the servants? It occurred to Lowther that this would be a very easy matter, once the real Dr. Lowther had been got out of the way. Even Lowther had not seen through Fenz's clever make-up, nor would have done until the rascal had made that slip in regard to his father.

The hapless junior blamed himself bitterly for having come alone; with his chums in support, Fenz and Croat would have met more than their match in Tom Merry & Co. There was no help to be expected from them. Even when his chums returned from Port Sunlight they would not be alarmed at his absence.

His only hope lay in himself, Lowther realised well enough. Yet what could he do? He had dragged and tugged at his bonds until exhausted, but with no result. The two rascals had done their work only too well.

But now as he moved his position, Monty's eyes suddenly fell on the poker in the fire-grate, and the sight of it brought an idea to his mind.

It was a forlorn hope; but it was a hope, and instantly the junior determined to try it.

If only he could attract attention from outside—let the neighbours or a chance passer-by know that something was wrong! The nearest house was certainly some distance away—invisible through the trees.

Yet the smashing of glass carried far, and Lowther resolved to try it.

He was seated with his back to the wall now, but the next moment he allowed his body to slide downwards, and, though every movement was an agony, he started to roll cautiously over towards the fireplace.

Once his feet struck a chair-leg, and the junior's heart was in his mouth lest the slight sound should be heard. But no sound came from the library, and the junior went on doggedly.

He reached the fender at last, and then his real difficulties began. With his wrists tied behind him it was far from an easy matter to grasp the poker, but his fingers touched it at last, and the next moment the poker was in his grasp.

Then began a desperate struggle to reach the window. It was a torturing effort, but he managed it at last, and then he strove to get to his feet.

The effort was quite beyond his strength, however. He gave it up at last, realising that every moment was precious. But he was on his knees now, and, after a rest, he resolved to make another attempt.

He allowed the poker to slide to its point in his fingers, and then with a sudden, desperate twirl he flung it at the glass of the window.

Crash!

He had done it—the poker vanished through the lower pane with a crash and a tinkling of glass on the gravel below.

Lowther waited tremblingly, hoping against hope that Fenz had not heard.

His hopes were soon dashed to the ground, however.

The next instant almost the door came crashing open, and Fenz rushed in, his face fiendish with rage.

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"You—you little rat!" he hissed.

His flat hand took the unfortunate schoolboy on the temple, and Lowther went down like a log.

The cowardly brute glared down at him, and then his passion seemed to vanish.

"So my young friend is dangerous!" he said in a hard voice. "Very well. So much the worse for your comfort, boy. I will see to it—"

He broke off as the sound of a motor came from the drive. Then came footsteps outside, and the next moment three sharp raps sounded on the front door.

Without another glance at the helpless junior Fenz hurried out. He came back with Croat and another man—a Jewish-looking fellow in dingy, oily clothes and a peaked cap.

"Any luck?" he asked Fenz eagerly.

Fenz shook his head.



CAMEOS OF LIFE THE BOOK

Young Wally D'Arcy winks a wink,
And chirps a cheery chirrup;
"Just fill a bag with blue-black ink,
And lots of sticky syrup.
Include some soot, likewise some glue,
And eggs of dubious quality;
And then your booby-trap will do—
Proceed with your frivolity!"

These hints are taken, you may guess,
From "Booby Trap Prescriptions."
Wally prepares a ghastly mess
With stuff of all descriptions.
A bulging paper bag he fills
With various noxious articles;
There's jam, and gum, and turkeys' quills
And soot in small black particles!

In Knox's study he's employed,
Preparing this atrocity;
And Knox will not be overjoyed.
But goaded to ferocity
When on his prefectorial pate
The bag descends most clamantly;
Methinks he'll sing a hymn of hate
And scowl at Wally jammity!

"None!" he snapped shortly. "The old fool has hidden it well. I'll see him to-night, though, and if he won't speak—well," he added, his thin lips twisting in a cruel smile, "we must try to make him speak. He is stubborn; but there are ways and means of making the stubborn speak."

He nodded at the smashed window.

"This kid do that?" gasped Croat.

"Yes. You'll need to keep a close eye on the young cub," said Fenz. "I don't think the smash was heard, but it might have been. Get him away from here—sharp! One moment!"

He hurried from the room, and came back an instant later with a large travelling-rug.

"Get this round him," he said. "It is rather fortunate the house is well hidden by trees. You understand what to do, Ikey—take him to your show until dark, and then let him join the old man."

"A blamed nuisance," grunted Croat.
"It may not prove to be," said Fenz, shrugging. "The boy may prove useful in persuading the old man to give way."

He nodded curtly, and together Croat and Ikey lifted Lowther and carried him out swiftly. The junior's face was covered, but he knew that he was being carried to a car of some kind. He felt himself dropped heavily on the floor of the car, and then realised that Croat had climbed in after him. Next came the slam as the door closed.

An instant later the vehicle was in motion, and Lowther realised with a thrill of bitter dismay that his desperate attempt to attract attention had failed.

Yet in his heart the junior felt a deep thankfulness. The rascally Fenz's words had told him that his uncle was alive, at all events. Lowther had feared the worst. Now he

OF SCHOOL LIFE!

BOOBY TRAP!



The paper bag is poised aloft,
Over the door it lingers;
And Wally gives a chuckle soft,
And rubs his sticky fingers.
"I'll teach old Knox to make me fag
When I've a game of chess on!
I somehow think that paper bag
Will teach the cad a lesson!"

Then Wally's heart beats loud and fast,
For footsteps are encroaching;
The prefect has arrived at last,
His doom is fast approaching!
The door is opened from without,
The bag swoops down with vigour;
Then comes a fearful, agonised shout
From the besmothered figure!

"Good gracious! Bless my heart and
soul!"
That voice there's no mistaking;
It is the Head's—a thunder roll!
And Wally D'Arcy's quaking,
I think I'll be discreet, and veil
The sequel melancholy;
If you would hear the mournful tale
You'd better ask poor Wally!

Next Week:

FIRE DRILL!



knew he was a prisoner somewhere, and that after dark he was to join him.

Somehow the thought brought a strange feeling of hope and courage to the junior. The position was desperate, yet not without hope. Tom Merry and the others knew he had gone to Myrtle Lodge, and he knew they would never rest until they had traced him. In the loyalty of his chums Lowther had great faith, and he had great faith in their common-sense. They would miss him, and they would suspect, as he had suspected.

That journey on the floor of the car was like a horrible nightmare to the kidnapped junior. The rug was rolled loosely round him, but it still covered his face, and the junior felt half smothered and choking. He knew that Croat was smoking, but not once did the fellow address a word to him.

The car ceased to rock and shake at last, after what seemed endless hours to the hapless prisoner. The door was

opened, and then he was dragged out roughly, and he heard the feet of his captors on cobblestones as they hurried with him across what he took to be a yard.

Then he heard their feet on boards, and then on wooden, creaking stairs. It was only a short distance up, and then a door crashed back, and Monty Lowther was carried into a room and flung on a creaking bed. The next moment the large rug was whisked from his face.

Without a word to him the two men left the room, and the rattle of the rickety door closing was followed by the click of a key turning in a lock.

Monty Lowther blinked about him with aching eyes.

He was in a room—a bare, desolate apartment with wooden walls papered over with a hideous wallpaper. The window was small, of four oblong panes, two of which were broken, letting in a strong draught of cold air. The door was of new match-boarding with a new lock, and two new, bracket hinges.

At sight of the hinges Lowther's eyes gleamed, and he looked back at the window, a daring plan forming in his mind. He was not the fellow to submit to captivity without a struggle, and he was already thinking out a way of escape.

In a moment his mind was made up, and with some difficulty he managed to get his feet to the floor, and then, with the aid of the iron bedpost, he worked himself upright.

Resting a moment, he then started to worm his way, on heels and toes, to the window.

Caution was necessary, but the task was absurdly easy, and reaching the window, he placed his back against it. One of the lower panes of glass was broken almost to the bottom, and Lowther stretched his bound wrists over the jagged edge of glass.

Then he began to saw the cords backwards and forwards across the jagged edge, with feverish haste and energy.

More than once his wrists caught the glass, and he set his teeth as the warm blood flowed over his hands; but he continued the desperate task.

It was finished at last—the last strand parted with a snap, and his hands were free.

But his wrists and hands were painfully bruised and bleeding, and it was some moments before he could get his hand in his pocket for his pocket-knife.

When he did get it out, however, it was the work of a moment to cut his legs free of the rope. Then he dropped on the bed to rest, white-faced and panting.

But he was free—free to fight for his liberty.

He did not rest long—at any moment his captors might return, and without delay Lowther started to work on the hinges of the door. It was an easier task than he had expected, for the screws were new, and the wood new. On the first one he broke the big blade of his knife, but with the broken blade as a screwdriver, he found his task even easier than before.

Once loosened the screws came out with ease, and Lowther breathed deeply with relief as the last screw came away.

He stood up and listened intently. From somewhere below he heard the faint hum of voices, and he set his teeth hard. He was not free yet by any means—he had yet to run the gauntlet of the men below, whose voices he could faintly hear.

Quietly, hardly daring to breathe, Monty Lowther grasped the light, rickety door, and cautiously slid it aside, the lock slipping free at once.

He lifted the door away, placed it gently against the wall, and then with beating heart he stepped out on to the landing outside.

CHAPTER 8.

The Adventures of Trimble!

"WELL, here goes!"

As Baggy Trimble murmured the words to himself he gave his silk hat—or rather, D'Arcy's silk hat—a final polish with a grubby handkerchief, and rolled up the drive of Myrtle Lodge.

It was some little time since Trimble had escaped from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The tram he had taken refuge on was bound for the pierhead, but at the next stopping-place, the fat youth had changed to a Wavertree tram, and he had reached Laurel Road at last. A few inquiries there very soon took him to Myrtle House, for Dr. Morton Lowther was well known in the district.

On the way up in the tram Trimble had not been idle. D'Arcy's coat and shoes and hat were wet and muddied, and he had spent the time in cleaning them up for his visit. Trimble had heard, of course, of the reception Tom Merry & Co. had got the previous night at Myrtle Lodge, and in Trimble's view it was solely because they had turned up there in such a bedraggled crowd.

Baggy Trimble was resolved not to make a similar mis-

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take—which explained why he had "borrowed" D'Arcy's expensive and elegant clothes for the occasion.

It was bad luck, of course, that the clothes had been so roughly handled, but that was solely D'Arcy's own fault, and Trimble felt very angry indeed with Arthur Augustus.

However, he had done his best on the way up to rectify matters, and now, here he was at his journey's end, just putting a final polish to the gleaming silk hat.

As he rolled along the drive, Baggy twirled his cane carelessly. He was feeling in fine fettle, and very satisfied with himself. Trimble had a very good opinion of himself indeed, and he did not doubt his ability to make a good impression on Monty Lowther's uncle.

Certainly there was Monty Lowther to be considered. He knew Monty Lowther would scarcely be pleased to see him—indeed, it was highly probable that Monty Lowther would be very much annoyed indeed to see him.

But the fact did not trouble him much. Once inside Myrtle Lodge he knew he would be quite safe—Lowther would hardly dare to cause "trouble" in his uncle's house. Lowther would doubtless writhe inwardly; but he would have to toe the line, for all that, and would be obliged in all decency to "back him up."

That was how Trimble had looked at it. He had done such things before, and things had turned out just as he had expected. He was reflecting over these matters as he rolled leisurely along the drive.

"Selfishness," he murmured to himself. "Sheer selfishness, that's what it is. That beast Lowther wants his uncle all to himself. I shouldn't be surprised if Lowther hadn't worked that affair last night somehow—just to give his blessed chums the go-by. Looks to me like it, anyway, coming here on his own now like this! The more chaps there are the less grub there'll be for him. That's it! What awful meanness!"

Reflecting thus, and feeling quite shocked at Lowther's behaviour in the matter, Trimble ambled up the steps and rang the bell. He rang it hard.

Nothing happened, and Trimble rang the bell again and again. After that the fat junior's self-complacency left him a little.

"Oh crumbs!" he mumbled dismally. "What a rotten sell if they've gone out! Here goes again, anyhow!"

Trimble rang again. There came no answer, and then he gave it up, his fat features wearing a disgusted look. After a last dismal blink at the house, the fat junior rolled back slowly along the drive.

"Oh, what a sell!" he groaned. "They must have gone out. I expect Lowther's uncle's taken him out in the blessed car or something. Oh, blow it all! And I'm jolly hungry!"

A sense of complete desolation descended upon the fat youth. He had visualised a jolly good tea at Myrtle Lodge, to be followed, possibly, by a tour, in Dr. Lowther's car, of the sights of Liverpool, and with dinner and a theatre to follow.

Instead of all these delightful things his trouble and risk had apparently all been for nothing. Nobody was at home. And Trimble's only consolation was that even this was better than tramping round and studying industrial life under the eagle eye of a master.

"It's all that selfish beast, Lowther's fault, I bet!" grunted the fat youth disconsolately. "He must have guessed I'd come, and he's persuaded his uncle—My hat! I wonder if the beast was there all the time, and wouldn't let 'em open the door?"

The sudden thought took Trimble by storm, and after a moment's reflection he turned about and dived into the bushes lining the drive. Here, well out of sight of the house, and, moving cautiously, Trimble began to work his way round to the rear of the house.

It was a very easy job, for laurels and bushes abounded all round the lawns and house, and at last Trimble reached the back door.

It was quite possible, he felt, that Lowther had stopped the maid opening the door, hoping he would depart. And Trimble was determined to find out if this was so. Once he managed to get somebody to open the door, he felt certain they could scarcely be so inhospitable as to turn him away.

Just as Trimble was about to knock, however, he noted that the back door was slightly ajar, and, peering through, the fat youth saw that the scullery was empty. Even then Trimble felt that the house seemed strangely silent.

Trimble had cheek enough for anything, and he also had nerve enough—when he was hungry. And he was very hungry now. Instead of knocking, Trimble tiptoed inside and looked into the kitchen beyond. It was also empty, and it seemed to Trimble to have a strangely deserted appearance.

But there was the remains of a meal on the table, and this caught Trimble's eye at once. There was a glass dish

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containing nearly a whole potted tongue, and there was bread-and-butter and a teapot, with a single plate and cup and saucer.

Trimble was not a very reflective youth, but even he could not help thinking it strange that a servant should partake of meals in such dilatory fashion—or be allowed to do so. There was no cloth on the table, and the bread had been hacked off in thick chunks. The room also bore many signs of not having been dusted that day.

"Queer!" murmured Trimble. "Almost looks as if some thieving rotter had come in here helping himself to grub. I've heard of dishonest people doing that. Well, they shouldn't be so jolly careless, I heard Lowther say the housekeeper was away; but where's the giddy maids, I wonder?"

Trimble stepped softly to the inner door, and blinked along the passage beyond, listening intently as he did so. Not a sound reached his ears.

"Oh, good!" he mumbled, his eyes fixed longingly on the potted tongue, which certainly looked very appetising. "I'm jolly hungry. And Lowther and his uncle must be out, after all. They wouldn't like me to go without something to eat, I know. If they'd been here they'd have insisted upon me having tea and all the rest of it. So it amounts to just the same thing, really, if I help myself—save them the trouble, too."

Arguing thus, Trimble seated himself at the table, and started to attack the potted tongue, his ears on the alert all the time for sounds from within the house. It was really a big tongue, but Trimble very quickly polished out the glass dish.

Then he got to his feet.

"I'm still jolly hungry," he grumbled. "Nothing to drink, either. I think I'll just have a peep in the larder—if I can find it. The doctor wouldn't like to think I had to go away hungry. He's such a decent old chap—Lowther said so himself."

Trimble passed quietly through into the passage in search of the larder. He had almost reached the end when a sudden crash sounded from somewhere in the house, making Trimble almost leap out of his skin.

Until this, he had come to the conclusion that the house was empty—that a careless maid-servant had gone out, leaving the back door unfastened.

He realised it was not empty, however. It struck Trimble that Lowther and his uncle might be at home, after all, and he determined to investigate. In any case, the fat junior could not help being very curious and puzzled.

A turn in the passage brought him in sight of the hall, and after listening a moment Trimble tiptoed to the first door on the right. It was the library, as it happened, and the door was slightly open.

Trimble held his breath and blinked inside.

He opened his eyes wide at sight of the disordered study. And then, as he recognised the man inside, he almost jumped.

It was Fenz—without his disguise now, however. He was just tipping a drawer full of papers over the carpet, and it was the noise of the drawer on the floor that Trimble had heard.

"M-my hat!" breathed Trimble.

The sight of the man who had struck him in the Liverpool Express astounded the fat junior. He could scarcely believe his own eyes.

The man's clean-shaven face was savage and hard as he rummaged rapidly amongst the disordered papers. It was clear that he was searching for something—something he was feverishly eager to find.

Into Trimble's mind came the thought of burglars—how else to account for the man being here engaged thus? He had suggested to Tom Merry & Co. that the dark-eyed man had warned them away from the house in order to burgle it, and they had laughed at him.

They wouldn't laugh when he told them this, however. It was plain enough now—to Trimble.

The fat youth's thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sharp sound of breaking glass—not from the library, but from a room on the left of the hall, the door of which was closed.

What happened next almost scared the fat junior out of his wits.

From the library came a sudden, startled oath, and, just in time, Baggy Trimble slipped back into the shelter of the shadowy passage.

Even as he did so the door of the library flew back, and Fenz leaped out, and, dashing across the hall, flung open the door of the opposite room and darted inside.

There followed another startled oath, and then Trimble's heart leaped as he heard a savage exclamation. It was followed instantly by a heavy fall.

Trimble waited to hear no more. Trembling like a leaf,



Monty Lowther stepped forward swiftly and snatched at the beard on the chin of the elderly gentleman. It came away in his hand, and with it came the heavy white moustache, revealing a clean-shaven face—the sharp, hard face of the traveller he had seen in the Liverpool Express! (See Chapter 5.)

he stumbled along the passage and fairly flew through the kitchen and scullery, out into the open.

He was just going round the house when he pulled up sharp, suddenly hearing the hum of a motor on the drive at the front of the house.

"Oh, good!" panted Trimble.

His first thoughts were that it was the doctor and Lowther returning, but second thoughts bade him make sure first. And Trimble did. He crept to the corner of the house and blinked cautiously round the ivy-clad wall.

The next moment he felt thankful he had exercised caution.

A car had stopped near the entrance steps, and out of it jumped a short, hooked-nosed man. Trimble recognised him at a glance. It was Croat, the under-manager of the dye works.

"M-mum-my hat!" mumbled Trimble, shaking with excitement. "What the thump—"

He watched breathlessly as the driver, a shabbily-dressed, Jewish-looking individual, joined Croat, and the two hurried up the steps.

Trimble heard three sharp knocks on the front door, and then he heard the door opened.

There followed a few seconds' interval, and then Trimble caught his breath sharply as Croat and the driver suddenly reappeared on the steps. They were carrying between them a long, bulky object wrapped in a big, thick rug.

The very shape of the bundle brought Trimble's heart to his mouth.

With eyes wide open with terror the fat junior watched as the bundle was lifted into the car, and he did not move as he watched Croat climb in after it. Then the driver started his engine.

The car turned swiftly, and went humming up the drive and turned into the road. Trimble heard it humming away, and heard the sound of the horn as the car turned on to the main road.

A moment later the fat youth heard the house door close, and for some moments afterwards Trimble stood where he was, shaking with excitement.

What it all meant Trimble could only guess. That it was the hapless Lowther in the bundle the fat junior was far from dreaming—indeed Trimble did not dream that Lowther had been in the house while he himself had been there. That the crash of breaking glass had been caused by Lowther flinging the poker through the window he was far from guessing.

And Trimble did not stay to think the matter out. He had had quite enough of Myrtle Lodge, and with a last blink at the sinister house, he dived into the bushes and made his way to the gates. Then, once away from the house, Trimble took to his heels and ran—and he ran hard.

He reached the tram-lines at length, and then he stopped, waiting for a tram to take him back to town. It was some minutes before one came along, and Trimble boarded it thankfully.

But his thankfulness was short-lived, for when the conductor came round Trimble discovered that his outward journey had taken his last penny. Trimble's next adventure was an argument with the conductor, terminating by Trimble being gently led off the tram by the car and deposited in the roadway.

The tram rumbled on its way, and Trimble started the long homeward tramp—there was nothing else for it. But during the tramp Trimble had time to think matters out a little, and he resolved that, burglars or no burglars, he would not acquaint the police with what he had seen. That would never do. Even Trimble realised that he had no right whatever in the house, and he felt that the police might possibly fail to see eye to eye with him in the matter. They even might think he had entered the house from motives that were not honest.

But he determined to tell Tom Merry & Co., nevertheless. Obdurate as he was, Trimble realised that something should be done in the matter.

CHAPTER 9.

Trapped!

LOWTHER found himself on a tiny landing with a narrow flight of stairs facing him. He could hear voices clearly from below now, and his heart beat rapidly as he started towards the stairs. The slightest noise—the creak of a board—might jeopardise his chance of success.

He reached the head of the stairs safely, and began to descend. Half-way down then he paused.

In the wooden wall on his right was a tiny, one-paned window, apparently fixed there to light the narrow staircase. It was covered by a bit of dirty curtain, and through a hole in the webbing the junior caught a glimpse of a room—the room, obviously, from which the voices proceeded.

Lowther peered cautiously through, and saw three men seated at a rough table with glasses before them. One was Croat, the second was Ikey, the driver, and the third was a man dressed in dirty seafaring garb, a greasy, peaked cap stuck sideways on his tumbled head.

Ikey was speaking, and his voice reached the junior clearly.

"Chief comin' along to-night, Mr. Croat?" he asked.

Croat nodded briefly.

"Coming at dark," he said with a grunt. "He's going to try to make the old man speak. He's getting the wind-up, and so am I, I might tell you. The job ought to have been pulled off long before this. And now those interfering school kids have come along it's dangerous. Anyway, you'd better be ready for him, Frost."

The seafaring man, emptying his glass, nodded as he got to his feet.

Lowther waited to hear no more. He left the little window and tiptoed downwards again. But haste now made him less careful, and suddenly a loud, sharp crack rang out as his foot pressed a broken step in the stairs.

From the room came a sudden exclamation, followed by the scrape of chairs as the two other men leaped up.

Lowther took the last few stairs in one desperate leap, heedless of noise now.

A form loomed up from the doorway at the bottom of the stairs, and without hesitation the junior's fist shot out.

It took the man—it was Ikey—full on the point of his bristly chin, and it had all the weight and force of Lowther's desperate leap behind it.

Ikey gasped and crumpled up, and Lowther leaped over him, and darted for the passage-way beyond. A glance had shown him that the door was open, and in a flash the junior was through it.

He found himself in a yard, with a tumbledown garage at the far end, and a gateway leading out into a road at the other.

Without a second glance about him Lowther tore from the yard, with the yells and the furious oaths of the three men ringing in his ears.

His heart was thumping madly with the excitement of the moment, but he felt strangely clear-headed for all that. Round him were dingy-looking houses and warehouses, and a few masts and funnels told him in one swift, comprehensive glance that he was in Dockland.

The street was narrow, and Lowther turned to the left and pelted along it until he reached the corner. Here was a garish public-house, with another narrow alley turning off from it. Without a glance behind him the junior tore down the narrow lane, heedless of the curious glances of idlers.

The narrow alley proved to lead out into a wider street with plenty of people about and plenty of traffic. Lowther stopped then, panting. He knew the three rascals would never dare to follow him there.

For some moments he leaned against a wall, while he rested, and considered the matter.

He was free now, indeed—safe from his captors. Yet Monty Lowther had no thought in his mind of self; he had no intention of leaving Messrs. Croat & Co. to their own devices.

He was thinking now of his uncle. His uncle was not a prisoner in the house he had just left, of that he was certain. And he had a very good suspicion as to where he was.

Croat had told the seafaring man to "be ready for the chief," who was expected that evening to try to "make the old man speak."

The chief was obviously Fenz, and the old man was obviously his uncle. The obvious deduction, therefore, was that Frost, the seafaring man, held his uncle a prisoner somewhere; and where else would that be but on a boat of some sort on the Mersey? Lowther himself understood now why he had been taken first to the house—if house it was. It would scarcely be safe to take a prisoner out to a boat in broad daylight.

Lowther felt convinced he was right, and he realised he

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would have to move swiftly if he intended to help his uncle. Frost had just been about to leave the place when he had descended the stairs, clearly to be ready for Fenz.

He would follow the man, cost what it might to himself.

Without another second's hesitation Monty Lowther turned on his heels and hurried back the way he had come, his eyes on the alert for a sight of his enemies.

He reached the public-house at the corner, and then he suddenly halted and drew back into the shelter of a doorway.

Past the end of the opening a man was passing—a burly man in dingy blue jersey and greasy cap. It was Frost, and after making sure the other two rascals were not in sight, Lowther started on his trail.

To a fellow like Lowther, who was a trained Scout, it was not a difficult matter—especially as the man seemed to have no thought of being followed.

Past warehouses and shops, and narrow alleys and by-ways the man led him, still keeping within touch with the docks, and then the man stopped at a grocer's shop.

He emerged shortly with a loaf of bread and several packages, and then he ambled on again, Lowther sticking to his trail with grim determination.

The trail suddenly ended, just where Lowther had expected it to end—at the gleaming waters of the Mersey.

At the edge of the dock wall Frost abruptly stopped, and then he descended some stone steps. At the water's edge a dinghy was tied up to an iron ring, and the fellow jumped aboard. Dropping his foodstuffs, he unhitched the rope, and pushed off. Then, seating himself at the oars he started to pull out towards a couple of sailing barges anchored some distance out from the shore.

From the shelter of a warehouse the junior watched him, his eyes gleaming now with excited expectation. He saw the seafaring man reach the first of the two anchored barges, and tying up the dinghy, clamber aboard.

He went first to a hatchway in the forepeak of the ugly craft, and, lifting the hatch, peered downwards. Then he closed the hatch again, secured it, and went aft. Here was another hatchway, and Frost lifted this up, and a moment later he had vanished below, taking his loaf and packages with him.

Shaking with excitement, Lowther waited for some moments, and then as Frost did not reappear, the junior hurried towards the step. He had already noted with grim satisfaction that another dinghy was tied up there, and without hesitation, Lowther sprang down into it, and untied the painter.

The boat apparently belonged to the second barge, but Lowther did not trouble himself about that. He picked up the oars, and then he started to pull with vigorous strokes out into the stream. It was hard work, for the tide was running strongly, but he reached to within a yard or so of the barge at last. Then he edged the boat gently and skilfully alongside, and made it fast.

His heart was thumping with fear lest the gentle bump of the dinghy touching the barge should alarm Frost. But nothing happened, and after waiting a full minute, Lowther clambered aboard.

Again he did not hesitate. Softly treading amongst the tumbled conglomeration of sails and tackle the plucky junior hurried to the fore hatchway.

It was secured only with a peg of wood, and in a flash he had it out and the hatch lifted.

The interior of the cabin below was dark and dismal, but as he lifted the hatch he caught a glimpse of a figure stretched out on a blanket by a little railed-in stove.

The figure moved as he peered downwards, and as he caught a swift glimpse of the face Lowther felt a sudden mist before his eyes.

The features were those of an elderly man, with white beard and moustache and white hair. Lowther recognised the features in a moment, and he realised that his suspicion had been only too correct, and that his search was ended.

"Uncle!" he panted, a lump in his throat.

There was another movement below, followed by a startled, tremulous cry.

"Who—who is that?"

Lowther waited for no more. He lowered the hatchway back, and in a flash he was dropping down the steep steps into the cabin.

He stooped over the old gentleman, his hand whipping his knife from his pocket as he did so.

"Uncle!" he panted huskily. "It is I—Montague, your nephew! Quick! Let me cut you free!"

"What—what—"

The old gentleman seemed utterly unable to credit his senses. He stared up at the junior, his white, haggard face trembling with emotion. And at that moment a heavy step sounded on the deck above, and a shadow was thrown across the hatchway.

There followed an oath, and just for an instant Monty and

his uncle caught a swift glimpse of Frost's evil, drink-sodden features. Then it vanished, and before Lowther could move, the hatch crashed back into place, blotting out the daylight. Lowther stood in the darkness, panting, his heart sick within him.

He was trapped. He had made his desperate attempt at rescue, and he had failed.

CHAPTER 10. Vengeance!

"WUBBISH!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke emphatically—derisively.

It was late afternoon, and Tom Merry & Co. were on the ferry-boat, just leaving the Woodside Ferry for the Liverpool landing-stage.

It had been a very interesting afternoon for the St. Jim's juniors. From Birkenhead they had journeyed by charabanc to Port Sunlight, and after a tour of the famous works, they had returned to Birkenhead, where Tom Merry & Co.—with Mr. Railton's permission—had left the rest of the party. Tom Merry & Co. had wanted to see something of Birkenhead, and they had spent an interesting hour wandering round the docks, keenly interested in the shipping and ship-building.

At the moment the juniors were interested in the New Brighton Tower, dimly seen through the mist on the Mersey. A rather heated argument was proceeding in regard to the tower between Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Robert Digby.

"Wubbish!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Uttah wubbish, Dig! You must be off your wockah, deah boy!"

"Not at all," said Digby. "I mean just what I say. I know a fellow who can jump higher than that tower, and I'm sticking to what I claim."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus derisively. "I am wathah astounded at you, Dig, expectin' us sewiously to swallow such a wedie statement. Why, that towah is a feahful height!"

"I know it is," said Digby seriously, winking at the rest of his grinning chums, however. "But I am stating a solemn fact, Gussy. I know a chap who can jump higher—much higher—than that tower."

"Then perhaps you would not mind tellin' us who the fellow is, deah boy," smiled Arthur Augustus. "I should

be vewy pleased to make the acquaintance of such a wonder-ful person, bai Jove!"

"You already know him, old chap."

"What?"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Certainly," said Digby. "He's on this boat now."

"Bai Jove!" said the innocent Arthur Augustus, looking round him blankly. "Then pway point out the marvellous person to me, Digbay."

"You're talking to him now, old chap," replied Digby, with a chuckle. "The fellow I mentioned is little me."

"Bai Jove! What uttah wot! You—you say you can jump highah than that towah, Dig."

"Certainly, old chap! If I can't I'll eat your topper, Gussy."

"And if you can, I myself will certainly eat it!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Right, old chap!" said Digby. "Mind you keep to your word, Gussy. Here goes, then!" And with an elaborate show of energy, Robert Digby leaped two feet into the air. Then he looked triumphantly at Arthur Augustus. "How's that?" he asked. "If the New Brighton Tower can jump higher than that, I'm ready to eat your topper, Gussy!"

"But—but, you silly dummay—" Arthur Augustus looked perplexed. "But you said—"

"I said I could jump higher than that tower, and I've done it," said Digby. "You see, old chap, that tower can't jump at all. It's a fixture—like your mental machinery, Gussy—can't move at all. See?"

"Oh! Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble face was a picture as he began to grasp the point of the ancient joke.

"You—you feahful spoofah, Dig!" he gasped. "It was only a wotten joke, then?"

"Go hon! Have you really grasped that at last, old fellow? Now what about eating your topper, Gussy? As a fellow of your word, I shall expect you to keep to the terms of the wager, of course."

"Really, Digbay—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter," said Digby. "It is a matter of honour between gentlemen. Here, let me help you eat it!"

And Digby pretended to make a grab at Gussy's hat.

(Continued overleaf.)



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.

STAGE-STRUCK!

ALLOYAL Gemite from the other side of the Tweed writes me a lengthy letter, telling me of his ambitions to become a "famous actor." Ambition is very creditable; without it the world would be a dreary sort of place; but over-confidence is something to be shunned. Now, this enthusiast from the North is, it is fairly apparent from his letter, over-confident, and also misinformed. He looks upon stage-life as something akin to a bed of roses; a profession where laurels are easily gained, where "big money" is easily earned, and where little is done in the way of "real" work. I'm afraid my correspondent knows very little of stage-life, or he wouldn't write me in this fashion. But he asks: "What ought I to do to get on the stage?" In the first place, I recommend this Gemite to get rid of these wrong ideas of the stage. If he's set on taking up acting as a livelihood, he will find out quickly enough that there are very few roses to be picked up; that he will have to work thumping hard; that this wondrous talk of "big money" is in reality a myth, so far as it affects the majority of people in the profession. True, the "stars" get big money; but how many years have they plodded along the bottom half of the ladder? How many set-backs have they experienced? And as against the successes of these present-day stars, how many thousands of disillusioned folk remain in the "chorus" or "small-part" brigade? It is with one of these latter people that I would recommend my correspondent to have a chat, if such a thing is possible. If this can't be managed, let my chum join an amateur dramatic society. Here he will pick up a few tips that will prove of use to him later on; here he will discover just how much histrionic ability he really does possess; here he will learn just how keen he is

seriously to take up acting as a living. But I would warn him to "throttle" some of that confidence of his, otherwise he will be falling out with his producer or his stage-manager. Maybe I have painted the dreary side of the profession; but, in view of my correspondent's letter, this course was necessary, for he asked for "good advice, straight from the shoulder."

HE WANTS TO BE AN AIRMAN!

J. G., of Luton, is keen to join the Royal Air Force, with the idea of becoming a pilot. But he's troubled as to his chances of passing the medical test, for his lungs are weak. If this is the case, J. G. would do well to pay a little extra attention to those lungs of his, as he would certainly fail to pass the medical johnny with the stethoscope if he went up for examination now. I would suggest that J. G. has a chat with his local physician and ask his advice on the subject. Perhaps those lungs can be got into trim sufficient to satisfy the Royal Air Force Medical Board. Fresh air and exercise will work wonders, you know; and in the meantime, J. G. could be putting in a bit of swotting on the theory of flight, aerial navigation, etc.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"D'ARCY'S COMIC OPERA!"

By Martin Clifford.

A mirth-provoking story of Tom Merry & Co., with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the limelight. Don't miss this treat, chums!

"WHITE EAGLE!"

Another instalment of this topping adventure serial, and a jolly little poem from the St. Jim's Rhymester, entitled:

"FIRE-DRILL!"

Order your copy of the GEM early, chums, and do me the favour of recommending this paper to a non-reader pal. Thanks! Chin-chin, Gemites!

Your Editor.
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Arthur Augustus jerked back his head in great alarm, and just at that instant a strong gust of wind caught his hat and took it clean from his head.

At the moment Arthur Augustus was standing a yard or so from one of the deck ventilators, and the silk hat sailed into its open mouth and was instantly swallowed up.

Tom Merry & Co. saw it go, and they roared with laughter. Arthur Augustus quite failed to see where it had gone. As he looked swiftly round him he jumped.

He was utterly dumbfounded. The hat had vanished completely—but where? It was nowhere on the deck, and it was not to be seen on the surface of the Mersey. Certainly it might have sunk, but then he must have seen it go had it gone overboard.

It was amazing—to Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What has happened to my hat? Did you see it go?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The look of bewilderment on D'Arcy's flushed features made his chums roar. Arthur Augustus thought he understood, then.

"You—you feahful wuffians!" he shouted. "You have played a wotten twick with my hat. Digby, did you touch my hat?"

"Not guilty, my lord!"

"Have any of you fellows touched my hat?" shouted Gussy.

"Certainly not, old chap!"

"Then—then—then—"

Arthur Augustus paused, utterly confounded. He never even seemed to think of the ventilator at all. Save for his chums, not another passenger was on that part of the deck. Yet his hat had gone.

He was still staring blankly about him when a grimy individual in overalls climbed up on to the deck of the ferry-boat. In his hand he held a silk hat, smothered in soot and coal-dust, and badly dented in numerous places.

He blinked about him, and then he came up to the juniors.

"Any of you gents lost a 'at?" he asked, with a grin. "It came rattling down this 'ere ventilator."

He looked at Arthur Augustus, who was the only one bareheaded. Arthur Augustus looked at the hat—it was a horrified look.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped. "Is—that—can it be my toppah? Oh, gweat Scott!"

It certainly was D'Arcy's "topper"—or what was left of it. Arthur Augustus looked at it, and looked at the ventilator, and then he understood.

The ferry-boat stoker grinned again, and then he departed—not waiting for any thanks. Possibly he felt it was out of place to expect any in the circumstances.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Go on—eat it!" suggested Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you grinning wottahs!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Oh deah! And Trimble has my othah toppah—I only brought two with me. If anything has happened to that—"

With a vicious kick, Arthur Augustus sent the hapless topper sailing over the side of the ferry. It dropped into the Mersey and sank from sight.

During the rest of the trip across the river, Arthur Augustus maintained a chilly silence—refusing to speak to his grinning chums at all. As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus had not been his usual cheery self all the afternoon. It was perhaps no wonder in the circumstances.

When Trimble had left him to settle the matter of the upset baskets with the porter, Arthur Augustus had spent a very rough five minutes. The irate porter had not waited for an explanation from the swell of the Fourth. He had just started in without any delay to "knock the stuffin'" out of the junior—as he himself expressed it.

There would have been serious trouble there and then had not Tom Merry & Co. come to his rescue, and with the aid of five shillings, persuaded the porter to let the matter drop.

With a swollen nose the unfortunate Gussy was led back into the hotel. But trouble did not end there by any means. Arthur Augustus was raging, and wanted to go after Baggy Trimble. And only by main force did Tom Merry & Co. prevent him doing so.

In their view, the fact that Baggy Trimble was risking trouble by absenting himself from the Port Sunlight party was no reason why Arthur Augustus should. So for Gussy's own sake they insisted upon his accompanying them to the North Western Hotel to join the others. And as they were five to one, Arthur Augustus had to do so.

But his wrath had not abated, and only on the way back had Arthur Augustus shown signs of forgiving his chums.

And now, when all looked like being merry and bright, this had happened on the boat, and it was no wonder Arthur Augustus was wrathful.

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It was against Trimble, however, that Arthur Augustus' noble wrath was chiefly directed. The swell of St. Jim's was very anxious indeed to meet Trimble. Arthur Augustus was a very kind-hearted youth, but he would have found great delight in scalping the fat youth just then.

"Better call at a hat-shop and buy a new hat, Gussy," suggested Blake, as the juniors trooped off the ferry-boat. "You'll be catching cold, old chap."

"I will wisk that, Blake," said Arthur Augustus coldly. "That can wait until I have seen that feahful wottah, Twimble. I shall not west until I have had a weckonin' with the wretched wascal."

"Please yourself, old chap!"

Blake winked at the others, and the juniors accompanied Arthur Augustus back to the hotel quickly enough. They were looking forward to D'Arcy's interview with Trimble.

They entered their room, and the first thing they saw was Baggy Trimble. He was lying back in an easy chair, fast asleep, with his muddy shoes resting on another chair. On that chair rested also Gussy's best hat, ruffled and muddy, and Gussy's best coat, likewise ruffled and muddy.

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass firmly into his eye and blinked at the fat junior. Then he strode forward and tipped up the easy chair.

Crash!

"Yaroooooh!"

Trimble awoke with a terrific yell as he smote the carpet with his fat person.

"Now, you fat wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, grabbing a cane from the corner. "I've got you at last, you feahful little wascal! I'm goin' to teach you to respect anothah fellow's clobber, Twimble. I'm goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Leggo!" roared Trimble. "Oh crumbs! Keep the beast off, you fellows! I say, your blessed clobber's all right, you silly ass! Haven't I brought it back? I say, I've got something to tell— Yaroooooh!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Arthur Augustus had started to work with his walking-cane, and Trimble roared with anguish.

CHAPTER 11.

Missing!

WHACK, whack, whack, whack!

Arthur Augustus was undoubtedly in a right royal rage, and the hapless Trimble soon had very good reason to know it.

He roared and roared, wriggling frantically to escape the vengeful cane.

"Yooop! Stop the beast, you fellows! I tell you I've got news— Yaroooooh! Murder! I tell you it was all a—yow!—mistake, Gussy. Your clobber got mixed up with—yooooop!—mine. Oh crikey! Help! Murder!"

Tom Merry and Blake jumped forward and grasped the irate Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's arm. They felt that Trimble deserved every bit of what he was getting, but they realised that a private room at an hotel was hardly the place for such a happening.

They grasped the fuming Gussy and fairly wrenched him away from his victim.

"Chuck it, Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry. "You'll have the blessed manager here in a minute, making that awful row. Trimble's had enough, anyway."

Trimble certainly had had enough. He lay and groaned. "There!" panted Arthur Augustus, throwing down the cane. "Let that be a lesson to you, you fat wascal!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

"It serves you jolly well right, Trimble," said Tom Merry. "You're too jolly fond of borrowing other people's clothes. And you'll get it from Railton, too, for clearing off like that. Did you go to Myrtle Lodge, you silly worm?"

"Yow! Yes," groaned Trimble. "Oh crikey! I'll punch that rotter to a jelly for this—some other time! Oh deah! After my rushing down here like I've done to save Lowther's uncle."

"To—what?"

"Ow-ow!" gasped Trimble, sitting up and forgetting his aches and pains for the moment. "It's quite true, you fellows. I've had an awful time—had to walk all the way back, too. They—took the body away in a car!"

And Trimble shuddered.

The juniors stared at him, bewildered.

"What on earth are you gassing about, Trimble?" snapped Tom. "Are you potty, you silly chump? Body! What body?"

"Oh deah! Dr. Lowther's body, of course," groaned Trimble, keeping an eye on Arthur Augustus and caressing himself. "I saw it all—saw the burglars carrying the body out wrapped in a rug! That beast who went for me in the train was one of them!"

"Wha-at?"

Tom Merry fairly blinked at Trimble. Even Arthur

Augustus ceased to take an interest in his muddled clothes in order to look at Trimble.

Tom Merry had been grinning at the first part of Trimble's strange remarks, but now he was looking serious.

"What do you mean, Trimble?" he demanded. "Explain yourself, you silly idiot! Did you go to the house, then?"

"Ow! Yes! Haven't I said so?"

"Did you see Lowther—Monty, I mean?"

"Ow! No, I didn't see him!" groaned Trimble, his eyes gleaming with excitement now. "But I jolly well saw something else."

And Trimble related what he had seen and heard at Myrtle Lodge that afternoon. In regard to why he had entered the house at all, Baggy was scarcely truthful, however. He felt it would be as well, after all, not to state the exact truth in that respect.

"I couldn't make 'em hear at the front, so I went round to the back," said Trimble. "Then I heard a queer noise in the house, and I went in to investigate. That was how I came to go in."

"You—you fat fibber!" gasped Blake. "You more likely went in to pinch some grub. Well, what a yarn!"

It certainly was a yarn. Yet somehow the juniors did not scoff at it as they usually did with Trimble's wonderful yarns. Even Blake's tone was strangely uncertain and uneasy.

All the juniors eyed Trimble fixedly for some moments. For once they felt sure that his excitement and earnestness was not put on. They could not help thinking of Lowther's suspicions—of his certainty that something was wrong at the lodge, and that the dark-eyed man in the Liverpool Express had something to do with it. Moreover, Croft was certainly on familiar terms with the fellow.

And now, Trimble claimed to have seen both at Dr. Lowther's house in what were certainly curious and significant circumstances.

Were they to believe Trimble? It was a story that Trimble could scarcely make up on the spur of the moment; indeed, there was no earthly reason why he should make up such a story at all.

"Trimble," said Tom Merry, speaking quietly at length, "are we to take it that this is the truth—that you actually did see what you state? Remember that it is jolly serious."

"Of course, it's the truth!" said Trimble, with excited eagerness. "I tell you, I saw them both rifling the library, and then I saw them carrying the body out. It must have been a—a body. They were kidnapping the doctor, I suppose."

"You didn't see the doctor at all in the house."

"Nunno. But I've told you what I heard in that room."

"And you saw nothing of Monty."

"Nothing at all. The beast wasn't there," said Trimble.

Tom Merry gave his chums a grim look.

"We can't let this pass," he said. "There must be some truth in it. We'll go up there, chaps, at once."

"I certainly think we should," said Blake. "Something's certainly wrong. And where on earth can old Monty be?"

That was a question all the juniors were asking themselves.

"Sooner we get off the better, chaps," said Tom Merry sharply. "There may be something to account for the queer goings on, but—but it's up to us to make sure."

"Had we better tell the police?" asked Herries.

Tom Merry shook his head after a moment. Had the information come from anyone but Trimble he would have considered doing so certainly. But Trimble was Trimble, and though he was doubtless quite sincere in his beliefs, it was more than possible that he had merely seen something that would prove on investigation to be of an entirely innocent nature. Trimble had a very vivid imagination, and his information was seldom to be relied upon.

"No, chaps," said Tom. "We'll make sure ourselves first. I—I wish I knew where old Monty was, though. But we're wasting time. Let's get off."

The juniors lost no further time after that. Even Arthur Augustus forgot his grievances and troubles in the new worry. He was as eager as the rest to get down to the truth of the matter.

In less than five minutes the juniors were speeding up to Wavertree in a taxi. Trimble had plainly stated that he would not accompany them, and they had been far from wanting the fat youth. So Trimble was left at the hotel to nurse his aches and pains, while the six juniors sped towards Myrtle Lodge.

It was quite dark now, but it was a fine night, with a full, clear moon riding in the sky. In a very short time the juniors were at Leaf Road, and, paying off the driver, they approached the house.

It looked just as it had done on their first visit; a light showed in the library, while the rest of the house was in darkness.

The sight of the light took away all their fears.

"Everything looks all right," said Tom, in deep relief. "Oh, thank goodness!"

"That fat rascal was spoofing us all the time!" gasped Blake. "We—we'll smash him for this!"

"Let's make sure first," said Herries quietly.

Tom led the way up the steps, and rang at the bell, wondering if they would get an answer. This time they did get an answer after a short wait. The light flashed in the hall, and shuffling footsteps sounded.

The next moment the door opened, and the juniors' fears fled abruptly as they recognised the old gentleman standing there.

Just for a moment the old man's eyes seemed to glitter as they rested on the juniors, but an instant later he was peering short-sightedly at them.

"Well," he demanded testily, "what is it? Ah, you are the boys who came here with Montague!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "We—we—I—I—"

He was suddenly made aware that they had come there on a fool's errand. Trimble had spoofed them, without a doubt. This was Dr. Lowther, and everything was seemingly quite as it should be. And Tom did not know what to say to account for their presence there. He could scarcely tell the yarn Trimble had told them.

The old gentleman frowned.

"What is it?" he repeated testily. "I am very busy indeed. I think I told Montague that I should be engaged to-day, and that I should not be free until to-morrow to entertain you. Is Montague with you now?"

Tom Merry felt suddenly alarmed.

"No, sir," he stammered. "He is not with us. He left us at noon, saying he was coming here."

"He has not been here!" snapped the old gentleman. "I have no doubt he remembered my warning, and changed his mind. If there is anything else I can do for you—"

He paused, obviously hinting to the juniors that he wished them to go, and obviously not intending to ask them inside.

"Nunno, sir," stammered Tom Merry. "It—it's all right, sir. We—we only wondered if Monty had been here. And we'd heard"—Tom hesitated, and then quite suddenly he decided to tell the story, after all—"we'd heard a yarn from a fellow who was here this afternoon."

"What!"

It was a snappy exclamation—almost savage.

"I'll tell you, sir," said Tom.

And he did, repeating the story just as Trimble had told him.

"It was a yarn, of course, sir," said Tom, flushing. "Trimble tells awful whoppers, and often spoofs people like that. But—but we thought we'd better come and make sure."

The old man did not answer for a moment. His face was working strangely. He spoke at last with a laugh—a laugh that was strangely harsh and forced.

"An absurd story, of course!" he said impatiently.

"Ridiculous! The rascally youth undoubtedly saw what he claims to have done."

"What?"

"But he has placed a ridiculous construction upon it," said the old gentleman, with another laugh. "The man he saw here was my private secretary, and he has been busy to-day searching for a rather valuable document I have lost. In regard to the bundle and the car, it is perhaps no wonder he allowed his imagination to play upon it. The car came to bring Croft, our under-manager, from the works, and the bundle he took back contained nothing more mysterious than specimens of dyed cloths that have been sent here for my inspection."

"Oh!"

"Bah Jove!"

"The boy evidently has a very vivid imagination," said the old gentleman. "However, this should satisfy him that everything is as it should be. I trust you are quite satisfied yourselves?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry quietly. "I myself am quite satisfied."

"You must tell your rascally young friend to be more careful with his absurd statements," said the old man, his tone impatient again. "However, I must bid you good-bye now, my boys. I have a great deal of work to do this evening."

"Good-night, sir!" said Tom Merry.

He led the way down the steps, the rest of the juniors almost tumbling over themselves in their confusion. Once in the drive, with the door closed behind them, Blake gave a disgusted snort.

"Well," he remarked feelingly—"well, if that fat worm doesn't take the giddy bun! We—we'll smash the silly spoofers for this!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"Trimble wasn't spoofing," said Tom Merry quietly. "It was that man who was spoofing."

"What?"

Blake almost yelled the word. "Quiet, you idiot!" said Tom softly. "Wait until we get out into the road. I have something to tell you chaps." The astonished juniors remained silent until the road was reached, and then they surrounded their leader with puzzled faces.

"What—"

"I'll tell you," said Tom, his eyes gleaming strangely in the gloom under the trees. "That man was lying."

"Lowther's uncle?" gabbled Blake.

"That man!" repeated Tom Merry. "I suspected nothing at first. I was going to go after he told us Lowther had not been there. Then I saw something that made me mention the other matter. It was a wonder you didn't see it, too. He was lying!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Dry up, Gussy! He was lying," went on Tom. "Lowther had been there. You fellows noticed that that small room opposite the front door was open?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, the light was streaming into part of the room. And on the floor I saw something. It was Lowther's cap."

"Wha-at?"

"It must have been Lowther's cap," said Tom Merry, his voice beginning to tremble a trifle. "I know a St. Jim's cap when I see one. Who else could it belong to but old Monty?"

"Phew!"

"Anyone in the room could scarcely have seen it," said Tom. "But the light streamed in where it lay, and I spotted it clearly. I knew then there was something very gravely wrong. And there is."

Tom's chums said nothing. They were staggered.

"But that is not all," said Tom, his voice going strangely tense. "I also noticed something else—something very queer. While he was speaking, the old man had one hand on the door, as if he feared we should try to enter. I noticed what you chaps must have failed to notice. There were two fingers missing from his left hand."

"Oh!"

There was a long silence. Under the trees the juniors looked at each other, their faces white in the darkness.

"Do you remember having seen a man with two fingers missing from his left hand recently?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes," said Blake, in a low voice. "That man in the train—the brute who hit Trimble. But—but—"

His voice trailed off; he was utterly bewildered and bemused.

"It was," agreed Tom Merry quietly. "I think I mentioned it to you fellows at the time. There is something very seriously wrong. Poor old Lowther was right. But where—"

He broke off abruptly, with a warning hiss. At that moment a car was heard approaching the house, and the next moment it had turned into the drive, and came speeding towards them.

"Back!" hissed Tom. "Hide your faces!"

The juniors obeyed in a flash, crushing themselves into the bushes, their faces averted. The car—a rattling, lurching affair—passed them in a flash, and stopped before the house.

"Come!" whispered Tom.

He led the way cautiously back, stopping when in sight of the house. In the shelter of the trees they watched.

The driver jumped from the car and wrenched open the door. Then he hurried up the steps and knocked three times on the front door.

The fact that he had knocked instead of ringing was quite enough for Tom Merry.

He caught Blake's arm in a vice-like grip.

"Listen!" he said. "That car's come to fetch someone—the old man, I fancy. Lowther is missing, there's no doubting that now. He may be a prisoner in that house, and he may be somewhere else. I'm going to find out where. When that car starts I'm going to jump on behind and go with it. You remain and keep guard, and if you can get into the house, search it. Hallo! Now for it!"

The light in the library suddenly went out, and after a moment the front door opened and closed. The house was in complete darkness now. Two figures descended the steps, and one jumped into the driving-seat of the car. The other entered the car, but as his face passed the lamp Blake gave a jump.

"It—it's not the old man! Great pip! It's that brute we met in the train! But why—"

"Because they're one and the same," whispered Tom Merry. "Think it over when I'm gone. Here goes!"

The car bounded forward, and as it passed them Tom Merry dashed forward and made a mad leap for the rear of the car. He had already noted the large luggage-rack at the rear, and he leaped on it just as the car began to gain speed. He had intended to pull himself up on the

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railed-in roof, but he found the luggage-rack more than big enough to hold him.

The next moment the car had swept out into the quiet road and was roaring away towards with the plucky junior crouching behind. He had taken the leap into the unknown, and there was no drawing back now. But Tom Merry cared nothing whether danger lay ahead or not. His chum was missing, and he meant to find him.

CHAPTER 12.

Tracked Down!

TOM MERRY remembered little afterwards of that strange ride through Liverpool on the back of the car. It was none too comfortable hanging on to the luggage-grid, and he was thankful when the car slowed down at last, and began to move slowly along a narrow alley amidst looming warehouses and shadowy masts and funnels.

Long ago the junior had realised they were making for the river, and he was not surprised when they had started to thread the streets and alleys of Dockland.

What the whole astounding affair meant Tom knew no more than Lowther had done, but he knew now that the Dr. Lowther they had met was an impostor, and he suspected that both Lowther and his uncle were prisoners somewhere.

That both might be at that moment held prisoners in the lodge was quite possible, he knew. But he had swiftly decided to take no risks in regard to that. He knew his own chums would find that out, and he did not mean to risk the opportunity of following the impostor and learning his destination. He felt instinctively that he was on the way to discovering the meaning of the strange mystery.

The car stopped at last at the end of the narrow alley. The tall, sharp-featured man sprang out and muttered a word or two to the driver. The next moment the car was backing, it turned, and then the driver—it was Ikey—stopped his engine and switched off his lights. As he did so Tom Merry slipped quietly from his seat and dived into the shadows.

He was thankful now that the driver had turned the car, otherwise he would have been seen leaving it. For Fenz was already walking away rapidly. He had apparently told Ikey to wait for his return.

Tom Merry, his heart thumping fast now, hurried after the tall man, fearful of losing him. The shadows of the warehouses had already swallowed him up.

But scarcely had Tom gone fifty yards when he halted, drawing back swiftly into the shadows the next instant.

He realised that he was at the very edge of the Mersey now—the moonlight glimmered on the heaving waters.

Twenty yards away was the tall man. He had joined another shorter man, who had evidently been waiting for him. It was Croat, Tom Merry guessed that instinctively.

The two men talked for some moments, and then both vanished.

Tom slid forward, keeping well in the shadows of a dock shed. The moonlight was very feeble, but he was taking no unnecessary risks.

He heard the splash of oars suddenly, and then he glimpsed the vague form of the boat as it stole across the water. It was moving in the direction of a barge out in the stream, the lights of which Tom had already seen.

The junior understood their destination now. He waited until the shadowy boat merged in the shadows of the looming barge, and then he stepped to the edge of the dock.

To his joy he saw another boat tied up at the bottom of the slimy steps. It was the same boat Lowther had used that afternoon, though he little dreamed it. Evidently Frost had brought the boat back and tied it up again.

In a flash the junior was down the steps, and, jumping in, he untied the rope. Then he grasped the sculls and pulled out into the stream.

It was far from easy work, as Lowther had discovered earlier on that afternoon. The tide was running strongly, and Tom had all his work cut out. He knew also that he was doing a very risky thing.

When half-way to the barge he glanced round, and his eyes gleamed as he noted no movement on the shadowy deck of the barge. Yet he knew that eyes might be watching his approach for all that.

He could only risk it, however, and after a short rest he pulled on again, and very soon he was working gently round to the far side of the barge.

Then he allowed the dinghy to drift alongside. It was an easy matter to board her, for the barge was low in the water. He tied up swiftly, and sank down on the deck, listening.

From the fore hatchway a dim glimmer of light came, and a mutter of voices reached the junior's straining ears. As Tom sank down, however, a head suddenly appeared



As the car passed the hidden St. Jim's juniors, Tom Merry bounded forward, and made a leap for the luggage-carrier. And to the relief of his chums, Tom reached his objective. (See Chapter 11.)

above the hatchway, and then a burly form climbed out on to the deck.

The man was plainly one of the crew of the barge, and he glanced round him sharply as he reached the deck.

Tom Merry held his breath, his heart thumping against his ribs. He remembered that the dinghy had bumped rather heavily as she came alongside, and he knew the man had heard it, and had come on deck to investigate the noise.

His glance round, however, seemed to satisfy him, for the next moment the fellow had dropped down through the hatchway again.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath of relief. He waited another moment or two, and then he began to creep towards the hatchway. He had to move with infinite caution, for the deck was littered with ropes and tackle, and part of the big mainsail hung half-unfurled across the hold.

Nearer and nearer he crept, and then he lowered himself flat and crawled up to the hatchway. He reached to within a yard of the open hatchway, and then he halted.

In the cabin below a voice was speaking—quietly, but with deadly menace in the tones. But Tom Merry scarcely heard the words. He was thrilling with eager excitement now. All he wanted was to see what was taking place in that dimly-lit cabin.

He was taking a terrible risk, and his heart was thumping madly. The last yard he crawled, and then he peered stealthily over the edge of the hatchway.

It was only a swift glance that he took, but it was enough.

Immediately below him, at the bottom of the steep steps, was the bargeman, standing with one hand on the ladder. Near him stood Croat, the rascally under-manager. A yard from him stood Fenz, a savage, menacing expression on his hard features.

But Tom's eyes were fixed upon two forms that lay, half-propped against the wall of the cabin, bound hand and foot. One was Monty Lowther, and the other—Tom Merry understood why even Lowther had been deceived by the impostor.

That bound figure was almost the exact double of the false "Dr. Lowther" they had met at Myrtle Lodge,

though the face was haggard, and Tom could now see a subtle difference in the steady eyes.

Tom Merry's eyes glinted, and he drew back. He had seen enough. He had also risked enough for the present. And the next instant the junior was crawling stealthily away. He reached the shelter of a heap of sailcloth, and there he hid to watch and wait. His time would come, he knew.

CHAPTER 13. In Time!

IN the dimly-lit cabin of the sailing-barge Monty Lowther and his uncle stared up steadily into the cruel, shifty eyes of Fenz.

During the hours—they seemed like years—since he had been trapped by the villainous Frost, Monty had lain there, cramped and aching, and already the strain and the foul air of the place was having its effect upon him.

Naturally enough his uncle had been amazed on recognising his nephew—though he had known, of course, that the junior was visiting Liverpool—and the shock of finding Monty a prisoner like himself had almost prostrated the old gentleman.

It was some little time before he could talk again, and then, after a while, Lowther explained how he had come there, and in his turn Dr. Lowther had told his story. And as he talked Lowther wondered how on earth he could ever have believed his uncle capable of such churlish conduct as to turn him and his chums from the door on a stormy night as the rascally impostor had done.

It was a strange story he had to tell—a story of ruthless cruelty and treachery—treachery on the part of Croat, the rascally under-manager of the dye-works. Lowther was scarcely surprised when he heard it, however. He had expected something of the kind.

Briefly, it concerned a secret formula for aniline dyes that the famous scientist and chemist had been working on for years, and which he had but recently brought to a successful termination. Naturally the matter was a close secret, only the heads of the firm and Croat knowing anything of it.

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At least, that was the belief of Dr. Lowther until the rascally Fenz had come along—until the night Tom Merry & Co. had arrived in Liverpool.

It was sheer coincidence, of course, that Fenz, who was a foreigner, should be travelling on the express that night; but there was no doubt that the plot had been well laid, and that in the juniors' arrival Fenz saw danger to his schemes.

At all events, Dr. Lowther very soon had reason to know on that eventful night that Croat had been false to his trust, and that he had plotted with Fenz to steal his secret.

Whilst in the library that night a ring had come to the door, and the maid had answered the ring—the house-keeper was away on holidays—and she had shown Croat and Fenz into the library.

The rest was easy to the two rascals. They had attacked the old gentleman, and before he could cry for aid they had gagged and bound him.

Then Fenz, who had been a clever actor, had made himself up as the doctor, and had coolly taken charge of the house, apparently—possibly sending the unsuspecting maid-servant home.

With the coast clear, the two rascals had carried the old gentleman to the waiting car, and the hapless Dr. Lowther had eventually found himself a prisoner aboard the barge.

All this Lowther had learned from his uncle, and the junior's eyes had blazed with helpless rage at the recital.

Since then the two had lain there, and until a few moments ago they had not been visited, Frost obviously fearing to raise the hatchway while alone.

Then Fenz and Croat had turned up, and now—little dreaming how near Tom Merry was—Monty Lowther listened to what Fenz had to say with rage and despair at his heart.

"Well," the rascal began calmly, "here I am again, Dr. Morton Lowther. I really do trust, for your own sake, that you will not prove to be so stubborn this evening. You know what it is we are after. I will tell you again that I mean to have that formula, and I will go to any length to possess it."

"You—you scoundrel!"

"I am waiting," sneered Fenz. "Where have you hidden that formula?"

"You will never find it with my help, you villain!" said Dr. Lowther huskily.

"Still stubborn, you old fool!" said Fenz, his voice icy and menacing. "Well, we must find other methods of making you speak. Neither food nor drink shall you have until you have told me where to find what I want."

"Your threats do not frighten me, you scoundrel," was the steady reply. "I have already given you my answer, and nothing—no, not even starvation—will make me submit! Do your worst!"

"Possibly so," was the cool answer from Fenz. "But I fancy you will change your tune when it means starvation for your innocent nephew as well."

The elderly gentleman's face went whiter still, and he groaned as he looked at Lowther's strained face. The junior looked round and smiled steadily at him.

"Don't listen to the rotter, uncle," he said quietly. "I'll stick it with you, starvation or no starvation. If—if only my hands were free—"

And Monty Lowther's eyes blazed as he glared at the sneering rascal.

Fenz laughed.

"Well, what is your answer now?" he asked. "This youngster will be singing a different tune by this time to-morrow night."

The old gentleman said nothing. He bowed his head and groaned. Fenz waited.

"My chums will come, uncle," whispered Lowther. "They will find us, never fear. Don't—please don't—submit."

Dr. Lowther raised his head.

"I have nothing to say," he said, though his lips trembled. "You—you scoundrel! You mean creature, to fight me through an innocent boy!"

"You refuse to tell me, then?"

"Yes. I shall tell you nothing."

"Very well. To-morrow night I will ask you again—if I have failed to find it by that time."

The rascal signed to Croat and Frost, and the three men climbed the ladder to the deck. The hatchway was closed upon them—or so Lowther and his uncle imagined.

"You will never give way, uncle?" pleaded the junior. "Never mind me. I can stand whatever those rotters can do, and I'm certain my chums will never rest until they have traced me. They will suspect when they miss me, and they will track these rascals down, never fear."

"They will find the formula sooner or later," groaned the old man. "It is a matter of great wonderment to me that

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they have not already found it. You say they have ransacked the room, my boy?"

"Yes. You—you are sure you left it there, uncle?"

"Certain, my boy. I was just about to take a copy when the ring came at the door. I hurriedly placed the formula in an envelope, and slipped it beneath the blotting-pad on my desk, and instructed the maid to show the visitors in. They proved to be those scoundrels, and—you know the rest. The sheer simplicity of the hiding-place had foiled the—"

He broke off sharply.

A slight sound above their heads caused both uncle and nephew to look swiftly upwards. The hatch above was open, and framed in the aperture was the face of Fenz.

The dim light from the lamp showed the triumphant, gloating glitter in his eyes.

"Thanks for the information, doctor," he said, his mocking voice trembling with uncontrolled satisfaction. "It was rather lucky I thought of listening—lucky for me and unlucky for you. I trust I shall find what I am after under the blotting-pad, as you say. Good-bye!"

The mocking face vanished, and the hatch slammed into place.

Bitter dismay at his heart, Monty Lowther looked at his uncle, whose kindly face had turned suddenly grey.

In the cabin there was silence for a moment. Then Dr. Lowther groaned.

"They have beaten us, Montague!" he muttered. "They will find it now—the secret worth a million. It is not the money, however, that matters to me so much. But that scoundrel intends to sell the secret to a foreign chemist. It will be a loss—a great loss and a severe blow to the dye industry of our country."

"Uncle—"

Lowther halted, not knowing what to say to lessen his uncle's distress and despair. There was a silence—a silence suddenly broken by the sound of a sudden scuffle on the deck above, a savage oath followed, and then came a thud, and the next instant a heavy splash.

"What's that?" said Lowther, his heart beating fast.

The two stood listening, and suddenly they heard a fumbling at the hatch above. It swung upwards, and a pair of youthful legs dropped through. The legs were followed by the owner of them the next moment, and as he recognised the figure Lowther all but yelled in sheer, astounded bewilderment.

"Tom Merry! What—what—"

"Little me!" snapped Tom Merry grimly. "No time for explanations now, Monty. Excuse me, sir," he added gently to the dumbfounded Dr. Lowther. "But every moment is precious. Those other rascals have gone, but if they happen to have heard that sailor merchant's yell—"

Without finishing Tom Merry whipped out his knife and cut the bonds of Lowther and his uncle—Fenz having ordered them to be tied up again when he had arrived—and swiftly he helped the old gentleman up on to the deck, Lowther following the next moment.

"I biffed that rotten merchant over the side," said Tom. "I bet he wondered what had struck him! Never mind him, though—this way, sharp!"

The captain of the Shell at St. Jim's led the dazed and bewildered Dr. Lowther to the waiting boat, Lowther following. From somewhere on the far side they heard a splashing; but they ignored it, and soon all three were safely in the dinghy.

Tom Merry grasped the oars, and Lowther helped his uncle on to the stern seats, his heart beating fast with deep thankfulness. To him it seemed like a miracle, but he did not ask Tom any questions then.

"We'll make sure of getting safely ashore first," said Tom Merry cheerily. "We can take it easier then. Those—"

"But we can't!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Pull, Tom, for goodness' sake! Those rascals have beaten us, after all, unless we can reach Myrtle Lodge before them."

He rapidly explained as Tom Merry pulled at the oars; and as he proceeded Tom Merry whistled, and he put more and more energy into his strokes.

"Phew!" he gasped. "I thought those brutes were in a hurry! But—but we're not done yet, Dr. Lowther. Our chums are at the house—Blake and the others. They will never let the rotters get away with anything—not now they suspect."

"Oh, thank goodness!" said Lowther, his voice trembling. "I knew you fellows would soon be on the trail."

"And they've still us to reckon with," said Tom grimly. "We'll get a taxi, and we'll very soon be up at Wavertree. We'll be—Hullo, there goes that bargeman! He's just climbing on to the deck. We can afford to let him rip. Hark to his beautiful language."

Glancing behind, Monty Lowther glimpsed the dim form of Frost on the vaguely seen deck of the barge. The next moment the dinghy touched the steps.

Five minutes later rescuer and rescued were seated in a taxi speeding at break-neck speed towards Wavertree.

CHAPTER 14. Foiled at the Finish!

"CAR coming now," whispered Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"
Crouching in the bushes, Blake, Herries, Digby, Manners, and D'Arcy waited, wondering if the car they could hear approaching along Leaf Road was bound for Myrtle Lodge.

It seemed hours to them since Tom Merry had vanished into the night on the back of the car, and the five juniors were stiff and cold with their vigil. They had tried the back and front doors of the house, and they had tried the windows. But apparently Fenz had discovered the open back door since Trimble had been there, for it was closed and locked now.

Doubtless enough the rascally impostor had become afraid since the visit of Tom Merry & Co. At all events, he had taken care the house should not be entered during his absence.

There was nothing else for it but to wait outside, and the juniors had waited until they were stiff and aching.

They had discussed the whole astonishing affair as they waited; but though Tom Merry's disclosures had fairly roused their suspicions, the mystery was as much a mystery as before.

Of one thing they were certain, however, and that was that foul play was afoot, and that the dark-eyed man of the Liverpool express was at the bottom of it. They had fully grasped the significance of Tom Merry's brief remarks, and they realised now that the old man they had taken to be Dr. Lowther and the dark-eyed man were one and the same.

But where was the real Dr. Lowther, and where was Monty Lowther?

It was an anxious time for Tom's chums in the garden of Myrtle Lodge, and they were not sorry when the car they had heard did turn into the drive and come to a stop before the house.

Hidden amongst the thick bushes the juniors watched, and their faces set grimly as they recognised Fenz and Croat. The two men leaped out of the car, and, rushing up the steps, they let themselves into the house.

Scarcely a second later a light flashed in the library as the electric light was switched on.

"Come on!" whispered Blake.

Though they did not know Blake's intention, the rest of the juniors followed him stealthily as he led the way towards the entrance steps—approaching them from behind the car. The driver sat in his seat still, smoking a cigarette, and Blake hoped to enter the house without his knowledge, if possible.

Against the two, Fenz and Croat, the leader of the Fourth at St. Jim's felt they would stand a chance. He was determined to find out what the two rascals were up to in the library.

In single file the juniors crept up the steps, thankful for the shadowy entrance, though it was unlikely the driver could see them unless he left his seat.

To his relief Blake found the outer door wide open, and he crept cautiously inside with his chums at his heels. When all were inside Blake gently closed the door, and there was a soft click as he turned the key in the lock.

The driver—if he were an accomplice—was not to be reckoned with, for the time being, at all events. But the juniors had burned their boats now, and all of them were trembling with excitement.

Through the half-opened door of the library showed a shaft of light, and they heard the voices of Fenz and Croat. And then quite suddenly they heard a triumphant cry.

"Got it!"

On tiptoe Jack Blake crept across the darkened hall. He reached the partly-opened door, and peered through into the room beyond.

The dark-eyed man stood by the table, Croat at his shoulder. He had some papers before him—papers he had, apparently, just drawn from an empty envelope he held in his hand.

The faces of both men were ablaze with triumph.

"Got it!" repeated Fenz gloatingly. "The old fool was not tricking us, then—I half suspected he was, Croat. There's a fortune here for us—a fortune we share together, man."

Croat said nothing—he seemed to be trembling with sheer, excited glee. Together the men examined the papers, and then Fenz seemed satisfied, and he shoved them hurriedly back into the large blue envelope in his hand.

"Now we've got to clear—sharp!" he snapped. "The old man and his confounded nephew are safe for a few days, but those other young cubs are bound to speak—to talk! The sooner we're out of Liverpool the better, Croat."

"Leave things just as they are?" said Croat.

"Yes. Come."

He hurried towards the door, Croat at his heels. Fenz switched off the electric light, and the two men came out into the dark hall. And as they did so the hall electric lights suddenly flashed up, and Blake's voice rang out.

"At them, chaps!"

Fenz and Croat staggered back, blinking in the sudden light, with gasps of startled alarm. Then they glimpsed the five juniors, and before they could do more than give vent to savage oaths the juniors were upon them.

Croat went crashing down, with Manners and Digby clinging to him desperately, but Fenz retained his feet, though Blake and Herries and Arthur Augustus had flung themselves like terriers upon him.

The juniors had expected a stiff tussle, and they soon found their expectation realised in that respect. But they fought desperately, determined the scoundrels should never escape. All their doubts had vanished now. The few words they had overheard were enough to prove their suspicions up to the hilt.

There came a sudden hammering at the door—the driver of the car had heard the uproar and was trying to get in. The hammering ceased abruptly, however, as a new sound came from outside—the roar of a motor on the drive. The roar ceased, and then followed racing footsteps and a voice—Monty Lowther's excited shout.

"That's one of the brutes—collar him!"

What happened after that nobody seemed to know. It was all so swift and confusing. There sounded a sudden scuffling outside, and, releasing his grasp of the raging Fenz, Jack Blake leaped up, and, jumping to the door, turned the key, and dragged it open wide, letting a stream of light out into the night.

It showed Ikey, the driver, struggling desperately in the grasp of Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and a burly figure in a blue uniform.

The next thing Blake knew was that the hall seemed suddenly full of uniformed figures in blue, and he gave a delighted, gasping yell.

"Good old Tommy!"

The juniors scrambled out of the fight, panting and nursing bruised faces and fists. There was no need for them to see to the three rascals now. Fenz and Croat were already handcuffed and helpless in the grasp of two constables.

The juniors grasped Monty Lowther's hand in turn, and wrung it joyfully.

"All serene now," grinned Tom Merry, wiping a perspiring brow. "Rather lucky we picked a few bobbies up on the way—what?"

"It was!" gasped Blake, mopping a cut lip with his handkerchief. "By jingo, it was!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And all of the juniors were agreed upon that.

As Tom Merry had said, it was "all serene."

When Dr. Lowther came into the house a few moments later Monty Lowther had the pleasure of handing him the big blue envelope—a pleasure he certainly had earned. And the old gentleman's eyes were misty as he took it, and shook hands with Monty and with each of his chums.

That night the seven chums were the guests of Dr. Morton Lowther at dinner at their own hotel, and they found Lowther's earlier claim that his uncle was "a jolly decent sort," very true. And, after dinner, the kindly old scientist visited Mr. Railton at the North-Western Hotel and explained matters to that astounded gentleman.

The following day was the St. Jim's juniors' last day in the great Lancashire port, and they made the most of it, visiting all the places of interest they had not already visited—the Walker Art Gallery, St. George's Hall, the wonderful new cathedral, and the Town Hall. They also visited New Brighton, seeing the battery, the tower, and the lighthouse. And when Tom Merry & Co. left Liverpool to return to St. Jim's they took with them pleasant—and certainly exciting—memories of the great Merseyside port.

THE END.

(Look out for another rollicking fine yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "D'ARCY'S COMIC OPERA!" By Martin Clifford. This is the kind of yarn you have all been waiting for and one that will raise a laugh from beginning to end.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 992.

THE REDS ARE OUT! While Colonel Chapin and his men are away from Calumet Ranch, a body of Redskin braves, under the leadership of Badger Head, are racing there, intent on pillage and murder. And at the ranch, practically unguarded, is Sadie, the Colonel's daughter!

WHITE EAGLE!



Black Hawk warns Tom that Badger Head's braves are on the war-path.

An Amazing Story of Wild West Adventure. By ARTHUR PATTERSON.

Bad News!

TOM coughed and stared at Mr. Slack, who thereupon found it necessary closely to examine one of his buttons.

"Badger Head has gone off with a party of the wildest bucks," Tom continued. "But he can be hunted down. I leave that to you and to the lieutenant. Black Hawk has saved us all. That must be made clear in your statement. Do you agree? If not—"

"Why—yes! Yes! Yes! Any kind of thing, sir. You've saved my life!"

He caught Tom's hand and shook it, but though his grasp was warm and clinging, Tom was not impressed.

"Then we'll get along," he said.

It was fully time they did. Lieutenant Groot was in a fever. The non-appearance of his men filled him with foreboding and dread; yet as there was no attack and no sign of any enemy he was completely at a loss what to do. To take his men into the storehouse, if there was foul play, would surely be running into an ambush. But how could there be foul play without a shot being fired? Yet—

The lieutenant was not a patient man, and having worked himself into a state of nerves, was about to order an advance at all risks, when, to his infinite relief, he saw three men on the steps of the storehouse—one of them Mr. Solomon Slack, whom he knew by sight, the others the sergeant and his prisoner. But a second glance brought back all his fears. The Britisher was free. No permission had been given for this, and, worst of all, the sergeant held no arms. The lieutenant's anger rose.

"Report, sergeant!" he roared.

The unfortunate sergeant, who, though thankful to be free from the attentions of the Apaches, and heartened by a stiff glass of grog to which Tom had treated him and all the troopers, was in a very miserable state of mind. He came forward—Tom checking the agent—and gave the facts of the situation as far as they concerned him.

At the news the face of the officer became apoplectic, but he had the prudence to reserve his comments for a more opportune moment; and, in any case, his attention was needed by Mr. Solomon Slack. That worthy came on now,

hat in hand. He did so sideways, so that Tom should not see his face as he greeted the officer.

"Lootenant"—he shuffled slowly—"this is my friend, Mr. Thomas Holt, who's saved my life."

The lieutenant made no direct reply. He seemed to be waiting for something, and then Tom, whose eyes had never moved from Mr. Slack's portly form, saw that a signal had passed between them.

"Hold up, you fiend!" snarled the officer. And once again Tom was under the rifles of the troopers; while Mr. Slack, with a quick run, plunged forward almost into the arms of the nearest machine-gunner.

But, alas, for Mr. Slack, and for the intrepid Groot, this manoeuvre, though not anticipated, had been guarded against by Tom. Even as the men moved, a whistle rang out, and from the houses in the rear and on the flank, from the street, and the storehouse steps in front came the full war-yell of the Apache Nation. The soldiers were surrounded by Indians with rifles in their hands; those in the open lying flat on their faces; those under cover crouching in such manner that only their eyes and the muzzles of their weapons were visible.

In the midst of it all Tom quietly stepped up to the lieutenant.

"Your sword, sir!" he said. "Or every man you have here will be shot down!"

The officer gave one gasp of fury, opened his mouth to order his men to fire, then shut it again, and surrendered.

It was the worst moment in Lieutenant Groot's life. Upon his first piece of active service, his first expedition in force, his first command, he was out-generalled and compelled to surrender unconditionally by a beardless British boy, who was not even a soldier. But he had no choice. The enemy numbered ten to one. His own men had machine-guns certainly, and could have mowed down the Apaches in the street—though even these had the sense to lie on their faces, and the Indians who appeared like magic from the houses would pick off the whole detachment in five minutes. There was not a chance.

But if the lieutenant writhed over his defeat, Tom was much embarrassed by his victory. The preliminaries were settled easily enough. The officer, with Solomon Slack, was

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confined in Jeremiah's hotel. The men were disarmed, and marched under guard to the railway depot and made comfortable with a plentiful supply of tobacco from the stores; after which they began to fraternise with their captors and settle down philosophically enough.

So far, so good. But what on earth was to be done with all of them?

Groot was shrewd enough to perceive Tom's difficulty. He refused point-blank to sign any statement whatever. He refused his parole. He dared Tom to keep him prisoner for twenty-four hours; and if it had not been for Jeremiah, who contrived, behind Tom's back, to import, with the connivance of White Cat, a few of the hunting-party to the hotel, and make the lieutenant believe he was going to be tortured and scalped by inches that very night, he would have recovered his spirits in the consciousness of his enemy's dilemma.

This grim warning, however, together with the frantic terror of Solomon Slack—who had very good reason to fear the worst for himself—brought the lieutenant to a reasonable frame of mind.

But the next day relief came to Tom—the most blessed relief of all.

He had spent most of the night talking matters over with Jeremiah and Black Hawk, and had finally come to the conclusion that the soldiers must be released, and Slack—now willing to do anything on earth to save his skin—made to report proceedings on Tom's plan, when the joyous news was brought that white men were approaching from the north, and among them Colonel Chapin, Kit Brett, and Old Billie.

Tom went out at once to meet them, and great was the excitement and enormous the jubilation of the cowboys when they heard the happenings in the Reservation.

Therefore, Tom's standing with the boys from Calumet and Servita went up to giddy heights, while the comradeship between the Apaches and these visitors to the Reservation became a bond of brotherhood against a common enemy such as had never before been known between white men and red.

Meanwhile, Tom, at the first opportunity, seized upon the colonel and poured out all his woes. Chapin listened in silence, with an air of solemn, though sympathetic anxiety and concern. In reality, he was having the time of his life. He had received Tom's letter, and acted upon it with effect; but to have said so too soon would have spoilt everything. It was a joy to his soul to see the character of the lad, dearer to him than ever after their long separation, unfolding itself as Tom recounted his adventures in a brief, matter-of-fact way.

On the contrary, he was inclined to blame himself severely for not having done better; and Chapin thanked Providence with all his heart for the gift of such a son. But not a sign of this appeared in his face. He shook his head when Tom finished, uncrossed his legs, and meditatively chewed his cigar a minute. Then he remarked judicially:

"Son, you would appear to be up a rather tall tree. This man Groot is a nephew of a senator with a nasty tongue. Slack, of course, is a grafter; but when it is a matter of Indians, that is excused at Washington. Say, let me see them together. I might do something." He smiled behind his hand at Tom's anxious face. "I will try, anyway."

So the lieutenant, who looked much startled when he saw the colonel, and Solomon Slack, improved in appearance since we saw him last, and very unctuous and sly, were brought into the room by Jeremiah, whom the colonel invited to remain. They had already formed the secret bond of brotherhood common to practical jokers the world over.

"Gentlemen, sit," the colonel said suavely. "I have asked you to meet me, as it just happens that business took me to Washington a short while back, and will again." He paused for this to sink in. "My name is Joseph Chapin, of Calumet Ranch, Servita. You and I, lieutenant, have met before."

They evidently had. Tom, to his surprise, saw the young soldier drop his eyes and begin to move uneasily in his chair.

"I have not much to say, Mr. Groot," the colonel went on, his voice growing colder and more precise with every word. "What were your orders? Be careful, if you please!"

"I was to stand by," the officer answered in a rather indistinct tone, "and—guard Government property. I found it in danger," he added hastily.

"You mean you thought it was!" the colonel remarked frigidly. "Anything in your instructions about arresting civilians—or anyone else who came to you under a flag of truce?"

The lieutenant's eyes dropped again.

"No, sir."

"Why did you do it, then?"

"I had received an alarming report from the telegraph operator at the depot, and this man"—pointing at Tom—"deceived me grossly."

"How did he deceive you?"

"He made me think he was an Apache chief."

"Did he give you his real name?"

"Y-yes."

"Is that an Indian title?"

The lieutenant became interested in his boots, and made no answer.

"You told Mr. Holt, I believe, that if anything happened to Mr. Slack, here, you would hang him. Is that true?"

The lieutenant continued to examine his boots.

"Well—yes!"

"You then disarmed and bound him, and sent him, under charge of a file of men, to find Mr. Slack, though he had assured you of his safety. That true, too?"

"I thought it my duty."

"What do you think now?" The words were rapped out sharply. "I am seeing the colonel of your regiment in a week's time. He will be interested to know. So will the commander-in-chief. He has asked me for a report!"

The mouth of Lieutenant Groot quivered like a child's. His poor, mean little face became just as red as his hair, and then paled to the lips. He knew that all this would mean ruin. Yet he realised that it was but justice, and a revulsion of feeling came over him. He rose and stood at attention.

"I think, sir, I was a fool!"

"Anything more?" the colonel asked.

His voice was not quite so severe, and he looked at Tom.

Groot followed his eyes, and the hot colour came back into his cheeks.

"Yes," he said, with a choke, "I—I should like to apologise to Mr. Holt. I was right down mean to him."

Tom's hand was out in a moment.

"Oh, don't worry about me. Let's shake hands!"

And they did very heartily.

The colonel's eyes twinkled.

"Well, if Mr. Holt feels that way, I don't know that anyone else has any call to complain. What's your idea, Mush?"

Jeremiah nodded his head with melancholy gravity.

"Sir, I told the chee-ee here Army officers was rattlers. But since the pison's out I'd be proud if the lootenant would shake hands with me."

The colonel now turned to Solomon Slack.

"You are Indian Agent in sole charge of this Reservation when Mr. Crombolt is away?"

Mr. Slack's countenance became one expansive smile.

"That is my privilege, colonel."

"What have you to say over this affair?"

Solomon's dull eyes grew cold. He sensed danger, but he knew nothing of the colonel, and put down his influence over Groot to his position in the Army.

"I shall make my report, sir, to Mr. Crombolt. There's

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY.

TOM HOLT, a sturdy young Britisher of seventeen, who has lived for a time amongst a tribe of Apache Indians in New Mexico.

BADGER HEAD, supreme chief of the nation.

BLACK HAWK, a tribal chief.

WHITE CAT, his son.

SOLOMON SLACK, a Government official in charge of the Reservations.

JEREMIAH MUSH, a hotel-keeper.

COLONEL CHAPIN, a wealthy rancher.

SADIE, his daughter.

HUNKS and MALINKA, Tom's dog and horse respectively.

After staying for a time with Colonel Chapin and his daughter Sadie, Tom learns the horrible news that White Cat is sentenced to the "fire" for disobeying Badger Head, his chief. Tom stands by the Redskin, and to save his life, offers to accompany the tribe to the Reservations for the winter. From Black Hawk, Tom then learns that Badger Head is contemplating a raid on the White Settlements

in the coming spring, and this knowledge makes Tom more eager to accompany the tribe.

Promoted to the rank of chief and known as White Eagle, Tom reaches the Reservations, where he finds Badger Head encouraging Solomon Slack to starve the Redskins who, in consequence, are on the verge of revolting against the "whites." The time now being ripe for a raid on the storehouse, Badger Head collects his braves and marches upon it. But he is forestalled by Tom, who for Slack's own sake, takes him prisoner. Enraged at being thwarted, Badger Head sentences the young Britisher to death. Wise to the truth, however, the Apaches speak out, and Tom is set free. Meanwhile, Slack having sent word to Washington that Tom is the cause of all the unrest among the Apaches, Lieutenant Groot and his troopers arrive upon the scene. Before many minutes have elapsed, however, the sergeant and his troopers, who have been ordered by their officer to fetch Tom and Solomon Slack from the storehouse, have the mortification of being taken prisoners themselves.

(Now read on.)

been bad doings! The Government has been robbed! I have suffered much! Someone"—he raised his voice slightly—"will have to pay!"

The colonel nodded. "I guess," he said slowly, "that someone will pay. A special commission of inquiry has been appointed by the President himself. He asked me personally to tell you this. You will have to prepare a detailed report of all that you have done. Mr. Crombolt has gone."

A sad change came over Mr. Slack. The expansive smile gave way to a sudden look of fear as great in its way as when he was in the hands of the Indian squaws. His eyes peered into the colonel's face, then into Tom's, then at Jeremiah Mush with the desperation of a rat in a corner.

"I—I am glad, sir," he gasped, "that the President should take interest in me!"

"He does," was the reply. "But he is not as much interested as the officials of the Bureau. They have been watching your proceedings, it seems, for a long time, and Mr. Crombolt, before he went, gave them a confidential memorandum on the subject. I found it very interesting reading. So would you!"

The wretched agent groaned. There was something so grim and pitiless in the colonel's tone that he saw he would get no mercy. He knew well what that memorandum would contain. The game was up. Then he thought of Tom.

"Mr. Holt," he whined, rubbing his fat hands together and wringing them in his despair, "you—you know me. I have not been all I should to you. But I know you will forgive me the little error I made when we first met—and help me now!"

"Silence!" Chapin thundered. "Understand that everything has come out. The Indian you set on to shoot Mr.

Holt was not killed. He made his deposition to me two hours ago. You will be lucky if you escape with a life sentence in a penitentiary. Mush, have Mr. Slack guarded closely, please. We must take no risks."

"None's took, colonel," the hotel-keeper replied promptly. "Two Apache bucks—not tame ones—watch him night and day. Sharp boys, them, but not so sharp as either of their knives. Come, Solomon, you're in it now. And, sure as sure, my coon, you'll not get out."

He extended a long arm and grabbed the back of the agent's fat neck, and, with a powerful twist, sent him staggering to the door, which opened as if it were upon springs. He was flung out and disappeared.

The colonel turned to Tom with a grim laugh, and was about to speak when he saw the window darken, and a man sprang into the room. It was Black Hawk. He entered without a sound, and did not speak until he reached Tom; but there was something in the Indian's manner and the intensity of his stare as he advanced which brought a sudden chill to the colonel's heart.

"Come!" the chief said, a finger on Tom's shoulder, and jerking his head towards the street. "Be quick! There is big danger. Badger Head put spy into colonel's party on way here. He know that Calumet Ranch has no guard. He will go there swift as hawk to rob and kill and burn, and then"—he turned upon Chapin—"then to ride away with Yellow Flower and make her squaw!"

"But Sadie is not there!" Tom cried.

And then he saw the colonel's face turn grey and wan.

"She came home for Christmas. Wouldn't go back. Wanted to see you! Good heavens!"

(Mind you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)

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